

## Belonging and the politics of belonging

**NIRA YUVAL-DAVIS**

**ABSTRACT** Yuval-Davis outlines an analytical framework for the study of belonging and the politics of belonging. Her article is divided into three interconnected parts. The first explores the notion of 'belonging' and the different analytical levels on which it needs to be studied: social locations; identifications and emotional attachments; and ethical and political values. The second part focuses on the politics of belonging and how it relates to the participatory politics of citizenship as well as to that of entitlement and status. The third part illustrates, using British examples, some of the ways particular political projects of belonging select specific levels of belonging in order to construct their projects.

**KEYWORDS** belonging, citizenship, identities, intersectionality, politics of belonging, social locations

### Belonging and the politics of belonging

**M**y aim in this article is to outline an analytical framework for the study of belonging and the politics of belonging. It is important to differentiate between the two. Belonging is about emotional attachment, about feeling 'at home' and, as Michael Ignatieff points out,<sup>1</sup> about feeling 'safe'. In the aftermath of 7/7, the 2005 bombings in London—the time at which this article was written—such a definition takes on a new, if problematic, poignancy. Belonging tends to be naturalized, and becomes articulated and politicized only when it is threatened in some way. The politics of belonging comprises specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging in particular ways to particular collectivities that are, at the same time, themselves being constructed by these projects in very particular ways. An analytical differentiation between belonging and the politics of belonging is, therefore, crucial for any critical political discourse on nationalism, racism or other contemporary politics of belonging.<sup>2</sup> In this article there is only space to outline some of the central features of such an analytical framework.

1 Michael Ignatieff, *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2001).

2 See Nira Yuval-Davis, *Nationalism, Identity and Belonging* (London: Sage forthcoming).

As I have mentioned elsewhere,<sup>3</sup> belonging and the politics of belonging have been among the major themes out of which both classical psychology and sociology have emerged. Countless psychological and even more psychoanalytic works have been devoted to the fear of separation felt by babies and children, separation from the womb, from the mother, from the familiar, as well as the devastating—often pathological—effect on them when they cannot take belonging for granted.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, much of the literature of social psychology has been dedicated to studying individuals' need to conform to the groups they belong to out of fear of exclusion, and the ways individuals' interpersonal relationships are deeply affected by their membership or lack of membership in particular groups, as well as their positions in these groups.<sup>5</sup> In sociological theory as well, since its establishment, many writings have focused on the different ways people belong to collectivities and states, as well as on the social, economic and political effects of moments when such belongings are displaced as a result of industrialization and/or migration. Some classical examples are Ferdinand Tönnies's distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*,<sup>6</sup> Émile Durkheim's categories of mechanical and organic solidarity,<sup>7</sup> and Karl Marx's notion of alienation.<sup>8</sup> Anthony Giddens has argued that, with modernity, people's sense of belonging becomes reflexive,<sup>9</sup> and Manuel Castells claims that contemporary society has become a 'network society' in which effective belonging has moved from the civil societies of nations and states into reconstructed defensive identity communities.<sup>10</sup>

This article does not attempt to sum up this vast literature in any way. Instead, it attempts to differentiate and identify some of the major building blocks a comprehensive analytical framework for belonging and the politics of belonging would require. To do so, it is divided into three interconnected parts. The first explores the notion of 'belonging' and the different analytical

- 3 Nira Yuval-Davis, 'Borders, boundaries and the politics of belonging', in Stephen May, Tariq Modood and Judith Squires (eds), *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Minority Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004), 214–30.
- 4 For a more elaborate account, see, for example, Otto Rank, *The Trauma of Birth* [1929] (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1973) and John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss*, vols 1–2 (London: Hogarth Press 1969–73).
- 5 See, for example, Kurt Lewin, *Resolving Social Conflicts: Selected Papers on Group Dynamics* (New York: Harper and Row 1948); Henri Tajfel, 'Social psychology of intergroup relations', *Annual Review of Psychology*, vol. 33, 1982, 1–39; and Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage 1976).
- 6 Ferdinand Tönnies, *Fundamental Concepts of Sociology (Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft)*, trans. from the German by Charles P. Loomis (New York: American Book Company 1940).
- 7 Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* [1893] (New York: Free Press 1997).
- 8 Karl Marx, *Early Writings* [1844] (Hammondsworth: Penguin 1975).
- 9 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1991).
- 10 Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society, Culture*, 3 vols (Oxford: Blackwell 1996–8).

levels on which it needs to be studied: social locations; identifications and emotional attachments; and ethical and political values. The second part focuses on the politics of belonging and how it relates to the participatory politics of citizenship as well as to that of entitlement and status. The third part illustrates, using British examples, some of the ways particular political projects of belonging select specific signifiers of belonging from different analytical levels in order to construct their projects.

## Belonging

People can 'belong' in many different ways and to many different objects of attachments. These can vary from a particular person to the whole of humanity, in a concrete or abstract way; belonging can be an act of self-identification or identification by others, in a stable, contested or transient way. Even in its most stable 'primordial' forms, however, belonging is always a dynamic process, not a reified fixity, which is only a naturalized construction of a particular hegemonic form of power relations.

To simplify our understanding of the notion of belonging, it would be useful to differentiate between three major analytical levels on which belonging is constructed. The first level concerns social locations; the second relates to individuals' identifications and emotional attachments to various collectivities and groupings; the third relates to ethical and political value systems with which people judge their own and others' belonging/s. These different levels are interrelated, but cannot be reduced to each other, as so many political projects of belonging tend to assume.

### *Social locations*

When it is said that people belong to a particular gender, or race, or class or nation, that they belong to a particular age-group, kinship group or a certain profession, what is being talked about are social and economic locations, which, at each historical moment, have particular implications *vis-à-vis* the grids of power relations in society. A man or a woman, black or white, working-class or middle-class, a member of a European or an African nation: these are not just different categories of social location, but categories that also have a certain positionality along an axis of power, higher or lower than other such categories. Such positionalities, however, tend to be different in different historical contexts and are often fluid and contested. Some differences, as Sandra Harding and Nancy Fraser have commented,<sup>11</sup> do not necessarily have differential power positionings but are only markers of

11 Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1991); Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso 1998).

different locations. This, again, can only be related to specific kinds of differences in particular historical moments and contexts.

Social locations, however, even in their most stable format, are virtually never constructed along one power axis of difference, although official statistics—as well as identity politics—often tend to construct them in this way. This is why the intersectional approach to social locations is so crucially important. There is no space here to discuss in detail the various intersectional approaches to social divisions.<sup>12</sup> However, there are three points relating to intersectional analysis that are important to mention here in relation to issues concerning the analysis of belonging and the politics of belonging.

First, while people can identify exclusively with one identity category (i.e. only as Blacks, only as women, only as gays etc.), their concrete social location is constructed along multiple axes of difference, such as gender, class, race and ethnicity, stage in the life cycle, sexuality, ability and so on. Second, the intersecting social divisions cannot be analysed as items that are added up but, rather, as constituting each other. Although discourses of race, gender, class etc. have their own ontological bases that cannot be reduced to each other, there is no separate concrete meaning of any social division. To be a woman is different if you are middle-class or working-class, a member of the hegemonic majority or a racialized minority, living in the city or in the country, young or old, straight or gay.

Third, the question of describing social location in terms of certain specific grids of difference is far from simple. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler mocks the 'etc.' that often appears at the end of a long list of social divisions mentioned by feminists (as was done above in this article) and sees it as an embarrassed 'sign of exhaustion as well as of the illimitable process of signification itself'.<sup>13</sup> As Axeli Knapp makes clear, such a critique is valid only within the discourse of identity politics in which there is a correspon-

12 See, for example, Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, 'Contextualizing feminism: gender, ethnic and class divisions', *Feminist Review*, no. 15, 1983, 62–75; Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, *Racialized Boundaries* (London: Routledge 1992); Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix, 'Ain't I a woman? Revisiting intersectionality', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2004, 75–86; Kimberlé Crenshaw, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1989); Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Beyond racism and misogyny', in Mari J. Matsuda, Charles R. Lawrence, Richard Delgado and Kimberlé Crenshaw (eds), *Words That Wound* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press 1993); Philomena Essed, *Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage 1991); Nira Yuval-Davis, 'Intersectionality, citizenship and contemporary politics of belonging', *CRISPP (Contemporary Review of International Social and Political Philosophy)*, special issue on 'Contesting Citizenship', forthcoming; and Nira Yuval-Davis, 'Intersectionality and feminist politics', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, special issue on 'Intersectionality', forthcoming.

13 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge 1990), 143.

dence between social locations and social groupings. This is the way the additive/fragmentation model of social divisions operates. When no such conflation takes place, Knapp finds rightly that Butler's talk 'of an "illimitable process of signification" can be reductionist if it is generalized in an unspecified way ... [and] runs the risk of levelling historically constituted "factual" differences and thereby suppressing "differences" on its own terms'.<sup>14</sup> Knapp's critique of Butler clarifies again the crucial importance of the separation of the different analytical levels in which social divisions need to be examined. Nevertheless, the question remains whether there are, or are not, in any set of particular historical conditions, a specific and limited number of social divisions that construct the grid of power relations within which the different members of the society are located.

There are two different answers to this question, and they are not mutually exclusive. The first is that while, in specific historical situations and in relation to specific people, there are some social divisions that are more important than others in constructing individuals' specific positionings, there are some social divisions—such as gender, stage in the life cycle, ethnicity and class—that tend to shape most people's lives in most social locations while other social divisions—such as membership in particular castes or status as indigenous people or refugees—tend to affect fewer people globally. At the same time, for those who are affected by those and other social divisions not mentioned here, such social divisions are crucial and rendering them visible needs to be an important political project, as this is a case in which recognition—of social power axes, not of social identities—is of crucial emancipatory importance.

The second answer relates to what Cornelius Castoriadis called the 'creative imagination',<sup>15</sup> which underpins any linguistic or other social categories of signification. Although certain social conditions may facilitate this, the construction of categories of signification is, in the last instance, a product of human creative freedom and autonomy. Without specific social agents who construct and point to certain analytical and political features, the other members of society would not be able to identify them. Rainbows include the whole spectrum of different colours, but how many colours we distinguish depends on our specific social and linguistic milieu. It is for this reason that struggles for recognition always also include an element of construction and it is for this reason that studying the relationships between

14 Axeli Knapp, 'Fragile foundations, strong traditions, situated questioning: critical theory in German-speaking feminism', in Maggie O'Neill (ed.), *Adorno, Culture and Feminism* (London: Sage 1999), 130.

15 Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1987); see also Marcel Stoetzler and Nira Yuval-Davis, 'Standpoint theory, situated knowledge and the situated imagination', *Feminist Theory*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2002, 315–34.

positionalities, identities and political values is so important (and impossible if they are all reduced to the same ontological level).

The discourse on social locations, complex as it is, cannot be conflated with the belonging discourse on identifications and emotional attachments, and any attempt to do so is essentialist and often racialized.

### *Identifications and emotional attachments*

Identities are narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not).<sup>16</sup> Not all of these stories are about belonging to particular groupings and collectivities; they can be, for instance, about individual attributes, body images, vocational aspirations or sexual prowess. However, even such stories often relate, directly or indirectly, to self and/or others' perceptions of what being a member in such a grouping or collectivity (ethnic, racial, national, cultural, religious) might mean. The identity narratives can be individual or they can be collective, the latter often a resource for the former. Although they can be reproduced from generation to generation, this reproduction is always carried out in a selective way. The identity narratives can shift and change, be contested and multiple. They can relate to the past, to a myth of origin; they can be aimed at explaining the present and, probably above all, they function as a projection of a future trajectory.

Constructions of belonging, however, cannot and should not be seen as merely cognitive stories. They reflect emotional investments and desire for attachments: 'Individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fuelled by yearning rather than positing of identity as a stable state.'<sup>17</sup> Elspeth Probyn, as well as Anne-Marie Fortier,<sup>18</sup> construct identity as transition, always producing itself through the combined processes of being and becoming, belonging and longing to belong. This duality is often reflected in narratives of identity.

Of course not all belonging/s are as important to people in the same way and to the same extent. Emotions, like perceptions, shift in different times and situations and are more or less reflective. As a rule, the emotional components of people's constructions of themselves and their identities become more central the more threatened and less secure they feel. In the most extreme cases people are willing to sacrifice their lives—and the lives of others—in order for the narratives of their identities and the objects of their identifications and attachments to continue to exist. After a terrorist attack, or after a declaration of war, diasporic people often seek to return to a

16 Denis-Constant Martin, 'The choices of identity', *Social Identities*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1995, 5–16.

17 Elspeth Probyn, *Outside Belongings* (London: Routledge 1996), 19.

18 Anne-Marie Fortier, *Migrant Belongings: Memory, Space, Identities* (Oxford: Berg 2000).

place that is less 'objectively' safe, as long as it means they can be near their nearest and dearest, and share their fate.

As Vikki Bell and Fortier argue,<sup>19</sup> following Butler,<sup>20</sup> constructions of belonging have a performative dimension. Specific repetitive practices, relating to specific social and cultural spaces, which link individual and collective behaviour, are crucial for the construction and reproduction of identity narratives and constructions of attachment. It is in this way, as Sara Ahmed points out,<sup>21</sup> that free floating emotions 'stick' to particular social objects. As feminist standpoint theorists like Dorothy Smith and Sandra Harding have commented,<sup>22</sup> there is no necessary connection between social location and a particular social identity and/or particular political views. They both emanate as a result of specific social practices.

Constructions of self and identity can, however, in certain historical contexts, be forced on people. In such cases, identities and belonging/s become important dimensions of people's social locations and positionings, and the relationships between locations and identifications can become empirically more closely intertwined. This still does not cancel the importance of the differentiation between these analytical levels in analysing belonging. On the contrary, without this differentiation, there would be no possibility of struggle and resistance, and biology—or belonging—would become destiny. As Frantz Fanon crucially argued,<sup>23</sup> such a politics of resistance needs to be directed not only at oppressed people's social and economic locations but also against their internalizations of forced constructions of self and identity.

### *Ethical and political values*

Belonging, therefore, is not just about social locations and constructions of individual and collective identities and attachments but also about the ways these are valued and judged. Closely related to this are specific attitudes and ideologies concerning where and how identity and categorical boundaries are being/should be drawn, in more or less exclusionary ways, in more or less permeable ways. It is in the arena of the contestations around these ethical and ideological issues and the ways they utilize social locations and

19 Vikki Bell, 'Performativity and belonging: an introduction', *Theory, Culture & Society*, special issue on 'Performativity and Belonging', vol. 16, no. 2, September 1999, 1–10; Fortier, *Migrant Belongings*.

20 Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

21 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2004).

22 Dorothy Smith, *The Conceptual Practices of Power. A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge* (Boston: Northeastern University Press 1990); Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?*

23 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press 1967).

narratives of identities that we move from the realm of belonging into that of the politics of belonging.

### **The politics of belonging**

John Crowley defined the politics of belonging as ‘the dirty work of boundary maintenance’.<sup>24</sup> The boundaries that the politics of belonging is concerned with are the boundaries of the political community of belonging, the boundaries that separate the world population into ‘us’ and ‘them’.

Benedict Anderson defined nations as ‘imagined communities’. They are imagined communities, according to Anderson, ‘because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’.<sup>25</sup>

Such an abstract form of community is necessarily based on an abstract sense of imagined simultaneity. However, the national imagination also includes former and future generations. The inability, therefore, to meet all members of the nation is not just a result of the size of the nation, but is inherently impossible. Perhaps even more importantly for our understanding of the politics of belonging, as Ross Poole comments,<sup>26</sup> Anderson’s definition seems to assume that, if all the members of the nation could meet face to face, imagination would be redundant. Nonetheless, any construction of boundaries, of a delineated collectivity, that includes some people—concrete or not—and excludes others, involves an act of active and situated imagination.<sup>27</sup> Could Jews be included in the boundaries of the German nation? Is there ‘black in the Union Jack’? Do Québécois form a separate nation from Canadians, one with its own boundaries? The different situated imaginations that construct these national imagined communities with different boundaries depend on people’s social locations, people’s experiences and definitions of self, but probably even more importantly on their values. They do not come into existence just because of the inability of people to meet all the other members of their nation. On the contrary, this ‘dirty business of boundary maintenance’ that underlies the politics of belonging is all about potentially meeting other people and deciding whether they stand inside or outside the imaginary boundary line of the nation and/or other communities of belonging, whether they are ‘us’ or ‘them’. Although the ‘us’, of course, is never really imagined as homogeneous or

24 John Crowley, ‘The politics of belonging: some theoretical considerations’, in Andrew Geddes and Adrian Favell (eds), *The Politics of Belonging: Migrants and Minorities in Contemporary Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate 1999), 15–41.

25 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* [1983] (London: Verso 1991), 6.

26 Ross Poole, *Nation and Identity* (London: Routledge 1999), 10.

27 Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, ‘Standpoint theory’.



even as homogeneously incorporated into the community of belonging, and the ways the 'them' is imagined are even more differential and varied, as are the ways that are considered proper for relating to them.

The politics of belonging involves not only the maintenance and reproduction of the boundaries of the community of belonging by the hegemonic political powers but also their contestation and challenge by other political agents. It is important to recognize, however, that such political agents struggle both for the promotion of their specific projects in the construction of their collectivity and its boundaries and, at the same time, use these ideologies and projects in order to promote their own power positions within and outside the collectivity. The politics of belonging includes also struggles around the determination of what is involved in belonging, in being a member of a community, and of what roles specific social locations and specific narratives of identity play in this. As such, it encompasses contestations both in relation to the participatory dimension of citizenship as well as in relation to issues of the status and entitlements such membership entails.

### *Citizenship and the politics of belonging*

There have been many definitions of and debates about citizenship. Although in political theory many focus on the debate between the liberals and the republicans and/or communitarians as being the most important,<sup>28</sup> in recent years a number of theoretical and sociological debates have focused, in different ways, on the extent to which citizenship should be understood primarily, or even at all, in relation to the nation-state.<sup>29</sup>

In liberal theory, citizenship is basically constructed as a reciprocal relationship of rights and responsibilities between individuals and the state.

28 See, for example, Shlomo Avineri and Avner de-Shalit (eds), *Communitarianism and Individualism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1992); Markate Daly, *Communitarianism: Belonging and Commitment in a Pluralist Democracy* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company 1993); Adrian Oldfield, *Citizenship and Community: Civic Republicanism and the Modern World* (London: Routledge 1990); Yoav Peled, 'Ethnic democracy and the legal construction of citizenship: Arab citizens of the Jewish state', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 86, no. 2, 1992, 432–42.

29 See, for example, Yasemin Soysal, *Limits of Citizenship: Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1994); Renato Rosaldo, 'Cultural citizenship, inequality and multi-culturalism', in William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor (eds), *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space and Rights* (Boston: Beacon Press 1997), 27–38; Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1995); Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (Basingstoke: Macmillan 2000); Naila Kabir (ed.), *Inclusive Citizenship* (London: Zed Books 2005); Nira Yuval-Davis, 'The citizenship debate: women, ethnic processes and the state', *Feminist Review*, no. 39, 1991, 58–68; Nira Yuval-Davis and Prina Werbner (eds), *Women, Citizenship and Difference* (London: Zed Books 1999).

In republican theories, the political community mediates between the individual citizen and the state, and loyalty to that political community, the nation, and its preservation and promotion are the primary duties of the citizen (who is required, when necessary, to sacrifice his—and it is usually ‘his’—life to it). Communitarian theories of citizenship go even further as they see citizens not only as owing loyalty to the political community but also as its products, as organic parts of that community, in stark contrast to the classical liberal model of an atomized society.

T. H. Marshall, the most famous British communitarian theorist of citizenship, does not even mention the state in his classical definition of citizenship as being ‘full membership of the community, with all its rights and responsibilities’.<sup>30</sup> As Stuart Hall and David Held had pointed out already in 1989,<sup>31</sup> although the state was assumed in Marshall’s definition, the fact that it was not actually mentioned opened the gate for definitions of citizenship that were not only loosely related to the nation-state but that considered the nation-state as only one of the layers of people’s citizenship, which could relate also to other political communities, sub-, cross- or supra-state, such as local, ethnic, religious, regional and international political communities.<sup>32</sup> Citizenship originally, as Jean Cohen pointed out,<sup>33</sup> was not born in the nation-state but in a city, the Greek *polis*. It was there that Aristoteles defined citizenship as being about ‘ruling and being ruled’ (although, of course, in the Greek *polis* itself, most of those who were being ruled were not allowed to be among those who ruled, as they were women, slaves or denizens).

This participatory character of citizenship, comprising full and legitimate belonging, has become the focus of the political struggles of many marginalized and excluded groupings. For instance, feminists in Latin America have adopted citizenship as their major political tool in the post-dictatorship period,<sup>34</sup> as have many others in the developing world, such as villagers in Pakistan and Bangladesh.<sup>35</sup> While, for civil rights activists in the United States, registering African Americans to vote was one of their main signifiers of belonging, the Chicanas, twenty years later, have developed what Renato

30 T. H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1950); T. H. Marshall, *Social Policy in the Twentieth Century* [1965] (London: Hutchinson 1975); T. H. Marshall, *The Right To Welfare and Other Essays* (London: Heinemann Educational Books 1981).

31 Stuart Hall and David Held, ‘Citizens and citizenship’, in Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques (eds), *New Times* (London: Lawrence and Wishart 1989).

32 Yuval-Davis, ‘The citizenship debate’; Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage 1997); Nira Yuval-Davis, ‘Multi-layered citizenship in the age of “glocalization”’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1999, 119–36.

33 Jean L. Cohen, ‘Changing paradigms of citizenship and the exclusiveness of the demos’, *International Sociology*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1999, 245–68.

34 Sonia Alvarez, Evalina Dagino and Arturo Escobar (eds), *Cultures of Politics/Politics of Cultures: Revisioning Latin American Social Movements* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press 1997).

35 For this and other related case studies, see Kabir (ed.), *Inclusive Citizenship*.

Rosaldo and others have called 'cultural citizenship',<sup>36</sup> which focuses on community activism as the main signifier of belonging.

The relationship between citizenship and the state has remained a thorny issue, even when there is a recognition that the nation-state is historically specific and constitutes only one of several layers of people's citizenship. Moreover, there has never been a complete overlap between the boundaries of the national community and the boundaries of the population that lives in a particular state, which is where the inherently exclusionary character of republican and communitarian theories of citizenship lie.<sup>37</sup> Even the supposedly universalist character of liberal citizenship has proved to be exclusionary, usually reflecting hegemonic, majoritarian and 'westocentric' positions, as Étienne Balibar, for example, has shown.<sup>38</sup>

It is for this reason that some anti-racist and feminist political theorists have tried to develop alternative theories of citizenship that encompass difference.<sup>39</sup> What is common to all these approaches is that, rather than ignoring the differences among citizens, which would result in assimilationism or exclusion from belonging to the political community, they suggest ways in which these differences can be recognized and responded to, similar to the ways the welfare state has responded to the differential social needs of its citizens. This, however, brings us to ongoing debates about who 'deserves' and who does not, who is entitled and who is not, to receive aid from the state (and/or other political communities, whether it is the United Nations, the European Union, the local council or the religious community). As Jean Cohen reminds us, after being born in a city, the notion of citizenship was historically transformed in an empire, the Roman Empire, where, from a mode of political participation, it became a legal status of entitlements and responsibilities.<sup>40</sup> Cohen argues that, in the nation-state, these two dimensions of citizenship have come together. However, as will be illustrated in the third part of this article, entitlements and belonging do not always automatically constitute features of citizenship. Much of contemporary debates on the politics of belonging surround that question of who 'belongs' and who does not, and what are the minimum common grounds—in terms of origin, culture and normative behaviour—that are required to signify belonging. In the aftermath of the 7/7 bombings in London, when it became known that the suicide bombers not only had formal British citizenship but were also born and educated in Britain and

36 Rosaldo, 'Cultural citizenship'.

37 Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*; and Yuval-Davis, 'Multi-layered citizenship'.

38 Étienne Balibar, 'Paradoxes of universality', in David Theo Goldberg (ed.), *Anatomy of Racism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1990).

39 See, for example, Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*; Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*; Yuval-Davis and Werbner (eds), *Women, Citizenship and Difference*; Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1988); Ruth Lister, *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Macmillan 1997).

40 Cohen, 'Changing paradigms of citizenship and the exclusiveness of the demos'.

involved in various strands of British public life, this question has been the focus of much political—and emotional—discourse in contemporary Britain. The situation is similar in many other countries. As Francis B. Nyamnjoh points out: ‘in Africa, as elsewhere, there is a growing obsession with belonging, along with new questions concerning conventional assumptions about nationality and citizenship.’<sup>41</sup>

### *Status, entitlement and the politics of belonging*

As mentioned above, T. H. Marshall defined citizenship not just as membership in the (political) community but also as including associated rights and responsibilities. Political theory has tended to discuss civil and political rights and, around the notion of the twentieth-century welfare state, social rights. Much of the debates concerning citizenship and belonging have been focused on which rights, which responsibilities and whether or not the two should be related.<sup>42</sup> In recent years there has also been a growing body of literature on the thorny issue of cultural rights and the associated question of individual *v.* collective rights.<sup>43</sup> As I have pointed out elsewhere,<sup>44</sup> however, before we consider these different kinds of citizenship rights, we need to consider another kind of rights—spatial rights—namely, the right to enter a state or any other territory of a political community and, once inside, the right to remain there. Much of the energy of different political projects relating to the politics of belonging focus on these issues: the right to migrate, the right of abode, the right to work and, more and more recently, the right to plan a future where you live (since people who have been granted full residence rights as refugees can be told after many years of living and working in a state, no matter what their life projects are, that their country of origin is now ‘safe’ and therefore they are obliged to return there).

In terms of the responsibilities of membership, here also there has been much debate. Common duties have been the paying of taxes, either via having property or working, and obeying the law. The ultimate citizenship duty, however, at one time was the readiness to sacrifice one’s life—and to kill others—for the sake of the political community. This, until relatively recently, has generally been a gendered demand: it was the responsibility of

41 Francis B. Nyamnjoh, *Africa’s Media: Democracy and the Politics of Belonging* (London: Zed Books 2005), 18.

42 See, for example, Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1990); John Holmwood, ‘Three pillars of welfare state theory: T. H. Marshall, Karl Polanyi and Alva Myrdal in defence of the national welfare state’, *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2000, 23–50.

43 See, for example, Laksiri Jayasuriya, ‘Multiculturalism, citizenship and welfare: new directions for the 1990s’, in Richard Nile (ed.), *Immigration and the Politics of Ethnicity and Race in Australia and Britain* (London: Sir Robert Menzies Centre for Australian Studies 1991); Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*; Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*.

44 Yuval-Davis, ‘The citizenship debate’.

male members. Women have been asked to re/produce the next generation of citizens and soldiers.<sup>45</sup> During the twentieth century, with the construction of the welfare state and the expansion of citizenship to women and other racialized and disenfranchised groups, the link between citizenship's rights and duties has been weakened, including, in many states, the professionalization of the military. In recent years, with the growing neo-liberal attacks on the welfare state, the link between work and the right to welfare has again been strengthened.<sup>46</sup>

When it comes to membership's rights and responsibilities in the arena of the politics of belonging, the duties involved become much more ephemeral and actually become requirements, rather than mere duties. The central question here is what is required from a specific person for him/her to be entitled to belong, to be considered as belonging, to the collectivity. Common descent (or rather the myth of common descent) might be demanded in some cases, while in others it might be a common culture, religion and/or language. Loyalty and solidarity, based on common values and a projected myth of common destiny, tend to become requisites for belonging in pluralist societies. In other words, in different projects of the politics of belonging, the different levels of belonging—social locations, identities and ethical and political values—can become the requisites of belonging. Requisites of belonging that relate to social locations—origin, 'race', place of birth—would be the most racialized and the least permeable. Language, culture and sometimes religion are more open to voluntary, often assimilatory, identification with particular collectivities. Using a common set of values, such as 'democracy' or 'human rights', as the signifiers of belonging can be seen as having the most permeable boundaries of all.

However, these different discourses of belonging can be collapsed together or reduced to each other in specific historical cases. Moreover, some political projects of belonging can present themselves as promoting more open boundaries than they actually do. In the next section I shall illustrate this by briefly outlining three different political projects of belonging in the United Kingdom that have utilized discourses relating to different levels of belonging.

### **British political projects of belonging**

Enoch Powell was the first major political figure in Britain to try and establish boundaries to British or, rather, English belonging in the post-imperial era.<sup>47</sup> He understood before others that the empire was a lost cause

45 Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*.

46 Jamie Peck, *Workfare States* (New York: Guilford Press 2001).

47 In his pre-European Union, pre-devolution time, Englishness was so hegemonic it virtually equated with Britishness (at least in England, though not in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland).

and called for a return to and a strengthening of the homeland itself: 'Englishman, go home!'<sup>48</sup> Although, as a minister in the Conservative government of the day, he was responsible for the importing of black British citizens from the Caribbean islands to work in England, he excluded them by definition from any possibility of belonging to the English national collectivity. He argued that 'the West Indian does not by being born in England, become an Englishman'.<sup>49</sup>

For Powell, descent is the ultimate criterion of belonging. Moreover, he collapsed descent and cultural and political identification. He was eventually expelled from the Conservative Party when he argued that, unless those who did not belong were returned to their 'proper' countries, there would be 'rivers of blood' in England, as people who originated in different countries and cultures could not, by definition, become part of the same integrated society.

About ten years after Powell was expelled from the Conservative Party, another Conservative minister in Margaret Thatcher's government, Norman Tebbit, promoted another political project of belonging that is popularly known as the 'cricket test'. One of the Conservative election posters under Thatcher presented a picture of a young black man with the subtitle 'Labour claims he is Black, we claim he is British'. In this way, the Thatcherite political project of belonging distinguished itself from Labour's multiculturalism, but also from the skin-colour, descent-based racism of the extreme right, although, during her original election campaign, Thatcher did speak about her worry that newcomers would 'swamp' the local people and their culture. However, as the Thatcherite neo-liberal project crystallized, its discourse opened the door, at least rhetorically, to black middle-class assimilationism. Norman Tebbit's contribution was to establish the boundary of belonging not only in terms of assimilation and economic contribution but also in terms of identification and emotional attachment. In 1990 he claimed that, if people watched a cricket match between Britain and the team of the country from which they or their family originated and cheered that latter team, it meant that those people did not really 'belong' to the British collectivity.

David Blunkett, as Home Secretary in Tony Blair's New Labour's government a decade later, was careful not to use the cricket metaphor, but football matches were mentioned often in his various papers, as New Labour distanced itself as well from the multiculturalism that had become the official policy of the Labour Party since the 1960s. The multiculturalist political project of belonging was basically aimed at post-imperial Britain and the non-assimilatory integration of coloured British citizens who came to live and work in post-war Britain from its previous colonies.<sup>50</sup> Over the

48 See Martin Barker, *The New Racism* (London: Junction Books 1981).

49 Quoted in Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London: Hutchinson 1987), 46.

50 They were usually known then as NCWP countries (New Commonwealth and Pakistan).

years there has been a growing critique of multicultural policies not only from the right but also from the left. Multiculturalism has been accused of neglecting issues of power between and within the minority ethnic communities, of reifying and essentializing boundaries of difference and of excluding the growing number of migrants and asylum-seekers who come from outside the former British empire.<sup>51</sup>

New Labour attempted to tackle multiculturalism after the 2001 riots in Northern England when the Cantle Report basically claimed that multiculturalist policies had gone too far and had effectively caused, at least in Northern England, social segregation between the English and the ethnic minority communities, mostly Muslim South Asians.<sup>52</sup> Multiculturalism was declared 'dead', and social and community integration became the new goals of the British politics of belonging. The British people, in this political project, so often articulated by David Blunkett, are not constructed out of common descent or a common culture, but their solidarity and loyalty have to be to the British state and society. In his White Paper, *Secure Borders, Safe Haven*, Blunkett even encouraged people from South Asian communities to find partners for their children from other families living in Britain rather than in their countries of origin, so that such cultural and social cohesion would be easier to achieve.<sup>53</sup> Learning English becomes a requirement for attaining formal citizenship under the new legislation, again in order for such social cohesion to be facilitated.

Although this political project of belonging is primarily based on the identificatory and emotional level, it also assumes adherence to specific political and ethical values that are seen as inherent to good democratic citizenship.<sup>54</sup> The emphasis on democracy and human rights becomes much stronger with British involvement in the wars in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq,<sup>55</sup> and becomes not only a signifier of British belonging for its citizens

51 See, for example, Anthias and Yuval-Davis, *Racialized Boundaries*; Gregor McLennan, 'Problematic multiculturalism', *Sociology*, vol. 35, no. 4, 2001, 985-9; Tariq Modood and Pnina Werbner (eds), *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe* (London: Zed Books 1997); Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*; Ali Rattansi, 'Changing the subject? Racism, culture and education', in James Donald and Ali Rattansi (eds), *Race, Culture and Difference* (London: Sage 1992).

52 Community Cohesion Review Team, Chaired by Ted Cantle, *Community Cohesion* (London: Home Office 2001).

53 Home Office, *Secure Borders, Safe Haven*, CM 5387 (London: HMSO 2001).

54 For this, Blunkett's main inspiration has been Professor Bernard Crick who wrote a report on citizenship studies in schools when Blunkett was Education Secretary; for the Crick Report, see Advisory Group on Citizenship, *Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools* (London: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 1998).

55 Although, paradoxically, at the same time, the fear of terrorist attacks after 9/11 and, especially in London, 7/7 has also brought the suspension of some human rights legislation and a growing political struggle around the wish of the government to suspend even more of it.

but also its mission in the world. This political project has been promoted mostly by the Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown. Recently he suggested the establishment of a 'Patriotism Day' to cement British political loyalty and, significantly, proposed 'Liberty, Responsibility, Fairness' as the British equivalent to the French political values of 'Liberté, égalité, fraternité'. Although many in the media saw in this politics of belonging project a way for the Scottish Brown to strengthen overall British identity at a time when the devolution of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland had weakened it and thus legitimize his claim to becoming the next prime minister of Britain, it is linked much more centrally to the overall political project of New Labour.

In several speeches Brown has emphasized values, rather than origins or social and political institutions, as what he sees as constituting 'the sense of shared purpose, an idea of what your destiny as a nation is'. For Brown, the 'common qualities and common values that have made Britain the country ... [are] our belief in tolerance and liberty which shines through British history. Our commitment to fairness, fair play and civic duty.'<sup>56</sup> This view of Britishness and British history has led him to declare, on other occasions,<sup>57</sup> that 'the days of Britain having to apologize for its colonial history are over' and that 'we should be proud ... of the Empire'.<sup>58</sup> In New Labour's politics of belonging, human rights and democratic civic values are part of what Britain has to offer not only to its citizens but also to the world at large. The re-elevation of the British Empire to an occasion for British national pride, in spite of all the terrible chapters in its history,<sup>59</sup> goes hand in hand with the contemporary 'civilizing mission' of the humanitarian militarism in which Britain, alongside the United States, is playing a central role,<sup>60</sup> and which has often had terrible consequences for the people it is supposed to liberate. This is an issue that all human rights activists—as well as all those who promote, unproblematically, a cosmopolitan world government in which the moral values of human rights are dictated from the top down—have to confront these days.<sup>61</sup> Emancipatory ethical and political values can be transformed, under certain conditions, into inherent personal attributes of members of particular national and regional collectivities (Britain, the West) and, thus, in

56 *Newsnight*, broadcast on BBC2, 14 March 2005.

57 See, for example, his speech during last year's African tour, quoted in the *Daily Mail*, 15 January 2005.

58 Speech at the British Museum, quoted in the *Daily Mail*, 14 September 2004.

59 For a quick summary, see Seumas Milne, 'Britain: imperial nostalgia', *Le Monde diplomatique*, May 2005.

60 David Chandler, *From Kosovo to Kabul: Human Rights and International Intervention* (London: Pluto Press 2002).

61 See, for example, David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1995); Mary Kaldor, *Global Civil Society: An Answer to War* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2003).



practice, become exclusionary rather than permeable signifiers of boundaries.

### **A concluding remark**

The different British political projects of belonging mentioned above are but small examples in one country of the ways different states and societies are trying to grapple with what Stuart Hall has called ‘the multicultural question’:

What are the terms for groups of people from different cultural, religious, linguistic, historical backgrounds, who have applied to occupy the same social space, whether that is a city or a nation or a region, to live with one another without either one group [the less powerful group] having to become the imitative version of the dominant one—i.e. an assimilationism—or, on the other hand, the two groups hating one another, or projecting images of degradation? In other words, how can people live together in difference?<sup>62</sup>

According to Hall, beneath multiculturalism lies the issue of globalization: the multicultural question is ‘the question that globalization has unconsciously produced’. Beneath it also lies the question of the contemporary politics of belonging.

In these post-9/11 (and, in Britain, post-7/7) times, ‘strangers’ are seen not only as a threat to the cohesion of the political and cultural community but also as potential terrorists, especially the young men among them. And who is ‘a stranger’ is continually being modified and contested with growing ethnic, cultural and religious tensions in, as well as in between, societies and states. The politics of belonging has come to occupy the heart of the political agenda almost everywhere on the globe, even when reified assumptions about ‘the clash of civilizations’ are not necessarily applied.<sup>63</sup> As the examples from Britain show, however, a lot of both political and analytical work is still required for fully permeable politics of belonging to gain hegemony in the ‘West’—let alone the ‘Rest’.

**Nira Yuval-Davis** is Professor and Graduate Course Director in Gender, Sexualities and Ethnic Studies at the University of East London. She is the current president of Research Committee 05 (Race, Ethnic and Minority Relations) of the International Sociological Association and one of the

62 Stuart Hall, ‘Rethinking the multicultural question’, a video conversation with Nira Yuval-Davis, presented at the ISA RC05 and RC32 interim conference on ‘Racisms, Sexisms and Contemporary Politics of Belonging’, London, August 2004.

63 Samuel Huntington, ‘The clash of civilizations’, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 3, 1993, 22–50.

founder members of Women against Fundamentalism and the research network Women in Militarized Conflict Zones. She has written extensively on theoretical and empirical aspects of nationalism, racism, fundamentalism, citizenship and gender relations in Britain, Europe, Israel and other settler societies. Among her written and edited books are *Woman—Nation—State* (Macmillan 1989), *Racialized Boundaries* (Routledge 1992), *Refusing Holy Orders: Women and Fundamentalism in Britain* (Virago 1992), *The Gulf War and the New World Order* (Zed Books 1992), *Unsettling Settler Societies* (Sage 1995), *Crossfires: Nationalism, Racism and Gender in Europe* (Pluto 1995), *Women, Citizenship and Difference* (Zed Books 1999) and *Warning Signs of Fundamentalisms* (Women Living under Muslim Laws 2004). Her book *Gender and Nation* (Sage 1997) has been translated into seven languages. She is currently preparing a monograph *Nationalism, Identity and Belonging* (Sage), and is the director of the ESRC research project 'Identity, Performance and Social Action: The Use of Community Theatre among Refugees'.

Copyright of *Patterns of Prejudice* is the property of Routledge and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.

Copyright of *Patterns of Prejudice* is the property of Routledge and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.