DIASPORAS IN AUSTRALIA:
CURRENT AND POTENTIAL LINKS WITH THE HOMELAND

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Introduction

Diasporas are increasingly recognised for their transnational ties between countries and regions and a growing international literature that investigates the implications of this for public policy. However, there has been little comprehensive research undertaken in Australia. This paper is one outcome of research that aimed to address this gap through an exploration of the character of four Australian diasporas: the Tongan, Vietnamese, Italian and Macedonian. Based on research conducted in 2010 – 2012, the intent of this paper is to compare the nature and strength of diaspora ties to the homeland. A further objective is to consider the applicability and relevance of Robin Cohen’s (1997; 2008) well-known model of diaspora typologies in the Australian context. Throughout the discussion, we consider the economic, political, familial and cultural dimensions of diaspora behaviour with the understanding, as Cohen (2008: 123) states, that diasporas are ‘...multifaceted, historically contingent and socially constructed entities’.

The paper begins with an overview of the relevant literature and debates and examines how they have informed our approach and method. We then discuss the key findings as they apply to each of the diasporas and compare characteristics in relation to Cohen’s (1997) diaspora ‘types’ of ‘classical or victim’, ‘labour’, ‘trade’ and ‘cultural’ diasporas. Of particular interest is Cohen’s category of ‘cultural diaspora, which in his more recent work (Cohen 2008: footnote 3 p194) has been revised and renamed as a ‘deterritorialised’ type. We conclude with a discussion and analysis of the relative strength and significance of diaspora homeland ties and what this reveals in terms of their potential to contribute to Australian international relations objectives, including the implications for policy development.

Background

There has been much debate in the literature about how best to define and conceptualise the linkages among peoples, nations, identities, and mobilities. In their overview of the literature on this issue, Baldassar and Gabaccia (2011: 5) highlight a degree of conceptual slipperiness around distinctions between the notions of transnationalism and diasporas, and they are often used interchangeably. For example, Safran’s (1991: 3) definition in the first issue of the journal Diaspora; “Modern diasporas are ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin - their homelands”, clearly resonates with Glick Schiller et al’s (1992: ix) classic definition of transnationalism; “a social process in which migrants establish social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders”.

According to Baldassar & Gabaccia (2011) the concept ‘diaspora’ has mostly been used to refer to issues of identity politics and the role of both home and host nation states on diaspora community formation. Of central relevance here are issues of nationalism and
belonging, which are important dimensions of the settlement process, reflecting degrees of immigrant marginalisation and integration. The related notion, ‘diaspora consciousness’, raises the relevance of these issues for the subsequent migrant generations. While some researchers have argued for a narrow definition of diaspora, limiting it to those groups to which it originally applied, akin to Cohen’s victim diaspora (cf Koser 2003), most have utilised Cohen’s broader typology, drawing on the Greek origins of the term, which refers to the scattering of people in multiple directions without fixed identities. In contrast, studies of transnationalism, according to Baldassar and Gabaccia (2011), commonly focus on questions of mobility and connectedness. Werbner (2004), for example, draws a distinction between transnationalism and diaspora studies by arguing that the former focus on movements (including communication) across borders, and the latter on the formation of “a permanent condition of ethnic and communal living.” Critics, like Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2004) debate whether the focus on border crossings implied in transnationalism obfuscates or conflates the continued importance of the nation-state.

Whatever their differences, studies of the transnational and of diasporas share a dominant focus on the supposedly ‘public’ issues of labor, capital and citizenship (Glick Schiller et al 1992: ix). This was a major consideration in the methodology of our research project, in which we included careful attention to the more quotidian and domestic aspects that have been gaining increasing awareness in the literature as “transnationalism from below” (Gardner & Grillo 2002; Sharpe 2001; Baldassar 2007). We not only wanted to explore the more common focus on economic, political and cultural connections between sending and receiving societies, but also the equally important and interconnected, but much less researched private sphere of kinship, family and caregiving. As Baldassar and Gabaccia (2011:191) argue, some scholars have theorized the notion of a diasporic public sphere (for example, Werbner 1998, 2002; Laguerre 2005; Appadurai 1996) “suggesting the possible significance of a corresponding diasporic private or domestic sphere as well” (our emphasis).

In this paper we examine both the ‘public’ and ‘private’ dimensions of diaspora relations as well as their intersections. Furthermore, our central focus on the concept of ‘diaspora’ is in no way meant to exclude transnational processes, but rather provides a framework through which they can be examined. It is our view that foregrounding diaspora as our central analytical frame better serves our particular interest in the nature of migrant communities in Australia. In other words, in this study, we examine the processes of transnationalism from the vantage point of Australian migrant diasporas.
The Diasporas

Cohen’s (1997; 2008) typology of diasporas are Weberian ‘ideal types’ that attempt to illuminate, albeit imperfectly, the essence of diasporas. Given that diasporas are highly fluid and in a constant process of formation, change and renewal, the intent of Cohen’s typology is to provide a tool for analysis and comparison rather than identify a set of fixed characteristics and descriptors. For this purpose, Cohen arrives at five key ‘types’. ‘Victim or classical’ diasporas are those whose emigration from the homeland was forced and/or traumatic, exemplified by the Jews, Africans, Armenians and in the case of our project, the Vietnamese. ‘Labour diasporas’ include those that are generated by emigration in search of work, such as the Italians, indentured Indians, or the Turkish (Cohen, 2008: 61). ‘Imperial diasporas’ are those that are exemplified by the British, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, German and French who established diasporas abroad as an outcome of the imperial objectives of colonisation. ‘Trade and business’ diasporas refer to those who emigrate for the purposes of trade. The term was initially coined to describe the networks that merchants, like the Chinese and Lebanese, set up to buy and sell goods on established trade routes (Cohen, 2008: 83). Finally, ‘deterritorialised’ diasporas are characterised by those that are multidirectional in their patterns of migration, have multiple events and reasons for their dispersal, and commonly have multiple centres of belonging that function as equivalents to the original homeland (Cohen, 2008: 123). Cohen uses Caribbean migrants as the exemplar of this type because they are highly diverse, have been scattered to different parts of the globe such as Britain, Africa and India, and have little relationship to an actual homeland. Yet at the same time, an essence of ‘being Caribbean’ with connections formed through a common identity can be discerned. Cohen’s typology shaped the development of the research instruments applied in this study as well as framed the analysis of the data gathered.

The four diasporas that are the focus of our study (Italian, Macedonian, Tongan and Vietnamese) were selected for a mix of practical and theoretical considerations. The key practical reason for their inclusion was the interest expressed by community leaders within these diasporas, their willingness to be part of the research process and to facilitate the research design, data collection and analysis. The involvement of community members with the relevant cultural background and languages was also considered essential to the development meaningful research tools. In theoretical terms, each of the diasporas are important as part of the Australian multicultural population mix and are illustrative of different migration histories, ethnicities, cultural backgrounds and types of diasporas. This allows for the comparative insights the research hoped to achieve. The following description gives a brief overview of their characteristics and migration history to Australia.

The Italian Diaspora
The Italian Diaspora in Australia is substantial with around one million people who were either born in Italy or who claim Italian ancestry. The Diaspora is highly heterogeneous and is built from various waves of migration dating back to the late 1800s. The Italian Diaspora is widely regarded as an exemplar of the success of Australian multicultural policies and has, over time, shifted, in Cohen’s typology, from what could be regarded as primarily a labour diaspora (in the pre-war and immediate post-war years) to one that is more ‘deterritorialised’ in character today. An argument could also be made that it has many characteristics of Cohen’s trade diaspora. This said, our findings suggest that a key feature of the Italian diaspora, particularly in the case of the first migrant generation, is the vitality and visibility of the Italian Australian community, which is both quite distinct and independent from Italy, with its own newspapers, radio programs, annual festivals, local community associations and so on. The Italian-Australian community has its own cultural character that is not the same as Italy’s. This development of an Italian Australian diaspora has occurred over time and as the result of a variety of factors including the success of multicultural politics and philosophy which promoted the celebration of mixed and hybrid identities, the successful integration and upward social mobility of the second and subsequent Italian generations and the international rise in popularity of Italian fashion and design.

The somewhat unexpected phenomenon of the migration from Italy of temporary migrants is having an impact on the character of the Italian-Australian cultural Diaspora. This very recent ‘new wave’ of educated and highly skilled migrants from Italy, arguably define the Italian diaspora as a labour diaspora once again, albeit a highly skilled one. Arriving as international students, on working holidays or short term business visas, the new arrivals are young and often single, highly mobile and extremely technologically literate. Their migration is strongly driven by the current economic crisis in Europe and disillusionment with Italian domestic politics. These attributes make the term ‘migrant’ less pertinent to describe these arrivals as they appear to be very much transnational actors, strongly connected to both their sending and receiving societies. Their presence may further transform the Italian Australian diaspora and increase this community’s ties and connections to Italy, making its transnational connections - more prominent, thus adding to and extending the ‘multiple centres’ of Italo-australian belonging, characteristic of Cohen’s ‘deterritorialised disporas’.

The Macedonian Diaspora

The Macedonian Diaspora in Australia numbers approximately 93,500 people comprising waves of migrants from the Republic of Macedonia since the 1920s and those who claim Macedonian ancestry. Macedonia is one of the oldest recorded states in European civilization with a history and culture dating back to the eight century B.C. Over the course of history, the region has been ruled by many foreign powers and the Republic of Macedonia, as it exists today, was established as part of the Yugoslav Federation in 1944 and became an independent state following the breakup of the Yugoslav federation in 1990. Given this long
history marked by overthrow and disruption, the constituency of the diaspora is considerably more blurry than others with many who claim Macedonian identity having a geographical history and heritage that stems from the broader region surrounding the actual contemporary borders. As a ‘type’, the Macedonian diaspora is, in Cohen’s (2008) terms, a labour diaspora, with its migrants having arrived in Australia seeking employment opportunities. Like the Italians, however, they increasingly show characteristics of a ‘deterritorialised’ diaspora, due to their focus on the development and maintenance of Macedonian-Australian language, religion and cultural activities and the much less important role that labour and employment now play in diaspora relations. As in the case of Italy, the initial migration from Macedonia was primarily a search for employment and an important source of remittances for the homeland, especially in the immediate post WWII period. This labour imperative declined for both countries from the 1970s and has only just recently re-emerged with the current global financial crisis. A particular characteristic of the Macedonian’s, however, is their level of political mobilisation and concern with achieving international recognition and support for Macedonian goals of economic growth and integration with Europe. The significance of these activist and political ties with the homeland also confers some of the characteristics of Cohen’s ‘victim’ diaspora.

The Tongan Diaspora

The Kingdom of Tonga is a constitutional monarchy and is unique in that it was the only small Pacific Island country that was not colonized by European nations and maintained independence. Migration from Tonga to Australia began in the 1960s and consistent with Tonga’s small population of 103,000, the Tongan Diaspora in Australia is small, comprising an estimated 18,000 people. Tongan migration to the US, Australia and New Zealand was and continues to be motivated by the search for employment and educational opportunities unavailable in Tonga. While Tongans are not in ‘exile’ as such, there are social, economic and environmental barriers to returning to the homeland (Lee, 2003). In part due to Tonga’s economic reliance on remittances and tourism, as well as close kinship connections, the Tongan diaspora maintains strong and sustained ties with Tongan identity and the Homeland. With these characteristics, Tonga is known as a MIRAB economy, defined as those which rely primarily on remittances to support the local economy. Tonga thus represents a labour diaspora in Cohen’s terms, more similar to the post war Italian and Macedonian diasporas than to their contemporary manifestations. However, the labour diaspora typology could be usefully refined to highlight the significant distinctions between, for example, the Italian labour diaspora and the Tongan labour diaspora. While Italy relied heavily on its emigrant remittances, it was never a MIRAB economy. Although a question of degree, it could be useful to further refine the category of labour diaspora to include types of labour diasporas, including MIRABs.

The Vietnamese Diaspora
The Vietnamese Diaspora in Australia includes approximately 200,000 people. While the earliest Vietnamese migrants arrived in the 1950s, numbers remained very small until the end of the Vietnam war in 1975 and Australia supported the resettlement of refugees between 1975-1985 and facilitated Vietnamese family reunion through the late 1980s and 1990s. With this history, the Australian based Vietnamese have been distinctively a ‘victim’ diaspora, with their emigration being forced and undertaken in traumatic circumstances. This profile is currently changing, however, with the most recent wave of migration being primarily comprised of Vietnamese students arriving on temporary student visas. These arrivals have been growing progressively since the 1990s and annual international student enrolments by Vietnamese students have grown from around 1,000 in 1994 to more than 20,000 in 2012 (AEI, 2013).

While the profile of the Vietnamese community in Australia is now changing due to changes in conditions of Vietnamese immigration, a distinctive characteristic of the Vietnamese Diaspora is the very strong and continuing identification as Vietnamese and to Vietnamese language and culture, while simultaneously having very low formal engagement with the Homeland. This lack of engagement with the homeland is due to the continued and antagonistic relationship with the homeland government due to the refugee experience meaning that the diaspora type of ‘victim’ remains a relevant descriptor. These features of the Vietnamese diaspora in Australia also supports our focus on the concept of diaspora over that of transnationalism, if we see the latter as primarily concerned with linkages between home and host societies and the former as centred on settlement and community identity. At the same time, as in the case of the Italian diaspora, the constituency of the Vietnamese Diaspora is currently changing with the most recent wave of temporary migrants that is primarily made up of international students. It is possible that these new members of the community may lead to enhanced transnational ties between the Homeland and Diaspora as the mix of migration circumstances changes within the Diaspora. This is further enhanced as the post-refugee second generation Vietnamese in Australia rise to the fore in the community with a greater interest and desire to engage with Vietnam.

Overall

Each of the diasporas are distinctive in terms of their history of migration and settlement in Australia and in terms of ethnicity and language. Importantly, they originate from different world regions with diverse forms of homeland relations. It appears that, over time, all diasporas, whatever their original ‘type’, show a movement towards becoming ‘detrerritorialised’ in Cohen’s terms – meaning the diaspora becomes a strong cultural community in its own right, distinct from the homeland. A key focus of the study was to explore these relations using the following methods.

Methods
The broad purpose of the research was to compare different ‘types’ of diasporas and to consider the nature and extent of ties to the homeland; the determinants of ties to the homeland; and the applicability of diaspora typologies. Data collection, through surveys and focus groups, was focused around four key dimensions of diaspora relations, all of which have important relevance to policy:

1. Economic: diasporas have potential to enhance international economic development and ‘brain circulation’ within and between knowledge economies, as well as being a source of remittances and investment in the homeland through tourism (Saxenian, 2005);
2. Political: diasporas are a site of political organisation for or against the interests of homeland governments or as advocates for the interests of the diaspora in Australia and/or in other receiving countries (Sheffer, 2003)
3. Family and Kinship: diasporas are a vehicle for the provision of transnational family caregiving and support (Baldassar, Baldock, & Wilding, 2007) and
4. Cultural: diasporas play an important role in the maintenance of culture, language and religious practices generating both freedoms and restraints for its members and host communities (Lee 2003).

1.1.1.1 The Surveys

A survey of each of the diasporas was designed by the research team and included a set of questions relevant to each of the four key dimensions of diaspora relations. As much as possible, each of the surveys included common questions to facilitate comparison between the diasporas, although each was also customized in order to ensure relevance to the specific community. Created as an on-line questionnaire, the survey incorporated a mix of open and closed questions designed to gather information on the four key dimensions of diaspora engagement in addition to basic demographic questions about the circumstances, timing and purpose of migration targeted at the individual respondent as well as their family circumstances. Specific questions were asked relating to each of the four dimensions highlighted above. The focus of economic questions related to homeland ties of a business, professional and trade nature. Questions around political ties were focused on associations in both home and host societies and questions relating to identity, citizenship status and motivation for visits. Family and kinship was explored through questions transnational caregiving obligations, practices and processes, including methods of staying in touch and visits home. The theme of cultural ties was investigated with questions on cultural and community activities and associations in both home and host settings and connections between the two including various forms of cultural production (media, news, film, literature etc). We also enquired about language maintenance, national identity and feelings of ‘closeness’ to the homeland.
Using a snowball method (Bickman & Rog, 2009) the survey was distributed as widely as possible through partner organisations email listings, electronic newsletters and through personal networks with the request to complete the survey as well as to forward it on to broader networks and family members.

1.1.1.2 Focus Groups
Focus group discussions were also held with groups of six to twelve people from each of the relevant diasporas. Care was taken that participants were from a cross section of the relevant communities and included a mix of men and women, people born in Australia and the homeland, and of a range of ages from 18 year to 70 years. Participants were identified and invited through relevant community networks known to the researchers.

The focus group discussions were conducted over 90 minutes and included a set of common open-ended questions that were guided by the core themes of the research and were intended to generate discussion that would assist in both explaining and verifying the survey results. Core questions related to the four key dimensions of the study with a particular emphasis on the participant’s sense of identity as being part of the diaspora; the motivation, means and mode of maintaining communication and contact with the homeland; interests in homeland affairs; perceptions of generational change to the diaspora; and, perceptions of the importance of the diaspora and its future role. Six focus groups were conducted in total across the four diaspora communities. The focus group discussions were recorded, transcribed and analysed and data were drawn upon to generate a deeper understanding of the survey results and are reflected in the research reports.

Extensive data was generated from the responses gained from each of the diasporas. These findings are reported in detail through reports on each of the diasporas which are each available on line (Baldassar, Pyke, & Ben-Moshe, 2012; Ben-Moshe & Pyke, 2012; Ben-Moshe, Pyke, & Andreevski, 2012; Pyke, Francis, & Ben-Moshe, 2012). The purpose of the following discussion is to provide a comparative overview of the findings in relation to each of the key dimensions of enquiry.

Data and Results

Survey responses
There were varied survey response rates from each of the diasporas due to the varied size and characteristics of the communities involved, the degree to which the communities are formally organised and the level of motivation for participating in the study. The Macedonians, for example, were enthusiastic in their response due to the community’s established role in promoting positive bi-lateral relations between Australia and Macedonia. The Vietnamese, in contrast, were more reticent to respond due to language barriers and a
hostile or ambivalent relationship with the Homeland government. Overall, response rates varied due to a range of differing circumstances and characteristics. Table 1 shows the actual survey responses generated as well as key characteristics of the sample by key variables including gender, age and place of birth.

Table 1: Survey responses from each diaspora

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diaspora</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age (40 and older/39 or younger)</th>
<th>Place of birth (Aus/homeland or other)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tongan</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>70% F/30% M</td>
<td>58.1% &lt;40 years 41.9% &gt;40 years</td>
<td>44.1% Aus/55.9% Tonga or other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>36% F/64% M</td>
<td>52% &lt;40 years 48% &gt;40 years</td>
<td>72.2% Aus/27.8% Italy or other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>60% F/40% M</td>
<td>54.2% &lt;40 years 45.8% &gt;40 years</td>
<td>22.64% Aus/77.36% Vietnam or other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macedonian</td>
<td>1101</td>
<td>30.9% F/69.1% M</td>
<td>49.1% &lt;40 years 51.9% &gt;40 years</td>
<td>39.7% Aus/60.3% Macedonia or other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In presenting these results, we are mindful of the limitations of the data in that responses are not based on a random sample, and that the reach of the survey was limited to the networks available to the research team. At the same time, each of the surveys is inclusive of substantial numbers of people who identify as being part of a diaspora and who are representative of a cross-section of age, birth-place and gender. The results are interpreted as being useful to indicate trends, beliefs and attitudes of cohorts within each of the diasporas. This is particularly important in light of the absence of comparable studies.

As a way to summarise and compare the findings in relation to each of the diasporas, the following discussion compares some of the key findings according to the core themes of investigation. These include the economic, political, cultural and familial dimensions of diaspora ties to the homeland. These are disentangled for the purposes of presenting a coherent discussion although, as argued from the outset, the dimensions of behaviour are in fact enmeshed and contingent on the other. We start with a discussion of the explicitly economic dimensions of relations to the homeland.
Economic Ties to the Homeland
Across all of the diasporas, the level of engagement with the homeland that is of a business and professional nature is generally very low. The Italian findings show the greatest level of engagement with 19 per cent saying that they have a job that involves interaction with Italy. This finding is largely made up of respondents who are engaged in teaching Italian or involved with Italian cultural exchange. For each of the other diasporas, professional and business engagement is less than 10 per cent.

While actual engagement is low, the capacity and interest in developing business and professional links is relatively high. This is particularly the case for the Macedonians where around 50 per cent of all respondents say they are interested in developing such links. The Italians (42%) and the Tongans (33%) also express strong interest. The Vietnamese are the exception here with very little interest (approx. 2%) expressed in developing business or professional ties to the Homeland.

The findings, however, show very different motivations and reasons for wanting to develop such links. The Italians are motivated by the desire to ‘visit more often’ while the Macedonians are most interested in the economic development of the Homeland. Tongans say that they are most interested in Tongan social development and increasing family opportunities and wellbeing. The Vietnamese show little interest in developing business and professional links and qualitative responses suggest that this is largely due to continued mistrust of, and estrangement from, the Vietnamese government. This finding, however, does not apply to the same degree for newer arrivals, but is certainly the case for those who arrived in Australia as refugees and for their children who are discouraged from engaging with the homeland.

Overall, these findings suggest that business and professional ties are not key drivers of diaspora homeland connections and where they do occur, it is more likely to be by those who were born in the homeland. Activities that could be described as an ‘economic’ transaction also occur primarily through family networks. For example, a number of Italian respondents have organised educational programs connected with villages and regions from where their families have originated as a means of meeting the dual objective of sustaining Italian family connections and developing their professional interests internationally. Similarly, a small number of Vietnamese respondents identified that they import food products unavailable in Australia and this occurs through family networks.

It is also interesting to note that a higher level of business and professional engagement occurs between the Macedonian and Italian homelands compared with Tonga and Vietnam. Both Tonga and Vietnam are relatively poor countries where there are considerable barriers to engagement. For the Tongans, a reason given for not cultivating business and professional links was due to the very communal cultural context in Tonga where there is
little encouragement of individual enterprise and entrepreneurship. While respondents show interest in supporting Tongan development, the barriers to business and professional engagement are perceived as too great. Similarly, and with the exception of only small numbers, the Vietnamese do not see any opportunities to, or reasons for, developing business and professional links with Vietnam.

In light of these findings, none of the diasporas can be described as being a ‘trade’ diaspora in Cohen’s typology. While there is intent and desire expressed to do so, this intent is not widely reflected in the responses for any of the diasporas. In light of Australian international trade objectives, this finding suggests that Australian diasporas represent ‘brain waste’ and that how to harness this intent for the purposes of international trade and knowledge exchange is an important policy question.

Political Links to the Homeland
Following from the theme of investigating political ties to the homeland, the findings revealed some very clear differences across the diasporas. The Macedonians are the most active politically and a large majority are involved in influencing Macedonian affairs and bilateral relations through a range of direct and indirect actions. This is followed by the Tongans, however, the reasons for this engagement is of a substantially different nature. The Italians show the least interest in actions aimed at influencing homeland affairs with only a minority saying that they had taken any actions at all.

In terms of organisational affiliation, the Vietnamese diaspora indicated the highest rates of involvement with Vietnamese organisations based in Australia and the main organisational type is ‘religious’. While not to the same degree, Tongans also indicated that involvement with the Church was the main type of homeland organisation that they are connected to. The Italians and Macedonians were similar in that approximately half of all respondents are involved in an Australian ethnic organisation but this involvement is primarily cultural, social, or sporting as opposed to being involved in a religious organisation.

There were distinct differences across diasporas in relation to Australian government policy as it relates to the Homeland. The Macedonians show the strongest interest with more than three-quarters of respondents identifying this as important. While not to the same extent, the Tongans and the Vietnamese are also interested in Australian government policy with at approximately half of all respondents in each group saying the Australian government policy is ‘very important’ or ‘important’. The Italians showed the least interest with less than 15% indicating Australian government policy in relation to Italy is important.

Overall, the findings from this theme of enquiry show some distinct differences across the groups. The Macedonians are distinctively political and engaged with homeland affairs in both direct and indirect ways. Influencing homeland affairs and bilateral relations is a high
priority and their concern with advancing the political interests of Macedonia in Australia can be seen as an identifying characteristic. This dimension of diaspora-homeland relations is not fully captured by Cohen’s types if the ‘essence’ of the Macedonian diaspora is to be captured.

The Tongans and the Vietnamese are also concerned about homeland politics and community affairs, although not to the same extent. Nor is it expressed in political actions for different reasons. For the Vietnamese, there is strong antagonism towards and estrangement from the homeland government. As a result, the stance is to ‘be Vietnamese’ in Australia rather than seek to be engaged with the Homeland. For the Tongans, the interest is strong but this is also married with a sense of ‘closeness’ and connection to the Homeland. While there is concern about Tongan politics, this is not expressed in forms of activism or dissent. In addition, while they are concerned about the development of Tonga, this is not an oppositional stance. Rather, their connections are sustained, and support for the homeland is directed, through family and kinship networks. In contrast, there is very little interest in Italian politics or communal affairs expressed by the Italians. The findings suggest that the connection for Italians is largely cultural and social rather than of a political nature.

While there were considerable differences across the four diasporas in term of the nature and expression of their political interests in the homeland, with the exception of the Italians, the findings show that concern about, and interest in the political conditions of the homeland, are a defining feature of diaspora ties. Such interest suggests the opportunity for further enquiry about how diasporas might contribute to international relations policy and ‘soft diplomacy’ with homeland governments.

**Family and Kinship**

Findings relating to the theme of family and kinship ties showed that a common feature of the diasporas was the presence of family and friends based in the homeland. Almost all respondents from Italy (95.7%), Macedonia (96.4%), Vietnam (93%) and Tonga (99.4%) have family and friends in the homeland. All diasporas stay in regular touch with family through various means. The Vietnamese primarily maintain phone and email contact while increasingly, Italians and Macedonians are using Facebook and Skype. Tongans are also increasingly using Facebook as a means of communication that overcomes the problems of different time zones and as internet and computer access is gradually becoming more accessible to their friends and relatives in Tonga.

Other indicators about family kinship connections, however, revealed considerable differences across the four groups. The frequency, intentions and the purposes of visiting the homeland was one such indicator. Of the four groups, the Vietnamese were the least
likely to have visited Vietnam and while 73 per cent of respondents had visited in the last five years, only 64 per cent said that they intended to do so in future. Those that have travelled said that next to having a holiday, the main reasons were to strengthen family connections (43%), a special occasion such as a funeral or birthday (32%) or to help family members (16%). Interestingly, only a few (6.5%) actually stayed with family while in Vietnam. This finding is in contrast to the other three groups who have travelled to the homeland in similar rates (Italy 84%, Macedonia 71% and Tonga 86%) yet their intentions to return in the next five years are much higher (Italy 86%, Macedonia 89% and Tonga 86%). Italians, Macedonians and Tongans also primarily (70% – 80%) stay with family members when visiting the homeland. These three diasporas particularly highlight the motivation of strengthening family and friendship connections as the major reason for visiting alongside to ‘have a holiday’.

Another commonality across the groups was that they receive family and friends as visitors from the homeland but with varying rates of frequency and duration. Approximately two-thirds of respondents from Vietnam, Italy and Macedonia say that they receive visits from homeland family and friends ‘once every few years’ with most visitors staying for considerable periods of time from two weeks to three months. Tongans, in particular receive visitors from family who stay for long periods. For example, almost 30 per cent say that they receive visitors who stay for one-three months. These high rates of visitation could be reflective of a return to diasporas being characterised as a ‘labour’ diaspora given the GFC, and Australia’s comparative economic strength. While this theme deserves further exploration, this finding suggests the important role of diasporas in supporting Australia’s temporary migration program with temporary entrants utilising diaspora networks to support their initial settlement in Australia.

Another important indicator relating to kinship connections with the homeland came from responses about care responsibilities in the homeland. The Tongans were the group who have the greatest care responsibilities in Tonga with almost half of respondents saying that they had such responsibilities. This care was provided primarily by sending money on a regular basis to an extended family member. Generally, this is sent frequently in amounts of less than $1,000. Approximately one quarter of Macedonian respondents were also responsible for care for a family member although this care was not necessarily reflected in sending money but primarily involved providing emotional support through staying in close touch and visiting. Few Vietnamese or Italians identified having direct care responsibilities for people in the homeland. Approximately one-third of the Vietnamese respondents anticipating that they would have to provide such care in the future, however, while few Italians anticipate the same.

In addition to questions about care, the study also focussed on identifying whether or not
respondents send and receive gifts and money. There were considerable differences across groups on these findings. Both Tongans and Macedonians send money and gifts to the homeland regularly and throughout the year. Only small numbers of Vietnamese do the same and the exchange of gifts with family and friends was a reciprocal exchange. Very few Italians said that they send money, although a large proportion sends gifts to family and friends for special occasions such as Christmas and birthdays. This gift giving was largely reciprocal, however, with similar roughly similar numbers of respondents saying that they commonly receive gifts from Italy (24%) as those who say that they send them (32%).

The differences between diasporas within the theme of family and kinship networks showed some considerable differences in the nature of family connections across the groups. The Tongans stand out as being closely enmeshed with their Tongan based family members who are commonly reliant on financial support from their Australian based relatives. They visit each other often and they provide support through accommodation and care. Macedonians also demonstrate very strong family ties although these connections are less financially dependent on each other. Italians also strongly value their family networks, and like the Macedonians, this is not a co-dependent relationship with homeland members requiring care from Australian relatives. The Vietnamese have perhaps the weakest family links, which is unsurprising given the circumstances of migration to Australia as refugees by the families of most Vietnamese respondents. While connections with family members are maintained, they don’t intend to visit as much as other groups and when they do, they stay separate from family.

The differences across diasporas are illustrative of the shifting characteristics of diasporas over time in line with the stage of settlement and the economic conditions of the homeland. As a poor country, Tongan based relatives remain dependent on care and remittances from the diaspora. In contrast, it shows how the Italians and Macedonians have moved on from being a ‘labour’ diaspora, with responsibilities to provide financial and emotional support to homeland family networks. Rather, transnational relationships are sustained as a form of reciprocal exchange and expression of family connection. Interestingly, the findings also highlight current developments with the role of diasporas in supporting visiting friends and relatives from the homeland with accommodation for extended periods. These findings suggest that diasporas are playing an important role in supporting temporary migration from the homeland, a role that is largely overlooked by migration policy.

Cultural Ties: Language, Citizenship, Media and Identity

Following from the exploration of homeland ties that are ‘cultural’ in nature, a common finding was that all of the diasporas closely identify as having an identity that is defined by the homeland. Overwhelmingly, the majority of respondents describe themselves as being ‘hybrid’ claiming a combination of Australian and the homeland as shaping their national
identity. This extended even to the Italians who have such a long history of migration and only 19 per cent identify only as ‘Australian’ rather than ‘Italian-Australian’ or ‘Australian-Italian’. In contrast, Macedonians have the highest proportion (27.5%) who define themselves only as ‘Macedonian’ despite similar rates of citizenship and length of settlement in Australia. Few Tongans (8.5%) or Vietnamese (8.2%) identify as being only ‘Australian’ and a large minority maintain their self-described as being ‘Tongan’ (22%) or ‘Vietnamese’ (18.6%).

Findings in relation to homeland language use show a hierarchy in terms of language use and maintenance. The Vietnamese show the highest rates of homeland language fluency and use with 93 per cent of respondents speaking Vietnamese ‘Very Well’ or ‘Well’. Macedonians also have very strong language skills with 90 per cent speaking Macedonian ‘Very Well’ or ‘Well’. While not to the same extent, the Italians also have a high rate of fluency in Italian which is perhaps surprising given the length of settlement in Australia and the high proportion (72%) of respondents who were born in Australia. Tongans show the lowest rates of Tongan language fluency but given that English is an official language of Tonga, this is perhaps not a surprising finding. Overall, the use of, and fluency in, the homeland language is strong across each of the diasporas and particularly strong for the Vietnamese and the Macedonians.

The survey also asked respondents to identify the extent to which they feel ‘close’ to the homeland and a hierarchy appears in relation to feelings of ‘closeness’ to the homeland. The Tongans expressed the greatest sense of connection with 72% saying that they feel close to Tonga. The Italians and Macedonians were very similar in relation to feelings of closeness with 65% and 66% expressing feelings of closeness. The Vietnamese, perhaps unsurprisingly due to their refugee experience, were most detached from the homeland with only 51% saying that they felt close.

Each of the diasporas also show high rates of Australian citizenship in ways that reflect the length of settlement and the options available for citizenship. The Italians and the Macedonians both enjoy access to dual citizenship and this is reflected in the findings with around one-quarter of respondents in each group holding this status. The Vietnamese have high rates of Australian citizenship (97%) as a result of their severance from the homeland due to their initial arrival as refugees. Tongans have the lowest levels of citizenship (76% are Australian citizens and 14% are permanent residents), however, most of those who hold permanent residency status indicated that they would like to become citizens. Generally, all of the diasporas have high rates of Australian citizenship.

Overall, a finding shared across the diasporas was high rates of Australian citizenship and identification with homeland identity, evidence of the important role policy can play in facilitating settlement and integration as well as links to homeland. Further, with the
exception of the Vietnamese, there is a strong sense of ‘closeness’ to the homeland, albeit for different reasons. The Tongans perhaps expressed the strongest connection and retain a sense of ‘being Tongan’. The Vietnamese were paradoxical in the sense that they similarly have a very strong expression of Vietnamese identity expressed through language maintenance, and their sense of identity. Due to an antagonistic relationship with the homeland government, and a lack of family who live in Vietnam, there is a feeling of distance from the actual homeland. However, while each of the diasporas are in some respects distinctive, the homeland remains influential in terms of language and identity.

Discussion

The comparison of findings across the four diasporas provides rich and textured data into the nature and extent of ties to the homeland. In this final section, we examine the relevance and applicability of Cohen’s (1997) ‘types’ to the four Australian diasporas in the study.

Our research shows that homeland connections are sustained in multiple ways through economic, political, familial and cultural dimensions. However, some of these dimensions are more important than others and this differs over time and by diaspora. Sense of identity, language maintenance, family connections and obligations for caregiving featured across each of the four diasporas, highlighting in particular the importance of the familial and the cultural domains. To a lesser extent, these ties are also influenced by political and communal affiliations and, in a limited way, business and professional engagement. Hence, political and economic ties appear to be secondary, although they have the potential to become more prominent. It is important to note that all these elements and dimensions are interconnected, such that increasing activities in the familial and cultural domains can increase the opportunities for political and economic engagement and vice versa, (although, in our study, it appears that familial ties are primary and followed by political and economic ones).

What we think is clear from our results it that Cohen’s typology is particularly useful in defining diaspora origins. However, it become less exacting as the diasporas develop over time, and our findings suggest some useful ways to qualify, extend and expand on Cohen’s original types.

In the case of Italy, Macedonia and Tonga, all three can be defined, in Cohen’s terms, as originating as labour diasporas, while Vietnam was, in its origins, a Victim diaspora. Our findings suggest that all four diasporas have been developing over time to become ‘deterritorialised’ diasporas, given the heterogeneity and internationally mobile nature of these communities today. However, this diaspora type risks being so broad as to have limited heuristic value. To some extent, all diasporas feature Cohen’s ‘deterritorialised’ characteristics, because all are influenced by the processes of globalisation that Cohen aims to accommodate in this recast type, such as the increasing trends of circular or temporary
migration patterns. It also has a tendency to disguise or homogenise the more distinctive features of each diasporas. For example, the Macedonian diaspora can be identified as deterritorialised, yet it is its political concerns with homeland interests and bilateral relations that is a key driver for the maintenance of homeland ties. Deterritorialised is a weak descriptor of this kind of characteristic.

In addition, our findings indicate that an important feature of deterritorialised diasporas today is the manner in which they exist quite independently from the homeland and have developed their own unique mix of host/land cultures and identities. While this feature is an aspect of Cohen’s ‘deterritorialised’ type, we feel it should be further highlighted and explored because of its particular relevance to the Australian case. We argue that, unlike many other countries of diaspora settlement, Australia’s long history of multicultural politics has fostered strong cultural community development, largely independent of homeland, and this is a characteristic that is not adequately captured by Cohen’s current definition of ‘deterritorialised’, which focuses more on connections to homeland.

A further argument is that while each have become to some extent become deterritorialised, they are also distinctive for a variety of reasons. In addition to being quite independent of homelands, each of the diasporas, to a greater or lesser extent, are shaped by homeland affiliations and obligations, networks and a shared cultural history. How and why these affiliations and ties are sustained, however, vary considerably depending a number of factors that shape homeland relations. Some of these factors were particularly evident in this study and included; homeland politics, stage of homeland development, the economic conditions of the homeland and the stage and circumstances of migration. Homeland religious orientation also appeared as a major influence on diaspora/homeland ties.

The Tongan case is particularly illustrative of how these influences combine to shape the diaspora. Tonga continues to retain strong links to its original labour diaspora type because Tonga is a MIRAB economy. In other words, the homeland economy remains is heavily reliant on diaspora remittances. There is an argument to be made that Cohen’s category of labour diasporas is too broad and should be differentiated between those labour diasporas, like the Italian and Macedonian, where remittances, while important, are not essential to the maintenance of homeland economies (we might call these ‘traditional unskilled labour’ diasporas) and countries like Tonga where remittances continue to be of paramount importance (we might call these ‘MIRAB labour’ diasporas). Tongans’ links to homeland are reinforced by the significant cultural obligation to send money to family members and communities, and the economic dependency of Tongan society on the diaspora. Given that Tonga is a poor country, with a highly communal culture, this is an obligation that is keenly
felt by the diaspora who commonly send money frequently to Tonga. Overall, we might define the Tongan diaspora links to homeland as primarily familial and economic.

In contrast to Tonga, Macedonia is no longer dependent on economic remittances from its diaspora members, however, it is profoundly connected to its diaspora for political reasons – a connection that is fostered by proactive homeland diaspora policy and programs implemented by the Macedonian government. The Macedonian diaspora is particularly influenced by Macedonian international relations with Macedonia seeking recognition internationally and proactively pursuing economic development and global investment. The homeland government is actively seeking support from overseas Macedonians globally, and as such, the Australian Macedonian diaspora is part of that global effort towards development. Overall, we might define the Macedonian diaspora links to homeland as familial and political.

A compelling comparison is provided by the Vietnamese. Originally a refugee or ‘victim’ diaspora, the community in Australia remains largely estranged from, and antagonistic towards, the Vietnamese government. As a result, formal political ties with the homeland are extremely weak, while at the same time, Vietnamese migrants maintain extremely strong connection with Vietnamese identity, culture and community practices in Australia as well as family and kin ties in Vietnam. Despite having weak formal political links with homeland, Vietnamese continue to send money to support relatives or other community members in the knowledge that the country is relatively poor. Overall, we might define the Vietnamese diaspora as familial and cultural.

The Italians sustain a relatively benign relationship and position in relation to homeland governments and interest in political affairs is low. But like the Vietnamese, familial and cultural connections are very high. Interest in Italy as a source of culture is strong, in the sense that Italy provides a profound sense of ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1991) and yet Italian-Australian culture is quite distinct from contemporary Italy. Remittances were a very important part of diaspora relations in the early years, when this diaspora was what we describe above as a traditional or unskilled labour type. Since the Italian economic miracle of the 1970s, Italian migrants in Australia rarely send money to family back home. Exchanges between Italian and Australian family and friendship networks is largely reciprocal and in the form of gifts and increasingly regular visits. However, the current GEC, which has led to the ‘new’ migration from Italy, has the potential to increase economic ties with homeland. This trend suggests that this diaspora may again become an important labour diaspora, but a ‘skilled’ one, and this important distinction may warrant further refinement of Cohen’s labour type (to include ‘skilled’ labour diasporas). However, overall, currently, we might define the Italian diaspora as familial and cultural.
These findings suggest that homeland political and economic conditions play a major role in the extent to which diasporas connect with the homeland, but that familial and cultural connections remain strong regardless of political and economic contexts. Of the four groups, diasporic political connections are strongest for Macedonians because the diaspora is active in the political quest for nation building. Political ties are weakest for Vietnamese because it was the political actions of this nation that created the victim diaspora and not surprisingly has resulted in fractious and fraught relationships between homeland and diaspora today.

The extent to which homeland ties are sustained is also strongly influenced by the stage of migration. This is part of the rationale for the development of Cohen’s ‘deterritorialised’ type, where he attempts to account for the ways in which diasporas are formed through multiple events over history (2008: 142). The Italians, for example, now have a long history of migration and settlement to Australia, which extends almost as far as European settlement itself. As such, the composition of the diaspora is highly heterogeneous and includes several generations and cohorts who have arrived in various waves under different circumstances and from very different socio-economic, political and regional contexts. For this reason, Gabaccia (2000) has defined Italy as having ‘many diasporas’, in an attempt to acknowledge the importance of regional differences. This is also an argument for unpacking the concept of ‘home’ country, which is often complex and heterogeneous, and replacing this term with the more nuanced and specific ‘sending society’, of which there can be many in one ‘home’ country. This argument compliments the notion that contemporary Italian connections to the homeland are largely cultural, rather than political or economic. In contrast, the Vietnamese remain distinctively shaped by their circumstances of forced migration through the 1970s and 80s. While there are signs of change, these circumstances mean that homeland relations remain largely defined by the relatively recent circumstances of migration.

The study also showed that the religious orientation of the homeland also plays a major role in the strength of diaspora networks. This was particularly apparent with the Tongans, whose links within the Tongan community based in Australia, in other countries and the homeland, were in large part expressed through involvement with Tongan churches. The church was the main Tongan organisational structure for the majority of Tongan research participants. This was similarly the case for the Vietnamese where a majority were involved with the Vietnamese community through Buddhist Temples which in turn are the centre of much community activity and service provision. This was not the case for the Italians who were involved more strongly in Italian social or cultural organisations in Australia, including religious ones, but with less transnational activity. Overall, religion and religious organisations play a major role in the sustenance of homeland ties and cultural identity, yet they can simultaneously play an important role in the development of distinctively Australian diaspora cultural identities.
It was also evident that the emergence of social media is playing an important role in strengthening homeland ties, particularly across the generations. Communications with homelands is being facilitated and increased through Facebook, Skype and email communications. Given the relatively recent emergence of social media as an accessible vehicle for communications, this is an influence that is likely to increase the importance of diaspora networks (Baldassar 2011).

Overall, the findings of the research suggest that diaspora/homeland connections are of central importance in shaping identity, affiliations and connections both within the diaspora and the homeland. It also shows that how these connections are manifested is highly variable across communities depending on a range of historical, cultural, political and economic circumstances. While the research, to an extent provides a ‘snapshot’ in time of the ways in which four different diasporas operate, it also suggests that the diaspora ties are highly dynamic and in a constant state of transformation. As such, Cohen’s (1997) ‘types’ reveal some useful distinctions between diaspora processes and provide useful insights for policy. The typology is also useful in identifying key changes in diasporic processes over time. Each of the diasporas in this study have transformed over their varied histories of migration, settlement and resettlement and the typologies are useful in capturing some of these phases. For example, the Italian diaspora has arguably transformed into a number of different types – from (traditional unskilled) labour, to cultural, to trade and back to (skilled) labour again in the context of the GFC. Similarly, as the most recent migrants to Australia, the Vietnamese are currently moving from being a ‘victim’ diaspora to a (skilled) labour diaspora in the context of the Australia’s skilled migration program and attempts to strengthen Australian engagement in Asia. The Vietnamese diaspora is currently changing in light of these migration patterns and the implications are being felt by the established Vietnamese community.

In this sense, the typologies are useful in describing shifting patterns and meanings of diaspora homeland relations in the Australian migration policy context and in the process, reveal important policy implications. For example, the findings highlight the extent to which Australian based Tongans and Italians provide support for family members in their arrival and settlement in Australia. This is an important consideration in the development of skilled migration policy that assumes that the arrival of temporary migrants – as students or skilled entrants – is largely ‘frictionless’. This may be the case, but the diaspora plays a role in absorbing that friction. A further example that the research shows is a significant gap between intentions and actual homeland business and professional engagement. Such a gap represents an important opportunity for development of international trade utilising diasporas as ‘bridges’ for ‘brain circulation’ or the two-way exchange of skills, capital and technology (A. L. Saxenian, 2005). These and other implications will provide the basis for future interrogation of the research data.
Conclusion
The research discussed in this article is part of a broader and growing international interest in diasporas and their powers in shaping international relations, international trade, global care networks and community wellbeing. On multiple dimensions, this research shows that at least four contemporary Australian diasporas are strongly connected to homelands and are increasingly transnational in orientation, but in different ways. For some it is through familial and communal dimensions while for others it is more economic (Tonga through remittances) and political (Macedonia) connected than others depending on the economic and political circumstances in the homeland. This is a departure from earlier generations of migrants where migration was largely a one-way process of emigration and settlement and being part of a diaspora inferred a sense of permanent departure and severance from the homeland with a real and figurative distance between the two. However, alongside the ties to the homeland exists a strong cultural independence in diaspora around which communal life revolves, and the presence, impact and significance of the homeland in that cultural life varies according to the stage of migration in the diaspora, the type of diaspora and the political and economic circumstance in the homeland.

Our findings indicate that fundamental characteristics of diasporas include familial and cultural ties, and the flow of people, information and ideas. As such, diasporas are potentially important vehicles for economic and political links through international trade, cultural exchange, public diplomacy and, more broadly, brain circulation. Despite this, the potential of diasporas is largely overlooked by Australian policy makers (Hugo, 2012). If the aim of both home and hostland governments is to maximize and encourage greater cultural, economic and political exchange, a stronger understanding of, and engagement with diasporas provide an important opportunity to facilitate the achievement of these aims. An objective of this research has been to understand the dimensions of ties to the homeland as generated in the Australian context with four different groups. The intention is that this nuanced understanding can inform policy directed at maximising the considerable potential of diasporas in contributing to Australian international relations objectives.
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2 MIRAB is the acronym for Migration, Remittances, Aid and Bureaucracy – a term used to describe an economy reliant on transfer payments and non-tradable production.

3 All surveys were distributed in English but a Macedonian and a Vietnamese language version was also provided as an alternative response option for these two communities. In addition, the distribution of the survey was guided by the specific research team members, with specific connections to, and interest in a particular diaspora. Each survey yielded varied response rates that were in part reflective of the size of the populations of the diaspora in Australia