

# Chapter 1

## The Internet, National Citizenship, and the “Sovereignty Paradox”: Asylum-Seeking Migrants’ Political Agency and “Technologized” Citizenship

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter explores the potential of the Internet for asylum seekers’/refugees’ political agency and for challenging the boundaries of national citizenship and state sovereignty. It considers that Western governments’ formulation of “restrictionist” and “assimilationist” citizenship policies and the conjoining “managerialist” approach to asylum are aimed at asserting state sovereignty and national citizenship. However, it is argued that attempts at the territorial construction of membership amounts to a “sovereignty paradox”: policies promote an international humanitarian norm of citizenship, which depends on state sovereignty for its realisation. Asylum-seeking migrants’ views and practices are therefore deployed to explore the counterproductivity of the UK government’s attempt to coerce would-be British citizens to have loyalty and allegiance to the nation-state. This UK case study provides empirical substantiation of asylum-seeking migrants’ political agency in the West, and the resilience of state sovereignty in affirming an international humanitarian norm of citizenship. It also contributes to an understanding of asylum-seeking migrants’ political agency through the Internet in holding political elites in the West accountable for their migration-citizenship policies. This perspective has been strikingly missing in the citizenship and international relations theories, particularly given the context that non-citizen asylum-seeking migrants residing in liberal democracies are a major trigger for these policies. The chapter also attempts to deconstruct the relationship between transnationalism and globalisation: a project that continues to be problematic in the academy.*

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## **INTRODUCTION: THE RELATIONS BETWEEN NATIONAL CITIZENSHIP AND STATE SOVEREIGNTY**

This chapter will explore the intersection of asylum-seeking migrants’ usage of the Internet, political agency, citizenship formations and state sovereignty. It will argue that Western governments’ formulation of policies to admit non-citizens into national citizenship and to assert state sovereignty amounts to a ‘sovereignty paradox’: policies promoted an international humanitarian norm of membership, which is beyond the territorial construction of the nation-state and that depended on state sovereignty for its realisation. Political agency means the capacities (behaviour and practices) that individuals have for political action and participation. Such actions are used by different groups in the nation-state to make claims and negotiate their viewpoints and aspirations within the democratic spaces and procedures that are available to them (Dahlgren, 2009). ‘State sovereignty’ is used here to mean “the assertion of final authority within a given territory” (Krasner, 1988, p. 8 quoted in Joppke, 1997, p. 23). ‘National citizenship’ is used here to refer to the ‘legal’ status of citizenship by which an individual is officially conferred membership of a nation-state.

As a legal status, national citizenship is bestowed on individuals by virtue of birth or *jus soli*, descent and ethno-cultural identity or *jus sanguinis* and naturalisation especially due to residency or *jus domicili* (Sales, 2007; Castles & Davidson, 2000). The individual is expected by the state to automatically inherit a ‘social’ status and a formal nationality, by which they enjoy certain welfare rights and obligations in equal measure to all citizenry (Jenkins, 2006). Membership of the nation-state also comes with special privileges that are distinguishable from those of non-citizens even though membership is open to long-term residents (Odmalm, 2007, p. 21). There is an expectation that all members should have allegiance and loyalty to the nation-state and around “a particular set of

common practices and characteristics” (Dwyer, 2008, p. 167; Gustafson, 2002). For example, in the case of the UK, admission into national citizenship implies that the state expects individuals to automatically have allegiance to the UK. National citizenship in this sense is synonymous with British citizenship. National citizenship (henceforth referred to as citizenship) is a formal or official attribution by the state of what citizens are, what constitute membership to the national community and the rights to be accrued by such members. Membership is to the state as a political community and to the ‘nation’ as a cultural community in which all citizens should have the same rights and responsibilities or obligations (Gustafson, 2002). Citizenship as a legal status therefore assumes that the ‘nation’ and the ‘state, and the ‘political’ and the ‘cultural’ community’ are coterminous, an assumption that is precarious especially in relation to the multinational states of many western democracies such as the UK (see Keating, 2009). The Scottish devolved context is a reminder of this problematic where in the case of Scotland, as a country within the UK, the political and cultural community, the nation and the state are not coterminous. For many Scots, the national and cultural community is Scotland, while Britain is perceived as the political community and ‘legal’ (national) citizenship is British.

Arguable therefore citizenship and sovereignty are interconnected in the sense that the acquisition of legal status of membership of the political and cultural community is the prerogative of state authority. As Joppke (1997) and Nickels (2007) argued, the nation-state is able to exert its authority or sovereignty by granting ‘legal’ membership of the nation-state to non-citizens. Both citizenship and sovereignty therefore construct a collective membership with the nation-state that is territorially (or nationally) defined. The sovereign state assumes that members of the nation-state should share a common national, cultural and political community. This conception of citizenship is therefore crucial to sovereignty because

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