Keynote speech

_____

Challenges of Migration towards International Relations Theory, Methodology and Empiricism

Nayani Melegoda[1] and *Pavithra Jayawardena*[2]
Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Colombo[1]
Senior Lecture, Department of International Relations,
University of Colombo[2]

"Migration is an expression of the human aspiration for dignity, safety, and a better future. It is part of the social fabric, part of our very make-up as a human family. … It is our collective responsibility to make migration work for the benefit of migrants and countries alike" stated Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary General of the United Nations at the High-level dialogue on international migration and development on 3rd October 2013. International migration has brought enormous opportunities as well as challenges to the 21st century world. Given its multidisciplinary orientation, the phenomenon of international migration is being studied by many scholars from different disciplinary lenses. This paper specifically details how migration has affected the discipline of International Relations (IR) today. We argue that the increased migration and the complex realities it produces at the levels of the international, state, and individual which are the key units of analysis in IR. We summarize such effects of migration to IR in three key themes: IR theory, methodology and empiricism.

Migration in the 21st century

According to the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in the United Nations (2019), international migration is a global phenomenon that is growing in scope, complexity and impact. Definition of

migration is the movement of persons away from their usual residence through international borders or within a state. Migration can take place due to a myriad of reasons, ranging from economic, security, political, social or emotional reasons. In the present world, migration that is caused by broader development processes are very common. This can be viewed as an essential feature of globalization as well. During the last four decades, 'migration' has produced multifaceted political, economic, security and social implications that presented many challenges in the third decade of the 21st century Global Governance.

Migration is seen both as an opportunity and a challenge in the present world. On one hand, if supported by right sets of economic, social and labour policies, migration can be a positive force that drives the development in different countries. In the 21st century world, migration has become an intrinsic feature of international labour and skills mobility. According to the International Labour Organization (2017) there are 164 million migrant workers worldwide. Of those 164 million migrant workers worldwide, 111.2 million (67.9 per cent) are employed in high-income countries, 30.5 million (18.6 per cent) in upper middle-income countries, 16.6 million (10.1 per cent) in lower middle-income countries and 5.6 million (3.4 per cent) in low income countries (International Organization for Migration, 2019). We agree with then the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki- Moon that millions of migrants who, through their courage, vitality and dreams, help make our societies more prosperous, resilient and diverse.

The counter argument is that, the intensity of mobility across boarders in irregular means affect economies, security negatively. For example, the contemporary irregular migration for European countries from countries like Syria is visibly opposed by many people in European host countries. Irregular migration is defined by the International Organization for Migration (2019) as movement of persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the state of origin, transit or destination. Irregular migrants include refugees, victims of trafficking or unaccompanied migrant children. Apart from the national policies of different countries, there are international laws to protect the irregular migrants. For example, refugees are protected under international

law against being penalized for unauthorized entry or stay if they have travelled from a place where they were at risk (International Organization for Migration, 2019).

Migrants who travel through regular and irregular means have both similar but also different migratory experiences. For instance, people who migrate, through regular channels or irregular channels, face the same experience of leaving a *home* and arriving to a *host*. In other words, people who have migratory lives do not any longer confine their attachments to only one state. Their mobility across international borders has allowed them to establish a range of different relationships, memories and bonds with all those states. As a result, migrants show a visible interest to continue several attachments such as socio-economic, political and emotive, simultaneously with two or more countries. Irregular migrants as a specific community within the migrant community also show their interest in continuing numerous attachments with more than one state.

A key encounter of migration towards IR is its interrogation of the role of individual and the role of nation state. Even though the state used to be the prime actor in IR with sole power and authority over its citizens, the realities produced by migration, among many other dynamics, challenge the supreme power of a nation-state. This was also affected by the rise of human rights discourse which led individuals to have independent agencies irrespective to their state affiliations. Consequently, individual migrants today are now embodied with universal human rights, that goes beyond the authority of states over its citizens.

Migration not only affects individuals and states separately, but it also affects the relationship between individuals and states. For example, the status of citizenship is severely influenced by migration today. The emergence of the concept of citizenship took place far before the international migration turned to be an intensive phenomenon as it is today. Since the city states' era, the role of an active membership was widely discussed, especially in the western societies (Heater, 1990, 1999). For instance, Aristotle said that humankind always acts in order to pursue what it calls good, and the good that statesmen (citizens) attempt to achieve for a particular state is the highest of all (Lord,

2013). The discussion continued in the medieval era in a different degree but picked up again in a tremendous volume in the modern era. Traditionally, citizenship was understood in the context a possible linear relationship between one member and one society, earlier in city-states and lately in nation-states. In both these contexts, the notion of a fixed 'territoriality' played a critical role in the citizenship discussions. Over the decades, citizenship has been contested as a theory as well as a policy. In brief, it symbolises an individual's membership in a nation-state. Individuals are eligible to receive rights and privileges from states through this formal affiliation. In return, states expect their citizens to fulfil a set of both explicit and implicit duties and responsibilities towards the state.

Until recently, the fundamental premises of the concept of citizenship was one citizen-one state. As a result, according to Faist, Gerdes, and Rieple (2004), citizenship and political loyalty to a state was considered as inseparable. The increasing migration, in all its different forms, has challenged this inseparable one citizen-one state premises. Being born in one country, emigrating the born country and deciding to settle in another country (or travelling back and forth two or more countries for several reasons) has become normalized. The advancements of travel, technology, relaxing visa policies and other travel-related infrastructure have further supported the mobility phenomenon. International migration presents many challenges in international relations and diplomacy creating tensions even in diplomatic relations. This is very true in the region of South Asia we live. The existing dichotomy of status of refugees and economic migrants has been contested. The impact of irregular migration therefore is one of the key public policy areas that test global governance.

All these contemporary developments that emerged as consequences of international migration, suggest one thing, that is, the need of citizenship to adopt into a much more pragmatic approach beyond its traditional nation-state-centric view (Bauböck, 1994; Faist, 2010; Kang, 2018; Soysal, 2001; Spiro, 2017). This, ultimately challenges the continuation of the validity of one of the traditional IR concepts, 'territoriality', in the times of increased mobility across the international borders. For example, even though earlier, a person's meaning of *being a citizen* was solely based on his/her attachment with only

one state, the migration has led people to interrogate the ideas such citizenship attachment with one state. As Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) identify, migration leads people who are from migratory backgrounds to live in transnational space fields than in particular physical territories. All in all, migration challenges the static nature of territoriality of traditional IR, demanding territoriality to have a flexible meaning to accommodate migration realities.

In responding to these realities, scholars have suggested different approaches. For example, Cabrera (2010) suggests that the relationships between individuals and nation states are no longer valid. Instead, individuals must be considered as global citizens. On the other hand, through transnational citizenship suggestion, Bauböck (1994) urges the need to convert the traditional nation-state emphasis of citizenship into a global one so that citizenship is better suited to contemporary realities. These evolving discussions of citizenship which was a consequence of migration are also closely related to the discipline of IR. The recent literature on citizenship contributes to problematize the fundamental concepts of IR such as the nation-state, individuals, agents, actors, territoriality, sovereignty, and the international system and to give those concepts meanings in a way that it can cater the current realities produced by the phenomenon of migration.

Below we present the effect of migration to the IR discipline in three key themes separately: IR theory, methodology and empiricism.

Theoretical challenge
The first challenge that migration poses towards the discipline of IR is on its fundamental theories and concepts. The realities that are produced by migration urge IR to revisit and revise some of the fundamental concepts of IR. For example, as discussed above, the validity of the concepts such as territoriality and nation-state in its conventional forms are critiqued. The concept of the nation-state in IR has traditionally been constructed on the territoriality of state (Agnew, 1994). In other words, every nation-state is interchangeably understood as a territorial-state. This has given the state a sense that it is an unmovable and a fixed unit with clearly defined territorial boarders. Nonetheless, the transnationalism of migration interrogates this

way of viewing the state as a fixed entity. For example, when scholars who studied transnationalism suggest that we need to understand migrants' lives in a transnational space than in a particular fixed physical unit, IR's traditional model of a nation-state cannot fit in such suggestions properly (Baubock, 1994; Faist, 2010; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Levitt & Nyberg-Sorensen, 2004; Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-szanton, 1992). According to Kang (2018), IR scholars have not studied the other different dimensions of nation-state adequately than territoriality. Consequently, the narrow understanding based on 'territoriality' has led IR scholars to perceive the nation-state, the predominant unit of analysis in IR, as a fixed and ahistorical unit (Kang, 2018). For Agnew (1994), this is a 'territorial trap'. He suggests that IR as a discipline is trapped in its overemphasis on territoriality in understanding the relations between and within nation-states.

However, there is a growing effort by IR scholars, particularly those who are from critical theorists, to study the non-territorial boundaries of state. For example, Niang (2020) highlights that the boundaries of states as not only territorial but also racial, ethnic and ideological. Normative researchers of the field of migration and citizenship, such as Baubock (2010) also suggest the need to expand the conventional theoretical boundaries. For example, he highlights the need to understand migration as a combination of many variables, socio-economic, political, emotive variables in both home and host country, rather than looking at different aspects of the phenomenon separately. This claim also implicitly suggests that the conventional nation-state understanding is inadequate to explain the complex realities of migration. Thus, we suggest that IR scholars need to expand the knowledge on nation-states' boarders beyond its territoriality.

Methodological challenge

The next challenge posed by migration towards the discipline of IR is a methodological one. Migration is a multidisciplinary phenomenon. It overlaps with many other disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, geography, psychology and economy. Consequently, the scholars who are from different methodological orientations have studied different dimensions of migration. These different methodologies range from positivist, interpretivist, critical and to deconstructive methodologies. It can be noticed that IR scholars are

yet using positivist and interpretivist methodologies largely, though not without exceptions (Niang, 2020). Thus, we suggest that the discipline of IR should go beyond its traditional methodologies to understand the complex realities migration brings. It is suggested that IR scholars move into using alternative to examine the effect of complex and nuanced realities of migration not only to the state, as the prime unit of IR, but also to the individuals, the communities and the international, as three other main units of analyses of the field.

Empirical challenge

The third challenge we identify is an empirical one that also overlaps with the previously explained theoretical and methodological challenges. The increased international migration in the contemporary world has triggered the necessity for IR to ask a series of new empirical questions, such as: 'how do migrants' transnational relationship with two states affect the relationship of these two countries?', 'what does it mean to be a dual citizen?', 'what are the implications for states of having dual citizens who pledge simultaneous allegiance for two states?' or 'what are the causes and consequences of anti-migrant rhetoric in some states?'. The discipline IR also needs to produce more empirical knowledge about potential threats and benefits migration brings, not only from the state point of view, but also from a non-state as well as individual point of views. If IR can explore empirical knowledge about migration in a multidimensional way, it would be able to provide necessary academic or policy level alternatives for countries to respond for migration in a meaningful way.

In conclusion, the paper suggests that there is a gap in the field of IR that it still cannot explain the changes brought by migration to international relations adequately. IR as a discipline that keeps state and non-state actors and their relationships at the centre, we suggest that it's time to strengthen its analytical explanations towards the migration. In the present day context of COVID 19 Pandemic where South Asia saw and influx of returnee migrant workers and others to their motherlands it is crucial that three particular avenues of IR theory, methodology and empiricism, that needs further scholarly intervention.

References

Agnew, J. (1994). The territorial trap :The geographical assumptions of International Relations theory. *Review of International Political Economy*, *1*(1), 53–80. https://doi.org/130.195.21.27

Baubök, R. (1994). *Transnational citizenship: Membership and rights in international migration*. Hants: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.

Baubök, R. (2010). Cold constellations and hot identities : Political theory questions about transnationalism and diaspora. In Rainer Baubök & T. Faist (Eds.), *Diaspora and Transnationalism* (pp. 295–322). Amsterdam University Press. Retrieved from https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09739572.2016.1183898

Cabrera, L. (2010). *The Practice of Global Citizenship*. Cambridge University Press.

Faist, T. (2010). Diapora and transnationalism: What kind of dance partners? In Rainer Baubök & T. Faist (Eds.), *Diaspora and Transnationalism* (pp. 9–34). Amsterdam University Press. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46mz31.4

Faist, T., Gerdes, J., & Rieple, B. (2004). Dual citizenship as a path-dependent process. *International Migration Review*, *38*(3), 913–944. https://doi.org/10.2307/27645421

Heater, D. (1990). *Citizenship: The civic ideal in world history, politics and education*. Harlow: Longman Group UK Limited.

Heater, D. (1999). *What is citizenship?* Cambridge: Polity Press.

International Labour Organization. (2017). New ILO Figures show 164 million people are migrant workers. Retrieved October 15, 2020, from https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_652106/lang--en/index.htm

International Organization for Migration. (2019). Key Migration Terms. Retrieved February 19, 2020, from https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms#Migrant

Kang, H. (2018). Investigating multiple citizenship in International Relations rethinking globalization, nation-states and social contract. *Global: Jurnal Politik Internasional*, *20*(1), 15–37. https://doi.org/10.7454/global.v20i1.315

Levitt, P., & Glick Schiller, N. (2004). Conceptualizing simultaneity: A transnational social field perspective on society. *International Migration Review*, *38*(3), 1002–1039. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2004.tb00227.x

Levitt, P., & Jaworsky, B. N. (2007). Transnational migration studies: Past developments and future trends. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *33*(1), 129–156. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.33.040406.131816

Levitt, P., & Nyberg-Sørensen, N. (2004). *The transnational turn in migration studies* (No. 6). *Global migration perspectives*.

Lord, C. (2013). *Aristotle's Politics* (second). The University of Chicago.

Moon, Ban Ki, https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2013-10-03/secretary-generals-remarks-high-level-dialogue-

Niang, A. (2020). The slave, the migrant and the ontological topographies of the international. *International Relations*, *34*(3), 333–353. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117820946809

Schiller, N. G., Basch, L., & Blanc-szanton, C. (1992). Transnationalism : A New Analytic Framework for Understanding Migration. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, *645*(1), 1–24.

Soysal, Y. N. (2001). Postnational Citizenship: Reconfiguring the Familiar Terrain. In K. Nash & A. Scott (Eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Sociology* (pp. 333–341). Blackwell Publishing.

Spiro, P. (2017). Multiple citizenship. In A. Shachar, R. Bauböck, I. Bloemraad, & M. Vink (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Citizenship*. Oxford University Press.

The United Nations. (2019). International Migration. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/theme/international-migration/index.asp