

Call for Papers

Restitutive Citizenship and the Right to Return:

Historical Justice, Spatiality, and the Boundaries of Belonging

The relationship between state sovereignty, historical justice, and territorial belonging remains one of the most contested questions in contemporary legal and political scholarship. As borders shift, conflicts displace millions, and post-communist and post-colonial states continue to redefine their political communities, renewed attention is needed to the relationship between restitutive or reparative citizenship and the right of return.

This workshop invites papers that examine the theoretical, legal, historical, and empirical intersections between the restoration of citizenship and territorial return. While international human rights and refugee law have long sought to protect the right of displaced persons to return to their homes or countries of origin, many contemporary citizenship restoration policies operate in increasingly extraterritorial, non-residential, and symbolic registers. They often restore formal status without necessarily enabling physical return, property restitution, or renewed political membership in a substantive sense.

A central aim of the workshop is to explore the conceptual distinction between restitution and reparation in relation to citizenship. Restitution refers to the restoration of a status or right unjustly denied to individuals themselves, for example in cases of denationalisation, exile, or statelessness. Reparation, by contrast, often addresses historical wrongs across generations, particularly where direct restitution is no longer possible. While reparative citizenship can perform an important expressive function by acknowledging past injustice and assuming state responsibility, it may also raise difficult questions about belonging, intergenerational entitlement, territorial connection, and the “genuine link” between individuals and states. In addition, reparative citizenship offers often target or effectively benefit certain groups more than others and can thereby reproduce existing inequalities in terms of access to legal recognition, property restitution, political participation, and territorial belonging.

The workshop will also consider the longer historical and legal genealogies of the right to return. From ancient and early modern understandings of exile as a grave punishment equivalent to “civic death” to modern human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the right to return has occupied a central place in debates over displacement, sovereignty, and membership. The post-1945 legal order, including UN General Assembly Resolution 194 and later peace agreements in Bosnia, Croatia, and Guatemala, further linked return to property restitution, compensation, and the reconstruction of political communities.

We welcome theoretical and/or empirical contributions from law, political theory, history, migration studies, citizenship studies, memory studies, international relations, and related fields. Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- Restitutive citizenship, reparative citizenship, and historical justice
- The right to return in international law and political theory
- Exile, denationalisation, statelessness, and restoration of status

- Citizenship restitution in post-communist, post-colonial, or post-conflict contexts
- The relationship between citizenship, residence, property, and territorial belonging
- Diaspora citizenship, intergenerational claims, and the “genuine link” principle
- Refugee return, compensation, and property restitution
- The symbolic and material limits of reparative citizenship
- Comparative case studies of return, restitution, and restored membership
- The instrumentalisation of citizenship restoration by states
- The inequalities re/produced through processes of citizenship restitution
- The implications that current citizenship deprivations and denationalizations might have in terms of future claims to reparative citizenship

The workshop seeks to move beyond a simple opposition between symbolic citizenship and physical return. Instead, it asks how these frameworks overlap, diverge, and sometimes contradict one another. In doing so, it aims to illuminate the structural inequalities, political choices, and legal architectures that shape contemporary regimes of belonging.

Workshop location and date:

The workshop will be **in-person** and take place on the **27th and 28th of January 2027**, at the **University of Sussex** in Brighton, UK.

Limited **funding** will be available to cover at least part of the travel and accommodation costs of participants based in Europe and the United Kingdom. Applications from participants based outside Europe are of course also welcome, but they will normally be expected to cover their own travel expenses.

Submission details:

Please send an **abstract** of approximately 200 words and a short biographical note to G.Reuveni@sussex.ac.uk and rschweitzer@uao.es, by the **30th of September 2026**.

Selected participants will be notified by **the end of October**.

Selected papers may also be considered for inclusion in a special issue or edited volume.



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