GLOBAL MOBILITY, SHIFTING BORDERS AND URBAN CITIZENSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Global migration has reached historic levels affecting every single country in the world. One of the most significant effects of this heightened mobility has been that a growing proportion of the residents of migrant receiving places lack national citizenship and are thus deprived of effective sociopolitical inclusion, representation, and participation in the localities where they have moved to for work, refuge or retirement. This disjuncture between the spaces of citizenship and daily life, in turn, has led to a devolution of citizenship claims-making from national to urban space. This paper begins by identifying four key political economic developments operating at the global scale that have unsettled the established view of the close correspondence between nationhood and citizenship. It then focuses on the uses and limits of the increasingly voluble discourse on ‘the right to the city’ as a way to create alternative political spaces in which variously excluded groups of urban inhabitants might empower themselves. Three strikingly different examples of widely diverse group actions and state responses to illustrate the practical strengths and limits of ‘the right to the city’ discourse are narrated. We end by offering what we believe to be a more useful way to envisage and analyse the interplay between global mobility and urban citizenship.

Key words: Global mobility, transnational practices, retirement migration, nationhood, ‘right to the city’, urban citizenship

INTRODUCTION

Global migrants live and work in cities and towns in countries other than those in which they were born. Added to the hyper-mobility of both skilled and unskilled labour migrants to localities in the global North, increasing numbers of retirees from affluent Northern countries now live and invest in Southern localities where they can afford a more comfortable and enjoyable life than in their homelands. International tourism also has experienced rapid and steady growth, reaching a record 903 million tourists in 2007 (UN World Tourism Organisation 2008). The sheer size, heterogeneity, and multi-scalar scope of all these mobilities and the relationships and social structures they engender across national borders, have encouraged the formation of complex transnational connections between multiple localities across the world, helping transform the local, national, and international contexts in which citizenship is defined, bestowed, and exercised. The once taken for granted correspondence between citizenship, nation, territory, and state has been called into question as new forms of supra-national and sub-national membership and belonging have taken on an increasingly trans-territorial character. The increasingly transnational character of global migration flows, cultural networks, and grassroots political engagement have dramatically changed the discourses and practices of citizenship in the past two decades.
Some nation-states are extending the inclusiveness of citizenship well beyond their national territorial jurisdiction; others are trying to erect further barriers of exclusion. Some analysts welcome these changes as progressive transformations, while others categorise them as dangerous and destabilising developments that should be curtailed. Changes in the institution of citizenship have not been consistent, straightforward and definitive. Rather, they have been inconsistent, complex, tentative and contested. Thus, categorical conclusions about the theoretical and practical implications of these changes should be avoided and replaced by historical, non-ideological and nuanced analyses. This is what we intend to do in this paper.

We begin by considering four key political economic developments operating at the global scale that have unsettled the established view of the close correspondence between nationhood and citizenship. A key effect of global migration has been that many local residents have moved to places throughout the world in which they lack national citizenship and are thus alienated from the means of democratic participation. This disjuncture between the spaces of citizenship and daily life, in turn, has led to a political devolution of citizenship claims-making from national to urban space. The heart of our analysis of this disjuncture is our assessment of the uses and limits of the increasingly voluble discourse on ‘the right to the city’ as a way to create alternative political spaces where variously excluded groups of globally mobile urban inhabitants may empower themselves in the face of the unsettled terrain of national citizenship. We offer an analytical framework suitable for overcoming the limits of this perspective that accounts for the causes and effects of the rising demand for urban citizenship as the twenty-first century moves forward.

NATIONHOOD, CITIZENSHIP AND GLOBAL CHANGE

Particularly since the nineteenth century, ‘citizenship’ has been the cornerstone of nation building projects and corresponding regimes of national belonging, affiliation and loyalty. The main challenges to this national construction of an homogenised identity have been the persistent claims for identities, loyalties and group affiliations anchored in sub-national territories at the local and regional scales. National citizenship has been the building block of liberal democratic regimes as it entitles people to actively participate in public decision-making processes crucial to self-government and national political autonomy and sovereignty. For ‘insiders’, citizenship has been maintained through the systematic exclusion of various ‘outsiders’, historically constructed on the basis of class, gender, and/or ethno-racial difference and also limited by age. Over time, these exclusions have been successfully challenged by grassroots social movements of minorities seeking both formal and substantive access to the universal rights of national citizenship.

By the twentieth century, national citizenship had become the cornerstone of democratic governance and of the global system of nation-states, regulating international law and interstate relations. Access to national citizenship had also become a key element of supranational discourses on universal personhood implicit in global norms regulating human rights. National citizenship has become the conduit through which discourses seeking to extend the principle of universal rights are channelled back to nation-states challenging both rich and poor countries to grant rights to their excluded minorities such as indigenous peoples, women and children.

Consistent with prevailing discourses of nation building, globally mobile segments of the world’s population have been expected to be anchored in one and only one national citizenship and one and only one national identity. The exception to this norm is bilateral agreements between nation-states that may grant access to dual citizenship to their respective populations. Generally, nation-states have institutionalised systems of naturalisation that required newcomers to renounce their previous national affiliation before taking up their new citizenship.

For the last four decades, however, this conventional understanding of citizenship as an exclusively nationally-based institution has been challenged by four political economic developments operating at the global scale. First has been the historic growth in the absolute size of mass migration and spatial mobility
This mobility has taken place both within and across national borders. Economically driven mobility within national borders has long been recognised as a driving force of world urbanisation. This pattern has now been superseded by transnational mobility both from the global South to North, and more recently intra-regionally within the global South, producing patterns of South-South and East-East transnational ties (Ratha & Shaw 2007; Smith & Eade 2008; see especially chapters 5 and 6). According to the United Nations, by 2006 the world’s international migrant population had reached almost 200 million (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2006).

The last decades have seen another form of mass mobility from affluent countries to poor countries. Southern localities have been depicted as ideal destinations for leisure, retirement and real estate investment. Largely generated by currency differentials and the place-marketing campaigns of the global tourist industry, such mobility has also been encouraged by state policy initiatives of governments in the global South to promote ecological, cultural, and urban heritage tourism, as new sources of economic development (see MPI 2006; Santamaría et al. 2007, pp. 61–67). This leisure mobility has rapidly transformed many exoticised communities as Northern tourists became long-term residents and retire there. Such affluent newcomers have claimed civic, social and political rights from municipal governments throughout the global South.

These types of mass mobility substantially affect the meaning and practice of national citizenship in both South and North because of the incorporation of newcomers to receiving localities, and also because of enduring transnational socio-economic and political relationships both poor and affluent migrants have forged with their homelands. In the migrant-receiving countries of the global North, the mass presence of southerners in their midst has informally helped to augment the shrinking official social safety net of these societies and thus, helped to redefine citizenship. Indeed, a large pool of cheap and pliable migrant labour has allowed the citizens of these countries to maintain higher living standards and social rights in the face of neo-liberal policy reforms seeking to significantly reduce the scope of the welfare state. A clear example of this is the rapid expansion of a once thought extinct occupation, domestic labour. Migrant workers, particularly poor migrant women, constitute a growing pool of cheap labour providing services, such as, domestic work and child and elderly care for urban households at a very low price. While these workers subsidise the social rights of these households, most migrants do not enjoy the legal labour and social benefits granted to the native labour force (see Anderson 2000; Salazar Parreñas 2001; Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2003; Cox 2006). In many instances, the path to the legal incorporation of migrants is becoming more restrictive, making it almost impossible to become part of the local and national polity. As Calavita (2005, p. 43) recently put it, ‘immigrants in Italy and Spain are first and foremost workers, and they are begrudgingly tolerated because there is work to be done’. Despite public discourses promoting ‘integration’ to the receiving society, migrants are not considered deserving subjects of citizenship rights.

Meanwhile, in the global South, national citizens’ limited social rights are informally being supported at the household and community levels by remittances sent back by transnational migrants. This ‘transnational social subsidy’ provides a modicum of social welfare for those linked to migration, while enhancing the social stability of society and the political stability of governments in sending countries (Guarnizo 2003). The consequences of mass migration for the local destinations of expatriate retirees from the global North are more ambiguous. They generate new fiscal resources and some job opportunities, but also demand new services from local governments, such as advanced medical services.

The growing importance of transnational practices and discourses developed by international migrants and their networks constitutes a second driving force affecting the character of national citizenship. The complexity of the transnational networks built by global migrants, connecting them with their new residential localities, their original homelands, and their conational communities in third countries, is enormous. Most of these networks are not formally regulated by state policies. Nevertheless,
they constitute what Knorr Cetina (2005) has dubbed ‘global microstructures’, having significant transformative power over the localities implicated in their practices. Many states of origin have developed policies to guarantee the continuous national affiliations of their overseas citizens, while simultaneously encouraging them to become active members of the societies where they reside and work. The unilateral introduction of dual citizenship regimes in many countries of emigration is now occurring at a scale unprecedented in history (see for example, Guarnizo et al. 2002; Calderón Chelius & Saldaña 2002; Smith & Bakker 2008). Contrary to the notion of dual citizenship as a bilateral agreement, many Southern sending states are unilaterally declaring their national citizenship both portable and irrevocable. These changes allow migrants abroad to become citizens of other nation-states while keeping their original citizenship intact. A vivid case in point is the sustained effort by the Mexican state to constitute a ‘global Mexican nation’. For the past two decades, four consecutive national administrations from two different political parties have refined this discourse by expanding the constitutional rights of Mexicans living abroad and strengthening the programmes attending to their needs (Guarnizo 1998; Goldring 2002; Fox 2005; Fitzgerald 2008; Smith 2008; Smith & Bakker 2008). Mexico is not alone in this process, as dozens of migrant sending countries throughout the world have introduced constitutional reforms granting special rights to their nationals abroad, including dual and multiple citizenship rights.

One of the driving forces of these changes in the meaning and practice of citizenship is the desire by political regimes in sending countries to guarantee the steady inflow of monetary transfers from their international migrants abroad. In fact, monetary remittances have become so crucial to the macroeconomic stability of sending countries, that they are now incorporated into the national accounts and used in the international financial system as collateral for international lending (Guarnizo 2003; Ratha 2003).

State restructuring is a third global development affecting the conventional framing of national citizenship. Under neoliberalism, ‘(t)he state is supposed to remain in the wings, while the stage is occupied by civil society and its organized groups’ (Caldeira 2008, p. 52). In the name of neoliberal economic development, prior to the global financial crisis of recent months, many national regimes had reduced their role in the area of economic management, deregulated economic transactions, and transferred responsibility for economic growth to the private sector in the name of an unregulated global ‘free market’. Likewise, many states abrogated their authority over social policy-making to private and nongovernmental organisations and other institutions of civil society. At the urban scale, this devolution led directly to changes such as the privatisation of urban social services and public space and placed the granting of social rights in the hands of non-state organisations, many of which are transnational organisations promoting state-directed policies. This decentralisation and partial privatisation of public authority has refocused the relationship between civil society and state power, as well as relocating discourses and practices of citizenship from the national to the urban scale.

The securitisation of national borders following 11 September 2001 is a fourth global development reshaping national citizenship. Fears of international terrorism caused many nation-states to rethink the celebration of unfettered global mobility that had followed the end of the Cold War. The free flow of capital and goods was still celebrated but most nations in the global North militarised their borders and drastically diminished the rights of human mobility across them. Restrictive immigration policies failed to stem the mobility of migrants from the global South, thereby criminalising them as ‘illegal aliens’. To promote ‘national security’, developed nation-states began reducing individual rights for example, rights to privacy, association and free mobility. While the state’s role in economic planning and social provision was diminished, its power to police national borders was strengthened. Meanwhile, citizenship rights of natives were also eroded. Despite this securitisation, civil society groups have begun to mobilise to make rights-based claims at urban and national levels. In 2006, for example, millions of undocumented and documented immigrants mobilised in cities across
the US to resist their criminalisation under the cry ‘¡Los indocumentados no son terroristas!’ (The undocumented are not terrorists!). In so doing, they demanded inclusion to the polities of the national and the local state. The four global developments have provoked a lively debate across the social sciences on the future of citizenship. In *Limits of Citizenship*, Soysal (1994) argues that prerogatives of national citizenship have been undermined by the global diffusion of widely held international norms of personhood and their impact on the construction of a ‘post-national’ European citizenship. Soysal’s argument points to the extension of political rights to guest workers in Europe, while overlooking the racialised imaginary around which a common European identity is currently being constructed. Bhabha (1990) goes further, depicting global migrants as new nomads, hybrid social actors whose identities have been freed from the siren calls of national identity formation promoted either by their countries of origin or state-centric discourses in their new destinations.

Others have argued that national identity formation is undergoing a profoundly negative transformation. They posit a world in which the multiple identities assumed by migrants in developed societies are diminishing the capacity of these societies to assimilate migrants (Jacobson 1996). Thus, the late political scientist Samuel Huntington (2004) decried what he saw as a growing trend toward the non-assimilation of US immigrants. He calls for a resurgent eighteenth century nationalism to restore a presumptively American patriotism and civic virtue to new migrants.

These bi-polar representations of the effects of global migration on the nation-state and citizenship engender at least two kinds of questions. First, what theoretical biases underlay these particular North-centred perspectives on South-North contemporary migration? Even those perspectives that are not explicitly centred on the northern states and their interests, nonetheless see post-nationalism itself as emerging from the human right discourses and institutions created and promoted by the world’s richest nations. Southern states of origin are simply not part of these narratives.

It is time to move beyond these theoretical discourses in which migrants seem to be perceived as will-less actors reacting to forces beyond their control. Many of the migrating subjects of global mobility, particularly from the global South, have forcefully sought to open up spaces for political participation and the extension of rights, if not in the nation-states, at least in the cities in which they live and work. The remainder of this paper focuses on the politics of one such rescaling of politics from the national to the urban level. We analyse the discourse on ‘the right to the city’ and its theoretical and practical implications as different actors at multiple scales clash and coalesce in efforts to empower particular claims-making groups demanding ‘urban’ citizenship in the face of the increasingly unsettled terrain of national citizenship.

**THE RIGHT TO THE CITY: EMPOWERING AND DISEMPOWERING LOCAL INHABITANTS**

Global mobility is the engine of global urbanisation. Today, 3.3 billion urban residents constitute more than half of the world’s population. By 2030, world urbanisation is projected to rise to nearly 5 billion and three of every five people will live in cities. (UN Population Fund 2007). In the next 50 years, two-thirds of the world’s population will be urbanised (International Alliance of Inhabitants 2008).

Rural-urban migration, identified by the Chicago School of sociology a century ago as a constitutive element of modernity, has taken a new turn. Rural inhabitants are moving not only within national borders in the global South, but also from the rural South to the urban North. This fact has generated multiple points of view about the consequences of the arrival of new urban inhabitants in the North. These range from optimistic hopes of developing progressive, super-diverse, and inclusive kinds of transnational cities and migrant citizenship, to pessimistic, exclusionary and xenophobic fears of the destruction of preexisting national cultures.

The ‘right to the city’ (RTTC) argument has been advanced as an alternative theoretical construction as well as a slogan motivating a new transnational social movement. While we are very impressed with the effectiveness of this slogan in practice, our concern lies primarily...
with the shortcomings of the theoretical underpinning of this construction. Urban geographer Mark Purcell (2002, 2003) has most fully explicited its theoretical logic. Drawing upon the pioneering work of Lefebvre (1968, 1973), Purcell deconstructs the RTTC into two main dimensions – the right of city dwellers to participate in decision-making processes that affect the quality of city life, and their right to appropriate and use urban space. Accordingly, inhabittance is privileged as a way to enable city dwellers to promote use values over exchange values in the production and use of urban space.

The RTTC argument is a direct response to the political disenfranchisement of urban residents resulting from global mobility, the neoliberal restructuring of the global economy, and the rescaling of the state (Purcell 2003). Urban residents have been disenfranchised by new forms of ‘governance’ dubbed public-private partnerships, which privatise major decisions over the development of urban space. A primary goal of city governments is to promote economic development connected to global capital circuits. They no longer seek to directly improve the everyday living conditions of the inhabitants, but rather to create environments attractive to corporate investments in global competition with other cities. To do this, cities have developed a wide array of tools, for example, creating special taxation districts controlled by private interests, reducing demands for social services by expelling low income populations from central city areas and promoting the image of safe and secure downtowns. To stem this imbalance of power, RTTC advocates propose to valorise the power of all city inhabitants, independent of their national citizenship, to shape the decisions regulating the use of urban space. This implies not only the inhabitants’ capacity to affect local governmental decision-making, but also private corporate decisions affecting urban space, the built environment and socio-cultural life, including labour markets and environmental impacts.

Bypassing conventional regimes of national citizenship, the RTTC argument incorporates all residents of the city. Inhabitance becomes a privileged status granting citizens and non-citizens alike a right to participate in public policy-making, as well as in decisions of private corporations affecting urban life chances. Accordingly, Purcell argues that, because the right to the city operates simultaneously at different scales and affects different territories, it thus empowers urban dwellers to affect all corporate and governmental decision-making, even if those decisions are actually taken outside the city proper. Residents of Los Angeles, for example, would be given a seat at the corporate table where decisions are made about the location and relocation of industrial plants into or away from Los Angeles, for these decisions are likely to affect labour markets and living conditions for Los Angelinos.

Lefebvre argued that urban inhabitants should have the right to participate centrally in all decisions that produce urban space. Purcell pushes this argument further several scales. He argues that a hypothetical decision by the Mexican government to change land tenure policies in the state of Oaxaca would be likely to strongly affect immigration patterns from that Mexican state to Los Angeles. Therefore, under the RTTC perspective, inhabitants of Los Angeles would have the right to participate centrally in the Mexican national government’s decision-making process concerning Oaxacan land tenure policies because such a decision would likely change Los Angeles’s population geography and urban space (Purcell 2002, p. 104). Left out of this equation are the rights of Mexican citizens residing in Oaxaca to shape their own localities.

In practical terms, the RTTC theoretical discourse has found expression in a global social movement, the International Alliance of Inhabitants (IAI). Founded in Madrid in September 2003, the IAI has brought together a large network of grassroots associations of urban inhabitants from many parts of the world. It seeks to co-ordinate actions to ‘jointly stand against the perverse effects of exclusion, poverty, environmental degradation, exploitation, violence, and problems related to transportation, housing and urban governance produced by the neo-liberal globalisation’ (<http://eng.habitants.org/who_we_are/>).

In the US, the RTTC movement is organised as the ‘right to the city alliance’ (RTTCA). By 2008, the RTTCA included 36 core member organisations spanning seven states and over a dozen metropolitan areas. Organised as regional
collaborative networks the RTTCA operates in metropolitan areas including Boston/Providence, DC/Northern Virginia, Los Angeles, Miami, New Orleans, New York, and Oakland/San Francisco. Network members collaborate on the basis of themes as well as regions, such as civic engagement, tenants rights, subsidised housing and ‘a just reclamation in the Gulf Coast’ (Staples 2008, p. 7).

Perhaps the most critical theme of the RTTCA is a call to reimagine citizenship in the context of the globalisation of urban space. Gihan Perera, one of the RTTCA founders, argues that we can no longer view cities as located solely within a national territory; they must be examined in their relationship to the global economy. Yet, cities are not simply places tied to global capital, they also engender processes that attract people from all over the globe. As Perera succinctly put it: ‘What we have been talking about in the Right to the City Alliance is a municipal citizenship where we can, practically, open up the possibilities for forms of citizenship and civic engagement that are not just tied to national citizenship’ (Tides Foundation 2007, p. 32).

Identifying the city as a key site for resistance to neoliberal globalisation in the name of the needs of urban dwellers, the Alliance has won several significant victories in US localities, including winning affordable housing provisions, maintaining access to public space, stopping the demolition of public housing and raising the pay of abused domestic workers (Goldberg 2008).

A vivid example of the effectiveness of the RTTCA is the work of its member organisation the Olneyville Neighborhood Association (ONA). Based in Providence, Rhode Island’s poorest neighbourhood, which also is home to that city’s highest concentration of immigrants, including many who are undocumented, ONA helps neighbours connect issues like skyrocketing property taxes and official raids against undocumented immigrants to broader causes, including ‘gentrification and the criminalisation of entire peoples because of race and immigration status’ (Goldberg 2008). The Alliance has pressured local governments in several US cities like Boston and New York to enfranchise new immigrants in municipal elections, independently of their legal status, thus fulfilling the goal of empowering local ‘inhabitants’. RTTCA advocates point out that such localised rights are already in force in school board elections in many US cities. They might well have added that such local enfranchisement of urban residents is also common in several European cities.

The RTTCA thus, embodies the normative reinvention of national citizenship as urban citizenship. This is the vision imagined not only by right to the city theorists like Lefebvre and Purcell, but also by more mainstream political theorists like Ranier Bauböck, who has advocated the creation of ‘a formal status of local citizenship that is based on residence and disconnected from nationality’ (Bauböck 2003, p. 139).

In practice, the RTTC movement seems to provide a mechanism for greater inclusiveness in today’s burgeoning multicultural cities, perhaps even offering the first step in the development of a transnational form of multicultural municipal citizenship. Yet its theoretical assumptions are fraught with what Purcell recognises as radical open-endedness. The RTTC approach, by emplacing global relations in urban space, also runs the risk of essentialising urban life and place-making. Inadvertently, the combination of radical open-endedness and making ‘place’ the basic site of citizenship can result in quite unexpected reconfigurations of power. Consider the following two less than salutary possibilities.

**TRANSNATIONAL RETIREMENT MIGRATION AND MUNICIPAL CITIZENSHIP**

The emigration of retirees from rich countries to more affordable lands has dramatically increased in the last few decades. According to a recent study by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI 2006), several municipalities in Mexico have experienced a substantial rate of growth in expatriate retirees. The MPI study reports that between 1990 and 2000, the expatriate retiree community living in Chapala, Jalisco, has increased by 581 per cent, Los Cabos, Baja California Sur, by 308 per cent, and San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, by 48 per cent (MPI 2006, p. 1). Real estate agents, insurance brokers, attorneys and developers in both Mexico and
Panama interviewed for the MPI study, confirmed that this growth has continued locally in both countries since 2000. In fact, one of these observers described this growth in Panama as a ‘frenzy’.

Banks (2004) provides a penetrating account of the perceptions and impacts of US and Canadian retirees living in Mexican localities in his rich ethnography of retirement communities in the Lake Chapala Riviera region of Jalisco, Mexico. Banks asked Northern expatriates to characterise Mexicans and Mexican ways of life and their relationships with Mexicans. What comes out most poignantly is that expatriate inhabitants in the Lake Chapala Riviera live in residential enclaves isolated from quotidian experiences with the host society. They portray their hosts simultaneously as friendly and helpful as well as untrustworthy and inaccessible; enterprising as well as lazy. Reminiscent of nineteenth century colonial discourses that ‘other’ the colonised, Banks’ informants construct such images of Mexicans in order to contrast them with their own self-image as superior, flexible and open. The expatriates’ self-attributions have material consequences for the locals’ right to their native localities, which have become contested terrains where newcomers, who possess greater material resources, gain the upper hand in shaping the cities and towns they have ‘colonised’.

This is an instantiation of neocolonial consumer domination rather than the multicultural political formation envisioned in the right to the city discourse. As Banks lucidly puts it, the stakes of this contestation over place-making are great:

It is indeed the face of Mexicans that is at stake: The Lakeside economy is dominated by expatriate consumer demand; indigenous commerce in fishing has disappeared as new employment opportunities opened up in the services sector; local prices for real estate (routinely listed in US dollars), restaurant dining, hotel lodging and most consumer goods are higher than in comparable non-retirement areas; traditional Mexican community life centred around the family has been supplemented, and in some instances supplanted, by expatriate community life centred around public assistance and volunteer programs . . . and the uniform use of Spanish in public life is displaced by the use of English (Banks 2004, pp. 376–377).

Such localised struggles over place-making are repeated in multiple localities through Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America. The small fishing village of Sayulita on the Pacific Coast of Mexico, for example, has gone through rapid spatial, economic and sociocultural transformation in a very short time. Preusch (2008) recently reported in the travel section of the New York Times that Sayulita has become transnationalised not only by the composition of its population, which has grown in the last few years due to the presence of US and Canadian expatriates, but also by its real estate market, which is now mainly advertised for potential clients in the North. The transnational commodification of this small village is summarised in a web site advertising its unique qualities:

Sayulita is the ideal location for a second home or to retire. We are located just 25 miles north of the Puerto Vallarta international airport and just a two hour flight from LAX. Sayulita Real Estate has become a great addition to a large number of American and Canadian investment portfolios. Sayulita is not only a great place to purchase real estate; it’s the perfect place to live (<http://www.sayulita.com/realestate.htm>).

These marketing campaigns have radically transformed the prices of local properties in Sayulita, rendering property ownership virtually inaccessible to the local population. Likewise, the physical character of the built environment has been changed dramatically. Property prices now reach into the millions of dollars in a place where the average house prices used to be a few thousand dollars. Now lots are scarce in the area surrounding the village and all but nonexistent in the town. As one long-time expatriate resident, who bought a large property several years ago, put it: ‘I could have bought the whole hill for a half million dollars. Now you can’t buy a lot up there for half a million’ (Preusch 2008). The presence of around 600 foreign owners has transformed the traditional architectural style of the village of once small-fishermen’s homes,
which now stand side-by-side with glass and steel large-scale modernist structures enjoying vast ocean views. The class and power structures of this locality have also been fundamentally reconfigured. In this instance, the ‘right to the city’ is clearly a matter of who has the power to acquire property, reconfigure private and public space, and influence local decision-making. A new social stratification structure emerges out of the presence of affluent expatriates, where locals tend to be placed at the bottom.

These new modes of local recolonisation of the global South have not gone uncontested. Local social movements are resisting some of the impacts generated by the rich newcomers. For example, a local grassroots movement has recently emerged to contest the widespread intervention of US expatriates on the urban and architectural texture of San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, Mexico (Atkinson 2008). Struggling to preserve the historical architecture of the city, the Basta Ya (enough already) movement seeks to control a new construction spree targeting the growing demand by rich newcomers from Canada and the US. They have already managed to stop or delay the construction of some new projects. Ironically, in San Miguel de Allende, as elsewhere, the growing presence and investments of affluent retirement migrants is changing the socio-cultural character, unique architectural heritage, and everyday rhythms of the place, undermining the features that attracted retirees in the first place. As one of the leaders of the Basta Ya movement expressed it: ‘San Miguel is held by a little string right now. We are straining the very things that made people wanted to move here’.

THE MULTI-SCALAR POLITICS OF ‘LOCAL INHABITANCE’ IN THE RUSSIAN ‘NEAR ABROAD’

In another part of the world contestations over the rights and entitlements of inhabitation reveal a connection between local place-making struggles, multi-scalar politics, and ‘neo-imperialism from above’ in transnational relations respectively between Russia and Georgia and the Ukraine. Consider first the multi-scalar ‘urban’ politics manifest in the recent declaration of independence by the breakaway republic of South Ossetia. This case is an instance of the privileging of ‘local inhabitation’ and reconstituting this identity as a basis for granting and denying rights to the city. The South Ossetian secession from Georgia, guaranteed by Russian military power, was preceded by a decade-long reduction of this region’s relatively autonomous status by Georgian nationalists who had themselves separated from the former Soviet Union. Many newly independent former Soviet republics, including the Georgian Republic, had initiated a reduction of the rights of ethnic minorities living within their new national borders. This loss of status and power, in turn, triggered the formation of militant nationalist movements, including among others, Georgia’s South Ossetians. (see English 2008)

Playing on the separatist desires of the alienated inhabitants of South Ossetia, in Northern Georgia, particularly the Ossetian residents of the then Georgian city of Tskhinvali, the Kremlin leadership promoted their inclusion as part of a broader political project seeking to reincorporate parts of what they call Russia’s ‘near abroad’ into what we might call Greater Russia. Prior to the recent military confrontation Moscow had already reconfigured national citizenship across borders by extending Russian citizenship to South Ossetians, even though they are not ethnically Russian and at the time were part of Georgia. Subsequently, Russia unilaterally recognised South Ossetia’s independence.

As a further part of this political offensive the mayor of Moscow, Yuri M. Luzhkov, broke ground for the construction of a new neighbourhood in the city of Tskhinvali, called ‘the Moscow district’ on Georgian territory that had recently been ethnically cleansed of Georgians. Moscow’s mayor is now so popular in Tskhinvali that a street has been named after him and South Ossetia’s president has referred to Luzhkov as ‘a dear friend who is one of us’ (Levy 2008). These cross-border acts of ‘place-making’ are in fact acts of displacement and erasure of the Georgian inhabitants of Tskhinvali and the city’s reconstitution as a presumptively ‘South Ossetian’ city. This can be interpreted as an almost paradigmatic expression of the right to the city, where locals, in
alliance with an extraterritorial power, reaffirm their alleged right of self-determination in opposition to a national government. From this point of view, this violation of Georgia’s national sovereignty and territorial integrity is converted into an expression of a new geopolitical arrangement of ‘nation-building’. Ironically, however, in the process, the neo-nationalism of South Ossetians has itself been displaced by a neo-Imperialist Russian project.

Consider next the related example of the urban restructuring activities that Mayor Luzhkov and his wife Yelena Baturina, the richest woman in Russia, have been engaged in as part of a political project to reconfigure political power and urban space in the Ukrainian city of Sevastopol under the guise of a ‘sister city’ relationship between that city and Moscow. Playing on the nationalist aspirations of Sevastopol’s ethnically Russian inhabitants, who comprise 72 per cent of the city’s 350,000 people, Luzhkov has established and provided financial support for a cultural centre there called ‘Moscow House’. Also, he has constructed a branch of Moscow State University and built Russian Orthodox cathedrals, schools and a sports complex. Luzhkov’s billionaire wife has invested substantially in other property development ventures there. Since the end of the Georgian conflict, Luzhkov has nurtured separatist organisations throughout the Crimean region. He has openly called for Russia to reclaim the region from Ukraine, including Sevastopol, its leading metropolis. His position is based on the argument that the region has an ethnically Russian majority and was part of Russia in the Stalinist period, before it was turned over to the Ukraine by Kruschev in 1954. A spokesman for Moscow’s Department of International Relations, which finances Moscow’s spending in the ‘near abroad’, cloaks Luzhkov’s annexation dreams under an inclusive and solidarity nationalist discourse: ‘We are engaged in offering aid to those considered Russian compatriots’. Since Russia recognised South Ossetia’s declaration of independence, the ethnically Russian separatist groups supported by Luzhkov’s transnational project have adopted the battle cry: ‘We will be next’ (Levy 2008, p. 14). Again, from the right to the city perspective, Sevastopol’s inhabitants’ desire to leave the Ukraine and re-unite with Russia could be deemed a legitimate alternative for the majority of the city’s inhabitants to their current national location and citizenship despite the national and international implications of this reconfiguration of citizenship. Thus, the radical open-endedness of right to the city claims for empowering urban inhabitants raises considerable political, social and practical questions. In this instance, the rights of selected inhabitants of cities in the near abroad are valorised over Georgian and Ukrainian citizenship rights by jumping from the urban scale to the transnational, even neo-imperial scale. In these instances the right to the city paradigm, in the name of ‘sister-city’ solidarity across borders, has not opened up either city to multicultural inclusiveness. Rather, it has been used to promote ethnic essentialism in Sevastopol and ethnic cleansing in Tskhinvali. The result seems to be a highly exclusive ‘democratic’ regime for the majority of inhabitants, instead of an inclusive system in which cultural diversity is valorised.

MAKING SENSE OF CONTESTED CITIZENSHIP

Today, more people, with more or less power, are moving across the globe finding more or less resistance and more or fewer opportunities in the localities to which they move. In practice the RTTC approach is a strong and progressive response to contest the marginalisation of southern immigrants in hyper-diverse northern cities, or even poor, racialised rural minorities in urban centres in the South. However, this approach, at least as presently theorised, seems to flatten the actual heterogeneity of the new inhabitants from abroad into an homogeneously poor, marginalised and powerless social grouping. Most fundamentally, the RTTC perspective has a large blind spot that prevents it from detecting and incorporating migrants’ persistent transnational interests and engagements that are embodied in complex global sociopolitical, communicative and multifaceted microstructures extending well beyond the city limits.

Tensions between established residents and newcomers, particularly when the power relation between them is asymmetrical, are unavoidable. The question of ‘inhabitance’ is
often fought out along the lines of who has the power to decide who is an established resident, legitimate local actor, or who is acceptable as a new resident and, thus, who has the right to local sociopolitical, cultural, and economic space and who does not. This is a common theme in the cases discussed above, whether it is affluent northern retirees in historic villages in Mexico, poor immigrants in Los Angeles or Providence, or claims to historical presence in South Ossetia, Georgia and the Crimea.

In the last instance, ‘the politics of municipal citizenship’ is a question of power. Who has the power to make place out of space, who contests this power, who wins, who loses, and with what effects? These issues are further complicated in a context of high, multidirectional mobility embedded in transnational relations that may reach a global scale. In this context, empirical research on municipal citizenship needs to address these central questions of power. If it is not possible to regard the RTTC logic of inhabitation as a cure-all to the local effects of globalisation and the limits of national citizenship, how can we best understand and map a practical way forward for reconfiguring contested citizenship in the decades ahead?

Like national ‘citizenship’ itself, ‘inhabitation’ is an abstract status associated with urban belonging. Both formal statuses ignore the actual subject positions that people making claims to citizenship or inhabitation actually occupy, speak from, fight for, and fight over. Urban and national belonging and political participation are shaped by actors situated in particular locations based on social relations of difference such as class, gender, generation, ethno-racial identities, religious affiliation, formal-legal status, and so forth. This is precisely what politics is all about.

The approach that we propose is comparative, multi-scalar, and sensitive to the dialectical relationships between micro, meso and macro-structures. Our approach starts from a close examination of the role of human agency and historically specific individual and institutional actors in producing urban change. Comparatively, our approach has two dimensions, namely, historical and cross-sectional. Historically, we need to understand the long-term changes in the dominant frameworks for organising economic, political, and social relations as, for example, in the shift from the post-Second World War world ‘order’ centred on the Bretton Woods global institutions of governance and economic management built around state-centred conceptions of national citizenship, sovereignty, and development to the market-centred neo-liberal project in which corporate domination is enshrined, while state power is diffused, privatised and refocused on new techniques of governmentality, to the current global fiscal crisis where state power over economic management is being reasserted. Cross-sectionally, we need to understand how these ruling ideologies differentially affect different groups of people located in different places around the globe. This implies comparing the experiences and consequences of the different mobilities of Southern, as well as Northern peoples, as we have tried to do in the examples above.

Our framework is thus multi-focal. It recognises that while keeping one eye on the developing global, national, transnational, and local structural contexts within which human mobility occurs, it is also necessary to focus on the agency of the mobile subjects operating at all these scales. Our view defines transnational politics as the study of processes of incorporation, accommodation, and resistance to changing structural opportunities and constraints. These processes do not operate in a vacuum or a world of pure voluntary action. Rather, mobility is embedded in a web of historically changing opportunities and constraints operating in the context of economic globalisation mediated by the institutional practices of nation-states and highly variable local contexts of reception. In this process, new local and transnational political spaces are emerging as myriad state and non-state actors seek to reposition or ‘replace’ themselves in the wider political-economic setting of global mobility.

Our approach is consistent with that of Ong who has proposed a ‘transversal’ mode of perception. Her ‘analytics of assemblage’ views the logics underlying the application of neoliberal policies as not taking place uniformly in a single social space. Rather, than viewing neoliberalism as an economic tsunami sweeping up everything in its wake, she conceives it as a ‘migratory set of practices’ that articulate diverse situations and engender diverse configurations of possi-
bility both within and across countries for the key actors we have already identified. Accordingly, states, market driven forces, and different civil society actors recalculate their respective capacities in relation to ‘the dynamism of global markets’ (Ong 2007, p. 4). While recognizing the multiple logics of neoliberal globalisation, the analytics of assemblage is a metaphor for the situated practices that come together in specific places, at particular times in history. It is within this historically contingent mode of analysis that we have framed our specific narratives illustrating the complex, non-linear, and often unpredictable realities operating at the intersection between human mobility, neoliberal globalisation, and the reconfiguration of national and urban citizenship.

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Notes
1. The UN World Tourism Organisation (2008) expects that the total number of the world’s international tourists will reach 1 billion by 2010 and 1.6 billion by 2020.
2. The Hague Convention of 1930 stated that ‘it is in the general interest of the international community to secure that all its members should recognise that every person should have a nationality and should have one nationality only’. It further asserted that ‘the ideal towards which the efforts of humanity should be directed in this domain is the abolition of all cases both of statelessness and of double nationality’ (League of Nations 1930).

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