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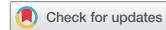
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Rethinking "transnational migration and the re-definition of the state" or what to do about (semi-)permanent impermanence

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We are delighted that our article has been chosen for this special anniversary issue. We thank Alice Bloch for her careful reading and insightful response to our ideas. We wrote this article more than fifteen years ago in response to what we saw as an increase in politics across borders. Whether it was states taking on new functions and shedding old ones, political parties organizing across borders, or a rise in dual citizenship, we saw a dramatic and deepening shift in the spaces and scales of politics. Much of what we highlighted remains true but there were also many holes in our analysis. Rather than responding systematically to a critique of thinking that is long out of date, we chose instead to use this space to connect what we began, very briefly and unsystematically, to the body of research that then followed and to highlight emerging areas of research that we believe are urgent and promising.

Our analysis looked at how the political repertoires of sending states were changing in response to migration and tried to explain why some states underwent more significant change than others. Indeed, this was the tip of the iceberg. To our great satisfaction, a large and rich body of work has followed that created an active new sub-field. This research comes under many names that do not always engage directly with each other, including "diaspora", "post-national", and "transnational". We continue to work with a "transnational" vocabulary and will not try to adjudicate between these different positions here. We ask only that researchers know what they mean by the particular set of words they use and that they can explain why they use them.

We think about "transnational" not as a noun but as an adjective and, increasingly, as a verb. Transnational is an optic or gaze, a way of asking

questions that does not take the spatial or temporal unit of analysis as given. It asks, instead, what the appropriate space and time are that need to be considered for the question at hand. A transnational lens tries to take all layers of social experience into account – including the global and the local and all else in between – and to hold them in conversation with each other. The top-down and the bottom-up are, therefore, necessarily considered at the same time, as are sending and receiving countries and other salient places where co-nationals or co-religionists might live. There are important regional differences in how these multiple sites and scales align and in how states and other political actors do the work of transnationalizing or negotiating the national and its place within the regional and global (Soysal 2015). It is also useful to distinguish between transnational structures, processes, and relationships and transnational outcomes. In other words, policies and organizations may be organized, financed, and led across borders but their outcome or effect may be decidedly one way. For example, homeland political parties may mobilize emigrant members and fundraise among them, all in the name of a candidate running for office in their country of origin. Their activities are organized transnationally but their effect is not.

These debates are alive and well and much too numerous and complex for us to summarize adequately here. At their heart are evolving and contested understandings of what the sources of social solidarity, representation, and protection are when more and more people choose or are forced to live as full or reduced members of multiple groups – in essence, a redefining of the spaces and scales of politics and a quest for responses to conditions of semi- or permanent impermanence, or long-term residence without settlement or full citizenship.

While these debates make it clear that the form and function of the nation-state is changing, it is still a central fulcrum. When we look "beyond the nation", as Baubock (2016, 4) describes, we are "searching for political community 'across', 'above' or also 'below' the nation-state, without denying its existence and relevance as the crucial level in relation to which all other forms of political community define themselves". In such a multi-level and multi-sited view of governance (and potentially, democracy), temporary migrants may or may not be granted full membership at their local place of residence or as citizens of a supranational union (i.e. the European Union or the ASEAN region) if they are also citizens of one of its member states. The units of political decision-making must be adjusted, argues Baubock, so that the native-born and permanent, semi-permanent and temporary migrants still feel like members of shared democratic communities that protect and provide for them.

Much research tracks the resulting transformations of political structures – the rise in multiple memberships, be they dual citizenship or some form of long-term partial membership without residence, such as the Indian state's Overseas Citizenship of India or the Person of Indian Origin cards. Other

scholars have continued and deepened our exploration of "diasporic" policies deployed to consolidate emigrants' enduring attachments and contributions to their homelands, including the Filipino governments' programmes to train, place, and protect its overseas workers or the Mexican government's provision of health care to Mexican emigrants in its consular offices in the United States. Sending governments want to make sure that migrants continue to send the remittances they now rely on to fund social services and infrastructure, especially in countries where the state is too poor or too weak. On the receiving-country side, immigration and integration policies shape the ethnic and racial make up of the nation. Certain groups are allowed to settle permanently and to embark upon the path of becoming full citizens, while others are relegated to permanent impermanence, invisibility, and vulnerability – a clear invitation to return home.

In her response to our article, Bloch suggests we undertheorized the role of nationalisms in shaping the policies adopted by sending country states. In fact, we did suggest that such policies reflected shifting global norms that were changing how people thought about national boundaries, sovereignty, and membership. However, as Bloch notes, our analysis perhaps took for granted a convergence on such norms; fifteen years later, as we write this response, it is clear that the forms of nationalisms we saw emerging are still very much contested by sectors of society and national leaders who increasingly advocate for more insular, racially and ethnically exclusionary constructions. And while the battle to ensure equal rights and protections at the national level, for natives and newcomers alike, should not be abandoned, we must also look for creative, viable alternatives emerging at other sites and scales of governance. In the remainder of this essay, we point to several places that merit further investigation but which most scholarship has largely ignored to date.

One set of questions demanding further attention is how and where our understanding of the nation-state changes. Many scholars bemoan the enduring footprint of methodological nationalism but do not take the next step and ask how and where we might begin to imagine a world that is not automatically organized into nation-states or what those nation-states would actually look and act like. This is not trivial. Until we begin to accept, document, and (re)imagine the changing contours of nations, we will lack the building blocks with which to create different kinds of political communities and political institutions. Culture and cultural institutions produce many of these elements yet migration scholarship continues to sidestep or dismiss their importance. What is more, how nations imagine themselves and the extent to which "they" can become part of "us" is, in part, negotiated culturally. Culture, therefore, is the soil in which new, sometimes more inclusive and often less inclusive imaginings of the sites and scales of politics are sewn.

For instance, Levitt (2015) detailed the important role that museums can play in (re)creating nations and in repositioning them on the global stage. How museums depicted the cosmopolitan-nationalism continuum, she described, and a nation's place along it, had to do with their institutional characteristics and histories but also with the urban cultural armature of the cities where they were located and, specifically, the diversity management regimes in place. But museums are just one site where the nation and its global place are put on display. At mega-events like the Olympics and the World Cup, the presence of "national" teams composed of immigrants or hired players; the clearing away of populations and territories deemed unseemly to make way for a transnational stage where host countries' official nationalisms are showcased; and the unprecedented inclusion of a refugee team at the 2016 Olympics all speak to the shifting contours of national identity (and statelessness) at the current global juncture. In 2016, the Man Booker Prize Committee, a traditionally "British" literary prize, honoured American author, Paul Beatty. In response, many asked if authors must be born in, have immigrated to, be claimed by, or write about a place to be considered for such national awards. These are all subtle but clear examples of the increasingly permeable, transgressible nature of national borders but also of the selectivity of this porousness that only lets certain people, of a certain class, pass through. We might even go so far as to ask if countries still need a *national* art or literature or at least to consider the relationship between national artistic and literary production and their global counterparts.

Another blind spot is the role of religion as a site of political mobilization, protection, and representation. This is because many academics are not themselves believers so they cannot see that many of the people they study are deeply so. Because too often religion does such bad in the world, it is hard to see that it also can do good. That understandings of religion are far too narrow also blinds us. They tend to stop at bibles, buildings, and boys or the idea that religion takes place in a building where people read a "book" guided by a male leader. But a simple stroll to the centre of many towns and cities in the West reveals a space often bounded by a church or cathedral. Even if few people attend services there each Sunday (a very poor metric of religiosity in our opinion), the enduring religious DNA is inscribed in the physical bricks and mortar, its holiday traditions and food, and in its national songs and symbols (i.e. "In God We Trust" on coins in the US or that The Pledge of Allegiance, recited even today by many public school children describes "One Nation, Under God") (Levitt 2007).

But just as we see transnational political regimes and conventions operating supranationally, so religious organizations also operate across borders and they can play an important role in immigrants' social and political integration. The Catholic Church is the paradigmatic example of a transnational religious organization with its headquarters in the Vatican and its CEO in the Pope. Each

time a new immigrant group moves to a new place, the church extends its breadth and depth to care for them. The context of reception strongly influences its role in immigrant incorporation. Many of the Italians who went to Argentina in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for example, became anarchists while many of those who came to the U.S. became Catholics. The first generation could pray in its dialect but, by the second generation, prayers were in English. Interestingly, that "Americanizing" function has shifted as the demographics of the Church have changed and as competition from Protestant denominations has increased. As Latinos become the largest group in the U.S. Catholic Church, its lingua franca is fast becoming Spanish.

The Catholic Church is not the only religious group that is constituted, formally or informally, across borders. Like their secular counterparts, these groups may act transnationally and have a transnational effect or they may act transnationally while their impact registers in a single direction. Their funding, leadership, and resources cross borders but they function primarily to integrate people into a new place or keep them connected to a leader in an old place.

As a result, large numbers locate themselves in the world primarily through their religious affiliations rather than through political attachments to nation-states. They are *religious global citizens* living in a religious global landscape. The capitals of these spaces are Mecca, Jerusalem, Nepal, or Varanasi. They are not marked by flags, coins, or historic monuments but by holy sites, religious pilgrimage routes, and sacred buildings. Their salient members are co-religionists rather than co-nationals. We have found that there are exclusive religious global citizens whose solidarity and responsibility only extend to those who share their faith (the most dangerous of which, of course, are groups like ISIS). But there are also inclusive religious global citizens who walk through a religious door to take responsibility for all of humanity. Evidence of the brutal effects of exclusive religious global citizenship is all too common. But it must not blind us to the positive political and social role that religion can also play. The Sanctuary Movement, seemingly a beacon of hope to undocumented immigrants in the United States preparing themselves for a Trump administration, has deep religious roots as do many progressive social movements throughout Latin America and Eastern Europe. The role that religion can play in creating new sites and scales for political organization, representation, and protection should not be overlooked.

This is a useful segue into our final point about transnational social protection (TSP). This world of heightened voluntary or involuntary, international and internal mobility challenges basic assumptions about how and where inequality is produced; family life gets lived; race, class, and gender are constituted; and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship get fulfilled. We must reframe our understandings of social problems and their solutions in

response – what we see when we connect climate change in Calcutta and California, gang violence in El Salvador and in Los Angeles, or high infant mortality rates in Mexico and New York City. Right now, pensions, health care, education, the law, and community development efforts are still organized nationally, but people's lives are not.

Already well-developed theoretical conversations, that tackle aspects of these questions, must be woven together. Research on hometown associations and development, on transnational labour unionizing efforts, and on transnational families and care chains would be more productive, if they were seen as part and parcel of a larger discussion about TSP. Several scholars have begun aspects of this work and we describe our own contribution briefly below.

We define "transnational social protection" as the policies, programmes, people, organizations, and institutions that provide for and protect individuals in a transnational manner (Levitt et al. 2016). To the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation's (OECD) list of basic social protections, we add education and labour rights. Our main focus is on social protections for voluntarily mobile individuals, but non-migrants and refugees also benefit from these policies and programmes. We include non-mobile actors who provide for and protect people who move transnationally; transnational actors who provide for and protect non-mobile individuals; and transnational actors who provide for and protect transnational individuals.

We suggest the concept of a "resource environment" to help scholars map, analyse, and understand the world of TSPs, and how access to TSP varies over time, through space, and across individuals and groups (Levitt et al. 2016). An individual's resource environment is constituted from a combination of all the possible protections available to them from four potential sources (states, markets, third sector, and social networks). The cluster of protections which is ultimately available depends upon the nature of the market, the strength and capacity of sending and receiving states, the third sector organizational ecology (i.e. the number and types of organizations, what they do, and their capacity to provide) and the characteristics of individual migrants and their families. These characteristics include the migrant's nation of origin, place of residence, and the breadth and depth of his or her social networks, in addition to the individual's gender, race, ethnicity, religion, wealth, income, and education. An individual's resource environment may change as they move across different sub-state or state environments, as their legal or economic status changes, and as their social networks transform. Resource providers will also, undoubtedly, change over time, leaving some groups well protected and others increasingly vulnerable.

For example, an undocumented Mexican migrant from Puebla who settles in New York City will have access to a package of resources and benefits based on what she is eligible for in her village of birth, as a resident of the state of

Puebla, and as a Mexican national, as well as the services offered by New York City, New York State, and the US federal government. Her resource environment will differ markedly from a similarly undocumented Mexican woman from Zacatecas who moves to Los Angeles, because the services provided at each level of government, in each country, are not the same. If an individual with similar socioeconomic characteristics and documentation status were to move to Montana, her resource environment would vary yet again. The third sector would be much weaker, smaller, and less well established in Montana than in Los Angeles because it is a relatively new immigrant destination. The strength of the labour market in each locale will also be different such that varying numbers and types of employers will be more or less amenable to hiring undocumented workers and to offering them benefits. Finally, because individual migrants are more visible in Montana, because they are fewer in number, undocumented migrants might be afraid to access services even when they are available (Schmalzbauer 2014).

In this brief response, we have laid out only some of what we feel are important directions moving forward. We are sure there are many more and we hope that many others will join the conversation.

Disclosure statement

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