MIGRANT COSMOPOLITANISM

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GLOBAL MIGRATION

The twenty-first century will be the century of the migrant. At the turn of the twenty-first century, there were more migrants than ever before in recorded history. Today there are over 1 billion migrants. Each decade, the percentage of migrants as a share of total population continues to rise, and in the next twenty-five years, the rate of migration is predicted to be higher than in the last twenty-five. More than ever, it is becoming necessary for people to migrate due to environmental, economic, and political instability. In particular, climate change may even double international migration over the next forty years. What is more, the percentage of total migrants who are nonstatus or undocumented is also increasing, thus posing a serious challenge to democracy and political representation.

The phenomenon of migration thus presents a unique problem for political theory. If citizenship and legal equality are the concepts by which many nation-states and liberal democracies understand the political agency and rights of a people, what does this mean for the 15–20 percent of people living in countries like the United States, for example, without full status? It means that a continually increasing population of migrants with partial or no status are now subject to a permanent structural inequality—the lack of voting and labor rights, possible deportation, and other deprivations, depending on the degree of status. This is difficult to reconcile with almost any political theory of equality, universality, or liberty. The fact that hundreds of millions of human beings are currently living outside their country of origin as a result of migration and frequent relocation should dramatically challenge the conditions of political life assumed by political philosophers.

Unfortunately, much of political theory has either been unwilling to acknowledge the structural nature of this exception with respect to the territorial nation-state, or it has been content to merely critique the structure itself without offering an alternative. If we want to understand the prospects for a truly global community, we have to move beyond the critiques of citizenship, nationalism, and liberalism, and propose an approach that will not structurally exclude the
millions of migrants and refugees of the world. We must create what I propose to call a “migrant cosmopolitanism.”

FROM POLIS TO COSMOPOLIS

The word “cosmopolitanism” comes from two Greek words, κόσμος (kosmos), meaning “world” + πόλις (polis), meaning “city.” The English word “politics” also derives from the Greek word polis, which in turn derives from the Proto-Indo-European root *pelo-, meaning “citadel or fortified high place.” It is thus precisely with the birth of the city that politics and walls are born. The three are etymological and historical triplets: politics-city-wall. For example, the first nondomestic walls appeared alongside the first human cities: Jericho, Ur, Lagash, Eridu, Uruk, and others in Mesopotamia. By the fourth century BC, if a city did not have a wall for protection, there was likely no city, and thus no politics. However, the walled polis also creates a structural political exclusion.

Aristotle

Aristotle articulates this exclusion clearly in his Politics. For Aristotle, political status is fundamentally tied to one’s inclusion in the polis. For those who do not have a polis, Aristotle reserves the term βάρβαρον (barbaron, barbarian). The Greek word βάρβαρος (barbaros) originates from the onomatopoetic sound of the babbling of the foreigner who does not speak Greek. In this way, the determination of the “nature” of the barbarian migrant is already relative to a geographical and political center: the Greek polis. Barbarism is thus a political determination. With respect to the center, the periphery is barbarian, mobile, migrant, diffuse, inferior, unintelligible, and so on. Accordingly, the antonym for the Greek word barbaros was civis or polis—both words that applied to cities. The barbarian is the “non-Greek, noncity-dweller.”

But what makes the barbarians inferior is not only their non-Greek status (although most non-Greeks also did not speak Greek), but their inability to use political speech and reason (logos) that were politically bound to the specifically Greek logos. Thus the figure of the migrant barbarian unites three concepts tied to the polis: (1) the inability to speak the language of the polis (Greek), (2) the inability to use the reason of the polis (logos), and (3) an excessive geographical mobility in relation to the polis.

Above all, the term “barbarism” designates a political inferiority: a natural incapacity for proper speech and reason that disallows political life. If people do not have a city-state, then they cannot possibly have political rationality, and vice versa. For Aristotle, barbarians are those whose temporary encampments, mobility, and even geographical distance from the polis create a natural inferiority. As Herodotus states, “[i]nstead of establishing towns or walls, they are all mounted...
archers who carry their homes along with them and derive their sustenance not from cultivated fields but from their herds.”12 The barbarian is the social figure whose inferior migrant motion outside the polis is ultimately enslaved in order to expand the rising political and military power of the state.

The idea of natural political inferiority and the figures associated with it, like the barbarian, were invented in the ancient world largely in order to conceptualize political slavery. The problem was that the migrant was no longer simply “out there” but also “in here,” in the form of the slave or political inferior. In this way, the political status of the migrant is in between that of the human and the animal: in the city but not belonging to the city. Aristotle understood the concept of political inferiority well. In his Politics, he argues that a slave cannot be defined simply by being enslaved. The practical condition of slavery does not necessarily tell us anything about the kind of being that the slave is. If it is possible, Aristotle says, for someone to be unjustly enslaved, then “no one would say that someone is a slave if he did not deserve to be one.”13 In Aristotle’s political writings, we can distinguish between two kinds of slaves: the slave by fortune, and the slave by nature. The slave by fortune is not a true slave since he or she may have been enslaved unjustly or by accident, such as civic slavery. The natural slave, however, is the one who, according to Aristotle, has nothing in them that rules by nature. This type of natural or true slave is what Aristotle calls the βάρβαρον (barbaron, barbarian). Insofar as “slave” means “slave by nature” and not by fortune, Aristotle says, “the barbarian and the slave are in nature the same” (ταὐτὸ φύσει βάρβαρον καὶ δοῦλον ὄν).14 Thus the barbarian is not merely enslaved, but the human being whose very nature is to be inferior to the political center: the polis, or city-state.

However, if the origins of politics are found in the exclusionary walls of the polis, the origins of cosmopolitanism can be found conversely in the opening of the city walls—and of political membership itself—to the entire world. In contrast to the parochial polis or walled city, the kosmopolis is the political community that is open to the world. Today, there are at least two major types of cosmopolitanism. Unfortunately, both types fail to fully account for the inclusion of one of the fastest growing groups of disenfranchised peoples in the world: migrants.15

Kant

The first modern theory of cosmopolitanism was developed by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant in the eighteenth century. Kant argues that the progress of human history can be defined precisely by our capacity to increasingly open up our city walls so “that which nature has as its highest aim, a universal cosmopolitan condition, can come into being, as the womb in which all the original predispositions of the human species are developed.”16 Since the invention of the ancient polis, human societies have slowly become more inclusive and should continue to do so, Kant argues.
Unfortunately, Kant’s cosmopolitanism is limited by his privileging of history and time over the figures of migration and motion. In this way, his epistemology and politics run parallel. This may sound surprising given Kant’s cosmopolitan legacy, but it remains nonetheless true. In his transcendental philosophy, Kant radically breaks with the previous historical subordination of time to movement. For Kant, time is no longer a mere measure of terrestrial or celestial movements, as it was for many ancient philosophers; time is an a priori transcendental condition for such movements tout court. “The concept of motion,” Kant writes in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, “(as change of place), is possible only through and in the presentation of time.” For Kant time is unlimited succession, space is simultaneity (a temporal term), and movement is a change in place (spatial term).

These terms are also given a spatial division and hierarchy. Time, for Kant, is the “inner sense . . . or form under which alone [as condition] we can intuit the soul’s inner state.” Space is the “outer sense (a property of our mind) [in which] we present objects as outside us, and present them one and all in space.” Time is the form within which we determine the unity of our self, and space is the form within which we determine external objects in relation to that unified self.

Movement occurs within or between objects already in space (external to time and the ego) and is thus secondary to space. Since objects are experienced in a specific place, their movement is perceived as a “change in place” and thus secondary to their place in the world of the subject. But place is derived from space, and space is derived from time (as its external sense), the pure underlying form of time, which defines space as simultaneity and movement as a change in that simultaneity.

Kant’s political philosophy follows a similar trajectory. For Kant, historical progress is accomplished insofar as humans struggle through their natural antagonisms with one another and as a result, “advance [their use of reason] gradually from one stage of insight to the next.” Through this antagonism, “the greatest problem for the human species, to which nature compels it to seek a solution is the achievement of a civil society which administers right universally.” However, this same unsociability that compels humans to abandon the lawless state of savagery and enter civil society also compels them to abandon the “barbarous freedom of the already established states” and establish “law-governed external relations between states.” Thus humans develop this “concealed plan of nature” through the two interlocking forms of right: constitutional right and international right. But what of migrants, nomads, and those without or between states? How can universal right be realized while there are still people who exist outside these laws or as nonmembers of states?

The third form of right that Kant creates to deal with these people is cosmopolitan right—achieved through universal hospitality. While Kant is quite clear that migrants do not have the “rights of a guest . . . (which would require a special, charitable contract stipulating that he be made a member of the household for a
certain period of time),” the migrant does have the right to visit, to which all human beings have a claim, to present oneself to society by virtue of the “right of common possession of the surface of the earth. Since it is the surface of a sphere, they cannot scatter themselves on it without limit, but they must rather ultimately tolerate one another as neighbors, and originally no one has more of a right to be at a given place on earth than anyone else.” Universal cosmopolitan right or “the right of everyone to the surface” is essential for the historical progress of humanity. If states or persons ignore this right, then they reject the universal progress of human reason.

However, while Kant’s gesture of visitation seems more inclusive than Aristotle’s, its exclusion is actually much more radical. For Aristotle, alien migrant residents can still reside in the polis, and they can even participate in office via prostatēs (sponsors). For Kant, migrants, nomads, and strangers are not even guests allowed inside a household, much less allowed to participate in political life; they are only visitors to the spatial exterior or “surface of the earth.” Just as time is the inner form that provides the unity of the subject in Kant’s transcendental aesthetic, so political time (history) provides the unity and progress of reason. For Kant, migrants, nomads, and other non-citizens are only allowed temporary access to the territory of a state: visitation (Besuchsrecht), not residence (Gastrecht). Kant’s right of cosmopolitan hospitality may protect nomads and migrants from slavery but only through their ahistoricity at the hands of the true movers of cosmopolitan history: citizens and states.

History and the culture it has built is off-limits to the migrant. Accordingly, just as space is the outer form that allows for relations between objects in the transcendental aesthetic, so the surface of the earth is the space of mere objects. On the surface qua surface, no human cultural structure progresses vertically away from the earth’s natural antagonisms. Human history is capable of progress, while the natural landscape only changes without development. As temporary visitors of the surface, migrants and nomads are thus not only excluded from being guests and staying within the domiciles of the state, but they are also expelled from political history itself. They are abandoned by political time: they are ahistorical. Just as movement is subordinated to both time and space in the transcendental aesthetic, so the migrant, as the figure most defined by movement, is expelled from history and condemned to roam the surface of the earth in Kant’s political philosophy.

Therefore Kant’s theory of cosmopolitanism does not resolve the structural exclusion of migrants; it only alleviates it temporarily. Contemporary proponents of the “federation of democratic states and societies,” such as David Held, encounter a similar problem. More often than not, cosmopolitan institutions composed of nation-states exist to protect the interests of citizens and states above and at the expense of migrants and the stateless. For example, the United Nations, an institution similar to what Kant had in mind, defines the right to leave a territory as a human right, but not the right to enter a territory. In short, powerful nation-states
want to protect their wealth from the global poor. Another example: the United Nations Migrant Workers Convention, signed by many states, provides basic rights and protections for migrants with status, but deliberately excludes rights for nonstatus migrants for the same reasons as above.\textsuperscript{30} Thus the cosmopolitanism of nation-states is not enough to protect or include all global migrants.

**Republican Cosmopolitanism**

In response to this, the second major type of cosmopolitanism proposes that global institutions such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and transnational corporations would be more capable of implementing a civic set of cosmopolitan laws based on global justice and shared humanity than nation-states biased by their own parochial interests.\textsuperscript{31} This “civic cosmopolitanism,” however, only displaces the problem of requiring benevolent and knowledgeable lawmakers in these institutions as the sufficient condition for cosmopolitan inclusion. It is certainly true that NGOs and other global institutions are capable of following principles of global justice, and in some cases, better than nation-states. But the proliferation of global migrants and refugees cannot be resolved by NGOs like the Red Cross in tent cities and refugee camps. In fact, rather than increasingly including migrants and refugees in political membership, humanitarian camps accomplish precisely the opposite: they depoliticize migrants and refugees by treating them as mere human beings.\textsuperscript{32} Refugee camps provide food and shelter, but they do not provide political voice and agency for their populations. Global institutions do not have the power to include stateless people in political membership. This is the danger of cosmopolitan institutions—that everyone becomes a mere human body to be managed in a camp. It is true that global institutions provide an important cosmopolitan role that should be increasingly regulated, but global institutions alone are not sufficient to protect or include global migrants.

A third option would be to combine both democratic and civic cosmopolitanism into a “three-tiered system of political authority.”\textsuperscript{33} Political decision making could come from subnational entities like cities, nation-states, and supranational institutions like the European Union and the United Nations. Many theorists have formulated some combinatory version of this thesis.\textsuperscript{34} However, the combination of multiple cosmopolitan law-creating institutions, while important, in principle still does not allow us to understand the most basic aspect of how those without the “rights to have rights,”\textsuperscript{35} like many migrants, come to attain cosmopolitan rights in the first place: through political struggle. Any theory of cosmopolitanism that focuses exclusively on the power of democratic leaders and their institutions to create laws of inclusion for dispossessed peoples is fundamentally inadequate. Cosmopolitanism is not just about the creation of globally fair and inclusive laws and institutions; it is more importantly about the popular struggles required to demand and win those laws in the first place.
MIGRANT COSMOPOLITANISM

While states and other institutions have slowly opened the polis walls over the course of civilization, there has always been a group on the other side of those walls forcing them open or tearing them down—the migrants of history. A migrant, broadly defined, is the political figure whose movement is the cause or result of their social expulsion. The migrant is the collective name for all the political figures in history who have been territorially, politically, juridically, and economically displaced as a condition of the social expansion of power. As such, migrants have always been active not only in demanding greater inclusion, but in creating cosmopolitan alternatives of their own.

In the neolithic world, the nomads of the steppe were territorially displaced by agricultural peoples, and so invented a new social organization of their own, based on solidarity, inclusion, and undivided territory. In the ancient world, barbarians were kidnapped from all over the Mediterranean and enslaved for the purpose of supporting the Greek and Roman political apparatus. Maroon societies of escaped slaves in Chios and communities of revolting slaves in the Servile Wars, including the one led by Spartacus, were by far the most open and diverse cosmopolitan societies of the ancient period. In the medieval world, hundreds of thousands of peasants were forced from their homes by excessive taxation, the invention of money rent (commutation debt), enclosures (land privatization), and other means, and then criminalized as vagabonds. Vagabonds of all kinds created maroon societies like those of Bacaude in Gaul, that welcomed all displaced people; they created roaming bands of military defectors, paupers, heretics, minstrels, and so on, with open membership. They created universalist and often egalitarian underground societies that dug up enclosure fences in the night; lived in the forests, wastelands, and commons; and preached the cosmopolitan right of the poor to the land. In the modern world, after centuries of displacement, migrants were dispossessed of everything but their own labor and were forced to move to wherever, and work for whatever, capitalists desired. The migrant proletariat in the modern period created the Paris Commune and socialist utopian societies of all sorts. Communists, anarchists, and others advocated the universal equality of an international working class against capitalist displacement and all political exclusion. Thus it was migrants of all kinds throughout history—not states—who were the true agents of political inclusion and cosmopolitanism.36 The legacy of migrant cosmopolitanism continues today.

The Sans-Papiers Movement

In 1996 the first autonomous organization of undocumented migrants was formed in France against the anti-immigrant Pasqua Laws. On March 18, 1996, 324 Africans, including 80 women and 100 children, occupied the church of Saint-Ambroise and demanded the regularization of their immigration status.
later, on March 22, the police evicted the sans-papiers (without papers) from Saint-Ambroise, an action authorized by the church. Soon after, there were two large public demonstrations in Paris in support of the sans-papiers, and in June, the government regularized twenty-two of the original Saint-Ambroise demonstrators. Because of the clear public support for the Saint-Ambroise sans-papiers and their partial regularization, their struggle led to the creation of more than twenty-five sans-papiers collectives in France. In Lille and Versailles, hunger strikes were conducted that in some cases, led to regularization. However, by far the most well-publicized sans-papiers occupation was the occupation of Saint-Bernard church in Paris later that year, beginning on June 28. Three hundred undocumented Africans occupied the church and demanded regularization. Ten men went on hunger strikes in the church for fifty days, and set up the Sans-Papiers National Coordinating Committee (Coordination Nationale des Sans-Papiers). Saint-Bernard church was occupied from June 28 until August 23, 1996, until riot police violently broke down the church doors with axes, using tear gas on mothers and babies, and dragged everyone out. That night, twenty thousand people marched in the streets to support the sans-papiers. By January 1997, 103 of the original 324 had received temporary papers, 19 had been deported, and 2 were jailed.

After the Saint-Bernard occupation, sans-papiers occupations only increased across France. As the Left and Right political parties prepared for elections in June 1997, the Right attempted to distinguish its party with the anti-immigrant Debré laws. Among other things, these laws required anyone who allowed a foreigner to stay in their residence to report this to the local town hall or they would be charged with aiding and abetting an “illegal” (clandestine). Following the first application of this law by a French woman living with a sans-papiers in Lille, sixty-six filmmakers called for a massive civil disobedience protest against the Debré law. Soon after, daily newspapers published lists of writers, artists, scientists, university teachers, journalists, doctors, and lawyers, all offering to accommodate foreigners without asking for papers. On February 22, 1997, 100,000 people demonstrated in Paris against Debré. In March 1998, the sans-papiers occupied the Notre-Dame de la Gare and Saint-Jean-de-Montmartre churches, and later others marched from Toulouse to Paris, demanding “Regularization for all!” Cosmopolitanism did not happen in the voting booths; it happened in the streets.

A key feature of the sans-papiers struggle was their demand to speak for themselves and in their own name:

We the Sans-Papiers of France, in signing this appeal, have decided to come out of the shadows. From now on, in spite of the dangers, it is not only our faces but also our names that will be known. We declare: Like all others without papers, we are people like everyone else. Most of us have been living among you for years. We came to France with the intention of working here and because we had been told that France was the “homeland of the Rights of Man”: we could no longer bear the poverty and the oppression which was rife in our
countries, we wanted our children to have full stomachs, and we dreamed of freedom. . . . We demand papers so that we are no longer victims of arbitrary treatment by the authorities, employers and landlords. We demand papers so that we are no longer vulnerable to informants and blackmailers. We demand papers so that we no longer suffer the humiliation of controls based on our skin, detentions, deportations, the break-up of our families, the constant fear.39

After many years, the sans-papiers won several important battles for their papers, rights, and inclusion in French society, yet there is still much to be done. These rights were not won simply because of beneficent leaders with broad ideas about cosmopolitan justice; these rights were won by starving migrants who were publicly beaten, experienced racial discrimination, and were expelled by the police. These rights were won because hundreds of thousands of French people said they would rather break the unjust laws against harboring sans-papiers than turn their back on their fellow man. This is migrant cosmopolitanism.

The Solidarity City

The creation of solidarity cities for migrants is also part of this legacy. The creation of sanctuary cities and asylum is as old as slavery itself; today cities all over the world choose not to enforce federal and state immigration laws in their cities. The solidarity city is a more radical incarnation of the practice of modern church sanctuary that emerged across North America in the 1980s in response to US foreign policy and civil war in Central America. The idea of entire sanctuary cities has now spread to thirty-one cities in the United States and many others around the world. However, the idea of the sanctuary city remains a largely negative and state-based decision to not cooperate with federal immigration enforcement. It is not yet sufficiently cosmopolitan. While top-down “don’t ask, don’t tell” (DADT) city immigration policies may be legally binding at the local level, they often do not stop police, service providers, and individuals in the city from reporting nonstatus persons directly to federal immigration enforcement. So while the sanctuary cities of the United States (New York, San Francisco, San Diego, Denver, and others), for example, may directly discourage police from helping immigration officials because it is “not their responsibility,” they can and do. Don’t ask, don’t tell is thus a precarious policy that always risks betrayal to the federal level. This is why DADT must become a matter of solidarity outside the law and against the state, similar to the underground railroads of the United States in the nineteenth century. Sanctuary is not enough; migrant justice must become a collective ethos.

The solidarity city movement is a migrant justice movement to (1) ensure that all city residents, including people without full immigration status, can access essential services—housing, health, education, social services, emergency services—without fear of being detained or deported; (2) ensure that municipal funds
and city police are not used to support federal immigration enforcement; and (3) ensure that residents of the city are not required to provide proof of immigration status to obtain services, and if such information was discovered it could not be shared with federal immigration enforcement. The goal of the solidarity city is to network with other community organizations to establish clinics, schools, food banks, and women’s shelters to (1) provide access to anyone regardless of status, (2) train frontline staff to adhere to this commitment and be sensitive to nonstatus issues, and (3) radicalize service providers and users toward larger actions against forced migration and support “Status for All.”

The density and diversity of migrants in the city of Toronto make it a particularly fecund milieu for the creation of a solidarity city network. With over eighty different ethnicities and more than half of its city population born outside the country, Toronto is demographically the most diverse city in the world. An estimated 500,000 nonstatus persons live in Canada, and Toronto is home to more than half of them. The Toronto migrant justice group No One Is Illegal (NOII) has taken the idea of solidarity cities one step further. No One Is Illegal first began in Germany in 1997, inspired by the sans-papiers organizations in France, and has spread to countries all over the world. No One Is Illegal, Toronto calls for the regularization of all nonstatus persons, the end to deportations, the end to the detention of migrants and refugees, and the abolition of security certificates. No One Is Illegal’s strategy is prefigurative insofar as it aims to build a solidarity city in which all the services and institutions of the city agree to serve and protect everyone, regardless of papers. The aim is to mobilize the city in collective civil disobedience against the Canadian government’s immigration policies, effectively building the cosmopolis that they envision without waiting for the state to respond to their demands. As NOII states: “The Solidarity City is about bypassing the ideas behind nation-states and centralized governments.” The goal is to create a true cosmopolis, and they are winning.

In conclusion, republican cosmopolitanism is only part of cosmopolitanism—the most reactionary part. The true agents and movers of cosmopolitan history and politics have always been, and continue to be, migrants.

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NOTES

1. International Organization on Migration, “Future of Migration.”
7. Rawls, Law of Peoples. John Rawls, for instance, goes as far as to posit states “as closed” where “persons enter by birth, and exit by death.” Since Rawls holds that the state’s problems are all internal, once its problems have all been resolved, migration “is eliminated as a serious problem” because no one has any reason to leave. Since large-scale migration ideally would not exist, political theory, for Rawls, should proceed as if it does not.
8. Cole, Philosophies of Exclusion; Agamben, Means without End; Butler and Spivak, Who Sings the Nation-State?
9. Pagden, Fall of Natural Man.
10. Ibid., 15.
11. “A human being is by nature,” Aristotle says “a political animal, and anyone who is without a city-state, not by luck but by nature, is either a poor specimen or else superhuman . . . either a beast or a god” (Aristotle, Politics, Book I, chap. 2, 1253a, 1–30).
15. Benhabib, Rights of Others; Cole, Philosophies of Exclusion.
18. Ibid., 85.
19. Ibid., 77.
20. Ibid., 76.
22. Kant, Perpetual Peace and Other Essays, 8.
23. Ibid., 12.
24. Ibid., 9.
25. Ibid., 13.
26. Ibid., 82.
27. Ibid.
35. Arendt, Origins of Totalitarianism.
36. I develop this history of migrant cosmopolitanism in my book, The Figure of the Migrant (forthcoming with Stanford University Press).
37. Hayter, Open Borders, 144.
38. Ibid.
40. Toronto’s DADT policy lacks solidarity.
41. Kopun and Keung, “City of Unmatched Diversity.”
42. According to No One Is Illegal’s website: http://toronto.nooneisillegal.org/node/274.
43. A “Security Certificate” is a mechanism by which the Government of Canada can detain and deport foreign nationals and all other non-citizens living in Canada.
44. Nail, “Building a Sanctuary City,” 159.

REFERENCES


