Unwanted People and Desired Citizens

Contemporary Attitudes, Challenges and Perceptions of Migration and Integration

Edited by
**Cezary Smuniewski, Andrea Zanini,
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International Migration and Transnational Social Protection: Theory and Practice

Abstract

Within the broader framework of the study of globalization processes, the research deals with transnational migrants and their integration in hosting countries, as well as with the transnational policies implemented by some sending countries to support their citizens abroad. From the theoretical point of view, it will analyze international literature on the rise of the so-called Transnational Nation States (TNS) and reconfiguration of both their dimensions of politics and policy. These States consider their citizens living abroad as a substantial part of their population, granting them political and social rights, while they rely heavily on their remittances for the domestic economy. In the perspective of the Transnational Social Protection (TSP), the research focuses on the role of the institutions, both public and private, of migrant-receiving countries, as parts of migrants' resource environment, paying particular attention to social services managed by local authorities. On the empirical ground, a case-study will be presented about the city of Genoa, in Northern Italy, home of a large population of Ecuadorean migrants, with an aim to analyze the relationship between the city administration and its social services, on the one hand, and the citizens and the consulate of that Latin American country (an example of TNS), on the other. Banking on this study, some more general conclusions will be made about the rise and development of TSP in its formal dimension.

Keywords: globalization, migration, transnationalism, welfare state, transnational social policies

1. Introduction

Within the broader framework of the study of globalization processes, the research deals with transnational migrants and their integration in hosting countries, as well as with the transnational policies implemented by some sending countries to support their citizens abroad.

The transnational status is currently experienced by an increasing number of migrants and the focus here is on the strategies that they try to set in order to meet their social needs along the migratory process (Scheibelhofer 2022: 161–163). According to many authors, transnational migrants and their families rely for their welfare neither solely on the institutions of their country of origin and nor solely on those of their country of destination, but more likely on all "the policies, programmes, people, organizations, and institutions which provide for and protect individuals (…) in a transnational manner," (Levitt, et al. 2017: 5) defined as forms of "Transnational Social Protection" (TSP) or also "Global Social Protection." (Castellani, Lagomarsino 2019: 27–42) Transnational migrants, therefore, refer to a "resource environment," comprising a combination of all possible protections, formal and informal, available to them from four potential sources: states, markets, third sector and social networks.

As it has been pointed out, social protection is an "assemblage" of formal and informal elements. Resources of the former kind are provided by state and other organizations, while the latter relies on migrants' interpersonal networks (Bilecen, Barglowski 2015: 203–214).

As regards the formal dimension of TSP, it is important to consider the attitudes that migrant-sending countries can establish with their expatriated citizens. Among the different models, very interesting is that of Transnational Nation-States (TNS), which consider their emigrants as fully recognized citizens living abroad, granting them dual citizenship or nationality, as well as voting rights for domestic general elections (Itzigsohn 2012: 181–196; Boccagni, et al. 2016: 444–463). Heavily dependent on migrants' remittances for their socio-economic stability, TNS try to offer them different forms of support, also through organization of extensive diplomatic networks.

From the theoretical point of view, the research will analyze the most recent international literature on the topic, focusing on the role of the institutions in migrant-receiving countries, both public and private, as parts of migrants' resource environment, and paying particular attention to social services managed by local authorities.

On the empirical grounds, a case-study will be presented about the city of Genoa, in Northern Italy, home of a large population of Ecuadorean migrants, with an aim to analyze the relationship between the city administration and its social services, on the one hand, and the citizens and the consulate of that Latin American country (an example of TNS),

on the other, describing the change from a difficult situation to the one more oriented towards cooperation.

Basing on this study, some more general conclusions will be made about the emerging TSP and the development of TSP in its formal dimension. One final issue will concern the factors determining, or at least influencing, the delivery of transnational welfare measures by migrant-sending countries and stress the tight link between these policies and the electoral dynamics. Another issue refers to the basis on which destination countries extend transnational social services to non-citizen immigrants, whether they become entitled to enjoy these rights as workers or just as persons.

2. Globalization processes, the rise of transnational migration and the reconfiguration of politics

As an aspect of contemporary globalization processes, international migration is among the factors threatening the role of the state with regard to different issues. Since the early 1980s, it has strongly challenged states' sovereignty and their ability to regulate movements of people, either documented or undocumented, across borders (Castles, et al. 2014: 5). At the same time, it has also questioned the role of the states as welfare services providers for their citizens, either at home or abroad, while they have to deliver these services also to non-citizens living on their domestic territory.

In this paragraph, we are set to define the features of transnational migration and to describe the reconfiguration of TNS, with regard to both their dimensions of politics and policy.

The transnational perspective in the study of migration can be considered an evolution of the network theory developed in the last decades and focused on migrants' capacity to establish social fields across geographic, cultural, and political borders. The multiplicity of their involvement within both home and host societies, remarked as a central element of this concept since the first seminal studies on the topic (Glick Schiller, et al. 1992: 1–24; Portes, et al. 1999: 217–238), has been made easier today by the development of cheaper and more effective means of transport and global communication technologies.

The current popularity of this concept, however, must not lead to the idea that all international migrants are actually "transmigrants." Nevertheless, looking at the experience of many migrants, it is realistic

to stress that "The lives of an increasing number of individuals can no longer be understood by looking only at what goes on within national boundaries." (Levitt, Glick Schiller 2004: 1003) As it has been pointed out, using an effective image about their experience, "Instead of loosening their connections and trading one membership for another, some individuals are keeping their feet in both worlds. They use political, religious, and civic arenas to forge social relations, earn their livelihoods, and exercise their rights across borders." (Levitt 2001: 3)

The transnational approach is not helpful only to understand the condition of many international migrants, but has been used also to study the transformation of welfare state systems and the kind of relations established by some nation-states with their emigrants.

The development of international migratory flows in the framework of globalization processes has also led to transnational reconfiguration of the political space (Guarnizo, et al. 2003; Bauböck 2003: 700–723; Bauböck 2007: 2393–2447; Boccagni, et al. 2016: 444–463). Different studies have focused in particular on the transnational political activity of migrants to the USA from Latin American or Caribbean countries (Glick Schiller, Fouron 2001; Levitt 2001; Lyons, Mandaville 2012), while more recently other research has dealt with the transnational policies implemented by states located mainly in the same geographical area that identify themselves as TNS. Transnational migrants, therefore, not only belong to two or more cultures, but also refer to different political institutions. As it becomes increasingly common for more people to foster social and economic relationships in two or more societies at the same time, "This is often seen as undermining the undivided loyalty some observers think crucial to sovereign nation-states." (Castles, et al. 2014: 5)

Just like not all migrants are transnational migrants, as we have seen, not all states can be considered TNS. Considering the degree of support offered to their expatriates and the degree of their involvement and representation in home political affairs, states can be classified into three main types (Boccagni, et al. 2016).

The first type is that of *Disinterested and Denouncing States*, treating their migrants as if they no longer belonged to their homeland. It is worth adding that some of these countries, even today, either try to prevent most emigration, as in the case of the communist state of North Korea, or are strictly regulating internal and international emigration, as the People's Republic of China, ruled by a communist party too (Castles,

et al. 2014: 297). Those who succeed in leaving the country are often stigmatized as "traitors who abandoned the cause."

A larger number of countries fall into the second type. *Strategic and Selective States* get this label since they encourage some forms of long--distance economic and political nationalism, but at the same time they try to selectively and strategically manage what immigrants can and cannot do. Among others, countries such as India, the Philippines, Haiti and Turkey can be included into this second cluster, because they all have tried to obtain support from populations abroad without granting full participation in their internal political activities.

The third type is that of *Transnational Nation States* (Glick Schiller, Fouron 2001; Itzigsohn 2012: 181–196). It is perhaps most relevant for our analysis and includes mainly Latin American states, such as El Salvador, the Dominican Republic and Ecuador. TNS consider their emigrants as fully recognized citizens living abroad and grant them dual citizenship or nationality, as well as voting rights for domestic general elections (Boccagni 2008: 35–56; Smith 2008: 708–741; Boccagni, Ramírez 2013: 721–750). These states are for their socio-economic stability heavily dependent on migrants' remittances, sent back home through both individuals' financial contributions and "hometown association activities." For this reason, but also for ideological and cultural motivations, they are set to provide their emigrants with different forms of support (Levitt, et al. 2017: 3), also through organization of extensive networks of consular services (Delano 2011).

3. Mexico and Ecuador
as TNS implementing transnational social policies

The initiatives carried out by the consular offices of Mexico in the USA and Ecuador in Italy can be considered as interesting examples of how TNS design and deliver transnational social policies to support their citizens abroad.

Mexico is mainly a migrant-sending country, with 12,965,000 citizens living abroad in 2017, roughly 10.0% of the total population. Its territory is also the natural transit area for migrants seeking to reach the USA from Central and even South American countries.

The USA is the main direct destination for migratory flows from Mexico too, since the *Bracero Program* that mobilized 4.5 million young men to

work as temporary migrants in agriculture and railway track maintenance between 1942 and 1946. Migration has been increasing steadily in the last four decades and in 2010 a third of immigrants to the USA were Mexican nationals, while over half of them are considered to be undocumented, constituting about 62% the country's total irregular population (Castles, et al. 2014: 130–136).

These immigrants to the USA tend to lack access to healthcare services, just like most of the Hispanic population. Recent data show that 45% of undocumented immigrants to the USA are currently uninsured, whereas only 8% of citizens are in such situation. Even if the implementation in 2010 of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), also known as "Obamacare," has increased coverage for all populations, this has benefited Hispanics very little. "While the uninsured rate for all Hispanic adults was 40.5% prior to the main provisions of the ACA taking effect in 2013, this rate decreased slightly by 7.1 percentage points in 2014." (Rangel Gómez, et al. 2019: 2)

To tackle this problem, the Mexican government has taken different measures in the last two decades. In 2003, an initiative called *Ventanillas de Salud* (VDS) was launched. Currently, the Mexican consulates in the USA operate about 50 "Health Windows" – two of which are mobile. From 2013 to 2017, they provided 21 million services to 7.7 million people (Rangel Gómez, et al. 2019: 2).

VDS are part of a strategy defined by the Mexican Government and implemented by the Mexican Ministry of Health and the Office of Foreign Relations through the consular network in the USA, relying also on help provided by some local partners. According to the government, these "Windows" are set to provide Mexican immigrants in a situation of vulnerability with early integral care and culturally appropriate information, together with a timely detection of the forms of illnesses and their treatment by specialized healthcare services.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, that hit ethnic minorities hard also in the USA, VDS were on the frontline, operating primarily by virtual modality and by telephone, as well as through all other healthcare contact points.

Another interesting example is provided by the initiatives carried out by the diplomatic network of Ecuador to support their citizens living in Italy, with specific regard to their relations with social services in some of its main cities (Pedone 2018: 99–135). We shall refer here in particular to the case of Genoa, where some years ago there were moments of strain

and tension between social services and Ecuadorean service users. This happened because of strong reactions adopted by consular representatives in response to child protection interventions by the former, resulting in the removal of children from the families of the latter. Consular actions aimed at getting information to be transmitted, sometimes even translated, to the families that were targets of these interventions but also to provide the social services with proposals to fix the situation (Massa 2019: 113–122; Massa 2020: 191–205).

After this very conflicting phase, the relationship between the City of Genoa and the local Consulate of Ecuador turned to a more cooperative one. In 2015, the two institutions eventually signed a memorandum of understanding that set the basis for working together on these issues, in the more general framework of an agreement between the Ministries of Justice of the two countries.

The interventions made by the diplomatic representatives in Genoa as well as in other cities in Italy, but also in Spain, for instance, are part of a broader political strategy of this TNS aimed at protecting and supporting its expatriates, who still form an important part of its overall population. With a pinch of transnational rhetoric, the citizens living abroad are considered the "fifth region" of the country (Boccagni 2014: 117–137), beside the four traditional ones: *La Costa* (the Pacific Coast), *La Sierra* (the Andes), *El Oriente* (the Amazon), the Galapagos archipelago.

It is common for members of the national government to visit the countries hosting the largest Ecuadorean communities and monitor the situation of their welfare. In the specific case presented here, a relatively large number of children brought back to their families because of these actions has been put under the limelight as evidence of their effectiveness.

The news about the outcomes of these consular initiatives are broadcast in the media, both at home and abroad, in a clear attempt to impress public opinion and then exert positive impact on voters.

4. Conclusions

The scientific research on the emerging forms of TSP considers the dynamics set between the three main elements of the matter – migrants, their countries of origin and their countries of destination – in the framework of what has been defined as a "new spatial architecture of social citizenship." (Ferrera 2005)

As regards the countries of origin of migratory flows, an attempt has been made to find the factors that determine or at least influence the execution of measures of social protection in support of their citizens who emigrated abroad. The formal dimension of TSP is prevalent here as the informal dimension can get in when the former is absent or reduced.

Recent studies suggest that transnational reforms implemented by some countries are motivated mainly by political reasons. In both cases presented here, for instance, crucial is the role of governments led by political parties that have played the card of supporting their emigrants to keep them economically and culturally in touch with the country, but also to score political and electoral gains among citizens voting at home as well as among those voting abroad. Granting political and social rights for migrants is therefore linked to the fact that they have kept the citizenship of their countries of origin implementing such transnational policies.

Other issues refer to the countries of destination of migratory flows. The first question concerns the conditions for extension of social rights by these countries to individuals who are not their citizens. Different studies have highlighted some aspects of the transformation of international migration produced by globalization processes. Among these, there are: the transnational condition of an increasing number of migrants, the importance of economic as well as social remittances, the new transnational dimension of politics. In this context, however, the existence of social rights enjoyed on the transnational basis must be considered as a consequence of migrants' integration in supranational labor markets rather than the direct result of the development of universal values and norms produced in the framework of globalization processes (Paul 2017: 33–46). The conclusions suggest that these individuals are therefore entitled to enjoy transnational social rights as workers rather than just as persons.

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