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Editorial: Re-spatializing transnational citizenship

Abstract

Thinking about citizenship in the context of transnational flows and global actors provides opportunities to considering new possibilities for politics and human agency in the contemporary era. Joining the interdisciplinary discussions where these approaches are adopted, this special issue on “transnational lived citizenship” sets out to challenge fixed notions of citizenship and calls for its re-spatialization and re-politicization. Specifically, we stress the importance of the non-state-based material and locatable situated practices, memories, and imaginings of particular actors. Importantly, we do not limit the forms of political agency associated with citizenship to individuals, or to the positions, practices, and acts related to polity memberships. Rather, we identify how citizenship is also made and acted out collectively in various socio-spatial contexts. Moreover, the individual papers propose new ways of understanding how people, as political subjects, are differently positioned in their communities and societies, and how they pursue new political stances and actions in their transnationalizing worlds. Centering ‘the geographical’ as the basis of enquiry, the issue as a whole seeks to provide spatial-theoretical contributions to the interdisciplinary debates on relational and contested citizenship.

Introduction

The growth of transnationalization in past decades has called into question fixed conceptions of citizenship and its spatial dimensions and grounds. In contemporary interdisciplinary scholarship the state and the national polity no longer appear as the self-evident loci of citizenship, and the notion has acquired meanings that go well beyond the formal rights-based status only. In their lived realities people identify with differently scaled and situated communities, build networks across cultural, political and physical borders, act in institutional and professional roles with manifold positions, form new publics and engender new commons, move between and resettle in different economic regions, and take action through various channels that may or may not be associated with formal structures.

Yet, simultaneously, the state system remains a powerful machine in conditioning citizenship and constituting citizens. Critical in this regard are the daily practices of institutions. These include legislative, educational, medical, social, nurturing, and familial institutions that are interrelated with various forms of mass communication such as news, popular media, and virtual interactive communication channels. Also, (trans)national forms of security, mobilized as border control practices, urban and virtual surveillance systems, the military, and established administration and policy structures, are important parts of this system. All of these practices and institutions help to legitimate, deny, and/or give new meanings to citizenship.

The processes of citizen(ship) formation are particularly influential in moments of transformation and in times of change, such as during childhood and youth, ageing or impairment, migration and other periods of mobility, and in the course of personal or societal crisis. The contemporary refugee situation in Europe, which is rapidly intensifying as we write, provides a prime example. Challenging topical ideas about a borderless world, the rising movement of asylum seekers from different parts of Africa and the Middle East to the European Union has made the national borders of European states extremely visible. Even in the context of Schengen neighbors, some of these national borders are now being physically fenced and heavily guarded. Based on various risk assessments and statistics concerning their countries of origin, but also on the receiving countries' estimated capacities to take asylum seekers, European states are dividing the incoming migrants into potential insiders and definite outsiders. Suddenly a heightened attention on state-based citizenship prevails.

This quickly escalating situation in Europe renders visible the significance of formal citizenship, especially when one does not fit a specific category, when a particular status is denied, or when the birthright position has little value in the hierarchical and unequal 'citizenship market.' These moments are often related to times and situations of distress, such as acute deprivation, social inequality, (geo)political conflict, and forced migration. Whereas the direct effects of such conditions are most visible regionally in asylum seeking processes in affluent and open societies (e.g. human smuggling/trafficking in Africa–Middle East–Mediterranean regions and the US–Mexico borderlands), indirectly they influence citizenship formation also beyond these borders – and may even lead to new attempts at nation and state building (e.g. of an Islamic State).

Tackling this complex terrain, this special issue seeks to contribute to interdisciplinary debates that are critical of fixed, state-based notions of citizenship. In concert with numerous others, we suggest that thinking about citizenship in the context of transnational flows and new types of global actors behooves us to consider new possibilities for politics and citizenship in the contemporary era (e.g. Soysal 1994; Smith and Bakker 2008; McNevin 2011; Nyers and Rygiel 2012; Isin 2013). But more specifically than this, we call for a re-spatialization of citizenship in this wider context. With this term we want to highlight the importance of the situated practices, memories, and imaginings of particular actors in embedded geographies that remain material and locatable—but not within the physical or conceptual limits of the nation-state (see also Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002).

We also pursue new ways of understanding how people, as political subjects, are on the one hand differently positioned and re-positioned in their communities and societies, and on the other hand how they seek new political stances and take new actions in their transnationalizing worlds. Moreover, as we consider citizenship in a broad framework we do not wish to limit it to individuals or to the positions, practices, and acts related to polity memberships. Instead, we seek to identify how citizenship is also ‘made’ and acted out collectively by institutions and their actors, public figures and professionals, and other agents who may not be operating explicitly *as citizens*, yet in effect come to enact or outline citizenship in particular ways through their actions.

Building on various theoretical grounds, all of the contributions in this collection share a human geographical perspective in which the national and the global are appreciated as both intertwined and co-constitutive, thus contesting the idea of alternate and/or nested scalar entities. In developing this perspective the issue as a whole connects with the topical discussions where the inside/outside dichotomy between the national and the global is challenged (e.g. Dicken *et al.* 2001; Gregory 2004; Katz 2004; Häkli 2013; Hui 2015; Ryan *et al.* 2015). In broad terms, the approach can be framed as a topological conception of spatiality that identifies “a multiplicity of possible spaces, or manifolds, of which the Euclidean plane is but one, existing halfway between a convex and concave curved space” (Martin and Secor 2014: 430). This is an approach where “topography and topology [are seen] as complementary rather than alternative understandings of spatial relations, neither of which alone provides an all-encompassing account of the spatiality of *polis*” (Häkli and Kallio 2014: 189).

While participating in these theoretical debates, we seek to go one step further by researching and foregrounding the situated practices and geographical imaginings that constitute transnational space. While many explorations of transnationalism claim to ground theory, the 'ground' is generally conceptualized in a highly metaphorical way (cf. Sparke 2005; Katz and Smith 1993). We also find that many of those involved in the relational theorization of citizenship resort to locally, nationally, regionally, or globally embedded illustrations and empirical studies, instead of other forms of spatial organizations and relationships (e.g. Purcell 2003; Tambakaki 2011; for similar solutions regarding the politics of citizenship, see Bennett 2005; Coole 2005; Krause 2011). For instance, citizenship studies that encompass spatial practices and embodied memories as important components of political belonging and identity are rare in the current scholarship, as are those where territorial logics are understood in any way other than purely as the locus of formal rights to citizenship (but see Moore 2005; Levy *et al.* 2011; Paasi 2015; Jeffrey and Staeheli 2016; Trelle and van Hoven 2016).

By contrast, the papers in this issue center 'the geographical' as the starting point for how the relationship between citizenship and transnational processes may be researched and theorized anew. In this way we continue the discussion launched in a special issue of the critical geography journal *Antipode* nearly twenty years back promoting the idea of "transnational spatial ethnographies" (Mitchell 1997: 110). It is the geographical as something lived and imagined that constitutes the main point of our focus, including individual and collective agents, and both formal and informal practices and acts (Staeheli 2011; Kallio *et al.* 2015). As Allan Pred (2006) once noted: "Everybody has a body, nobody can escape from their body, and consequently all human activity-- every form of individual and collective practice-- is a situated practice and thereby geographical". Beginning with this idea, we seek to demonstrate how thinking geographically, with lived space and situated practices at the center rather than the margins of the narrative, enables engagements with the fraught ties between transnationalism and citizenship with fresh insight.

The challenge of treating citizenship as transnational and lived

The perspective we adopt is dangerous in two ways: first, it runs the risk of losing the context of citizenship; and second, it runs the risk of losing the subject of citizenship. By disengaging from the idea that citizenship is principally state-based we open the gate to a

universalizing notion of the concept, which, if followed to its logical end, leaves no other basis to citizenship than human rights and the global community. In her in-depth engagement with this strand of work Paulina Tambakaki (2009: 7) has come to ask: “If citizenship, the vehicle of democratic politics, becomes reformulated in all-inclusive terms, drawing on common humanity instead of the discourses and practices that bind democratic citizens together, then isn’t it likely that we risk political disengagement and apathy?” This conjecture points to the fact that by giving up the *geographies* of citizenship we risk losing the *politics* of citizenship, as the political exists *in abstracto* only in political philosophical principles. It would therefore be a hazardous path to follow.

Should citizenship be stripped of its geographical-political connotations the idea of the citizen could turn into a non-localized, drifting subject – a member of the global community without spatial referents, who relates to others only through the discourse of human rights. In the geographically politicized worlds in which we live such a theoretical move could be disastrous. An example of its negative functioning in everyday life is evident in how human rights principles operate in cities like Cairo, where hundreds of thousands of people are currently seeking asylum through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). While in the global polity that is the ‘refugee aid industry’ they should all receive equal treatment as human beings, in practice race, ethnicity, gender, age, (dis)ability, education, health, wealth, and many other characteristics provide individuals quite different positions and possibilities as political subjects (see Pascucci in this collection).

To retain citizenship as a politically useful concept thus requires that as it is conceptually de-nationalized, it must be concurrently *re-spatialized*. Moreover, the subjects of these newly imagined worlds must be afforded positions of action and possibility – the potential to enact a transformative agency. Tambakaki (2011: 570) has sought this change of perspective by re-defining the scale of the *demos*, “because citizenship itself, the vehicle for practicing democratic politics, rests on collectivism and common identifications”. Similar theoretical approaches to democracy have been employed by a number of contemporary scholars, who draw on the notions of agonism such as those pursued by Karl Schmitt (e.g. Bäcklund and Mäntysalo 2010; Stokke 2013, for older work see Laclau and Mouffe 1985, for a critique of the spatial limits of their analysis see Sparke 2005). In empirical terms this usually means identifying non-state-based political communities – in Tambakaki’s case the European Union

– where politics follows a different logic from that dominating the state system and respectively creates distinct relations, dynamics, and agencies (see also Faist 2004).

However, even if providing a middle ground between universalistic and state-based conceptions of citizenship, there remains the risk of the ‘territorial trap’ that John Agnew (1994) identified some twenty years ago; this is the snare of a deterministic geography that can potentially restrain and limit novel spatial–political concepts and discoveries. In avoiding the pitfalls of such regionally-bound empirical starting points, it might be possible to unearth new possibilities of citizenship from the opposite direction. Jeannette Pols, among others, sketches “the ‘theories’ of citizenship as they find expression in the daily practice” (2006: 79). She conceptualizes citizenship in terms of participation in the community rather than vis-à-vis a spatially-defined legal status. Exactly what a citizen is and what form this participation may take are deliberately left undefined. This perspective leaves room for a re-definition of both the spatial and the political ‘from below’, and permits a fluid border between public and private dimensions of citizenship. As Nielsen and Simonsen (2003) have suggested, as an empirical strategy it allows a relational social construction of scale, which may lead to new kinds of spatial–political formations and formulations (see also Wood 2016).

Yet this perspective, also, carries risks. When the meaning of citizenship is derived from some extremely mundane practices (in Pols’ example it is the routines of hygiene in institutional mental care practices), then all human life and all human activities can be conceptualized as forms or acts of citizenship. Citizenship, in this case, can be seen to encompass everything. This weakens the analytical powers of the concept and de-politicizes it. The de-nationalization and de-formalization of citizenship hence requires also its *re-politicization*. And while the exact nature of this re-politicization will always be subject to debate, this agonistic process itself – i.e. the identification of what constitutes politics in terms of specific acts and aspects of life within the newly imagined spatial realms – creates an important political space.

In this special issue the authors address both the ‘territorial trap’ and ‘citizenship as everything’ conundrums through engaging with the everyday, situated practices of diverse actors in a wide variety of transnational processes and venues. These include institutional and organizational actors, professionals, policy makers and civil servants, popular figures and cultural agencies, students, and asylum seekers. The goal is to broaden our scholarly

conceptualization of citizenship, while at the same time remaining cognizant of the risks involved in stretching it too thin. In its own way, each of the articles navigates this scholarly balancing act through reworking the organization of transnational space into particular political–spatial contexts. They explore the engagements and activities of different people and institutions that shape these entities, and disclose the citizenships afforded by and practiced in these worlds. The overall theoretical contributions of the collection are pulled together in the concluding paper, which, we hope, invites commentaries and further discussion in the interdisciplinary community.

Introduction of papers

The individual contributions to this special issue tackle the multi-dimensional and contradictory terrain of transnational lived citizenship from four directions, which are expanded further in the afterword. By different theoretical means and in distinct empirical contexts, the authors set out to re-spatialize and re-politicize citizenship. They do so through explorations of where and how people lead their lives as political subjects, and how these lives and subjectivities are governed and guided. The diverse development of ideas and conclusions in the papers points to the ongoing and fruitful plurality of ways in which citizenship continues to be theorized and understood.

The collection begins with an article by Sami Moisio and Anni Kangas that focuses on the geopolitics of higher education and, particularly, on the mechanisms by which new generations of capitalist laborers are being produced. By revealing the constitution of the ‘global engineer’ that is emerging forcefully in the Finnish higher education system, for instance, they show how the interaction of the state and capitalist globalization opens avenues to new spatialities that manifest in the form of transnational political subjects. Drawing from assemblage thinking, Moisio and Kangas suggest that the key mechanism in transforming geopolitical worlds is subjectification through which new kinds of transnational realities may become lived.

The second paper of the issue is Elisa Pascucci’s article, exploring the temporalities and materialities of asylum seeking in Cairo, with a specific focus on one young Somali woman’s mundane experiences and daily life. In this life that falls into a particular intersection of transnationality and citizenship, she identifies three defining socio-spatial dimensions: familiarity, neighborhood, and the international aid system. Making use of the same

theoretical approach as Moisió and Kangas, yet from a different perspective, Pascucci analyzes how Leyla's transnational citizenship as a lived experience and mundane practice unfolds through intertwined yet separate temporal-material assemblages. The analysis reveals how, in their situations of 'waiting', asylum seekers form manifold spatial relations that lead into worlds characterized more by disruptions than fluidity and simultaneity (cf. Lehtinen 2011).

In the third article Katharyne Mitchell investigates the formation of transnational citizenship practices and feelings that are galvanized by celebrity humanitarians such as Bono. Employing a sense of moral urgency and drawing on different registers of emotion, these celebrities recruit and direct their fans to become involved in cross-border charity activities, primarily in developing countries. The specific emotional language and techniques through which individuals are enrolled and transnational networks are formed include those of pastoral care and individual enterprise. Mitchell argues that these technologies are part of a larger process of neoliberal citizenship formation, in which subjects are nudged in the direction of liberal rationalities of individual responsibility and entrepreneurialism, and away from expectations of help and claims for social assistance from state governments.

The last article in this collection is by Jouni Häkli and Kirsi Pauliina Kallio, who trace transnational citizenship in the practices of human rights advocacy that ties together global desires and local realities. By analyzing the everyday practices of children's rights organizations and professionals, they seek to show that rather than interaction between two different realms, their seemingly global and local activities are all transnational by definition as they are splayed out on the topological-topographical field of children's rights. Häkli and Kallio's attempt to re-spatialize citizenship draws from field theory that they are developing with relational spatial-theoretical means, to come up with a 'Bourdieuian topology' useful in understanding the plural spatialities of our lived worlds.

In conclusion, Anssi Paasi and Lauren Martin discuss the four articles in an afterword that not only summarizes the outcomes of this special issue, but also provides new insights to the theme. Moreover, they invite others to join in the discussion of the spaces and politics of transnational lived citizenship. As editors we look forward to future interdisciplinary developments that will, we hope, contribute to making sense of what citizenship is, can be, and perhaps should be, in the transnationalizing worlds where political subjects lead their everyday lives.

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