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Cosmopolitanism, Migration, and Transnationalism: An Interview with Nina Glick Schiller

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Dr. Nina Glick Schiller was founding director of the Research Institute for Cosmopolitan Culture and is Professor Emeritus at the University of Manchester and the University of New Hampshire. Dr. Glick Schiller has published more than ninety articles and nine books on migration, transnational processes and social relations, diasporic connections, and long-distance nationalism. She has also conducted research in Haiti, the US, the UK, and Germany and worked with migrants from all around the world. Her recent book, *Whose Cosmopolitanism?: Critical Perspectives, Relationalities, and Discontents*, co-edited with Andrew Irving, offers a critical look at the concept of cosmopolitanism.

disClosure Collective (DC): So, first, I would like to say your work on *Nations Unbound* was so important in defining and examining transnationalism and has continued to be incredibly influential in migration studies. Were you surprised by the great influence of your work? And can you speak a little bit about your own understanding of transnationalism and how that's changed over time?

Nina Glick Schiller (NGS): Okay, well, it was not just my book. Both *Nations Unbound* and the proceeding edited book, *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration*, were co-authored by Linda Basch and Cristina Szanton Blanc, and so the work on transnationalism was very much a collective and collaborative project. And I prefer to work collectively and collaboratively because I think that creates a much richer scholarship. And there is a sort of a triangulation when people with different kinds of life experiences and different kinds of social histories come together and see things together. Then, in a mutual way, you feel that you've got something. You've got some kind of analysis that holds up reflecting various different life experiences.

When we began working on developing a transnational migration paradigm, which was in the 1980s, actually, we knew that this was very important. We had a sense that it was urgent, that we were setting out a new direction for migration studies and that we had to organize a way to be heard. From the beginning we were convinced that we had something to say. We didn't think it was original in a sense that other people have never said this before. We knew that we were building on existing scholarship, but the previous scholarship hadn't been brought together as a challenge to migration studies. So the research was there, the data was there, some of the key concepts were there, but they weren't put together in an alternative research paradigm that challenged both assimilationism and the tendency to focus solely

on immigrant identities rather than multiple simultaneous nation-state building processes. Instead, we suggested really examining the way people lived their lives in two or more nation-states at the same time.

DC: Has your understanding changed?

NGS: Changed? Well, we were—well, let me go back to the question: “Were we surprised?” So, we weren’t surprised that the framework we offered resonated with many people, because we knew that many people were living or studying transnational lives but lacked a way of describing and analyzing these lives. So our analytical framework resonated both with people with migrant backgrounds and also with migration scholars who had data about people living their lives across borders but didn’t have the way to express it. But we were concerned that our terminology would be taken up by nation-states and used as a new way to exploit immigrants. And that happened also and we weren’t surprised, but we were concerned that migrant-sending countries increasingly were seeing immigrants as a new form of cash flow and a way of funding national economies.

However, what has surprised me over the last twenty or so years since the publication of *Nations Unbound* is the way that the global perspective of the book was ignored. The descriptive aspects of the book looked at the way people build familial ties transnationally, the way people build political ties, the way people build religious ties, the way people build social, economic, and cultural ties. That was taken up. And some scholars also began to describe simultaneity, which was in the book. The concept of simultaneity highlights that not only do people live across borders, but that they also become part of the nation-state in which they live. However, what was generally ignored in our work was the idea that we need a framework that can *explain* why people do this: why they migrate, why they settle, why they maintain ties, and how that relates to what was happening in the sending countries and the receiving countries in terms of how they are located within the global political economy.

Nations Unbound presented a framework that can put it all together and this was ignored, increasingly ignored. People were interested in what we said about human agency and not what we said about structure. For us structure and agency come together; you have to look at both. Of course you can’t just have a structural analysis without understanding what people do in the face of the conditions and opportunities and barriers that they face and how they struggle against and change structural conditions. But you can’t leave out the structural conditions. Structure and agency are mutually constituting and this was all in *Nations Unbound*, which examined globe-spanning institutions of unequal power.

And the other thing that surprised me, and I felt that I have to reiterate, is that we talked about the role of nation-states by focusing on nation-state building processes. Yet, our book was cited over and over again as if the *Nations Unbound* announced the end of nation-states, the end of nationalism. We were cited as if we said there was now a global flow of people and goods that marks the demise of the nation-state. Soon after the publication of *Nations Unbound* some authors did tend to celebrate flows of people, ideas, capital, and objects. However, we were saying something different about nation-states. We were looking at continuing national structures and borders and border regimes. We said that sending states began to see themselves as deterritorialized because they continued to claim their citizens all around wherever they settle. Meanwhile, the nation-states that were receiving migrants also remained important. They played a role in trying to tame this transnational behavior. For example, in the US we noted that the dominant narrative was “well it’s all fine that you have other flags, as long as the American flag is on top of your flag pole.” A police official once told me that directly when I interviewed him. So, the officials of both sending and receiving states were responding to the transnational networks of migrants through state discourses and narratives, and *Nations Unbound* looked at the way they did this.

In the past twenty years, I have found it necessary to reiterate over and over again that we need a

global perspective on migration. I've written a number of articles on that and on the global perspective on migration and development. More recently I've tried to stress that a global perspective must pay attention to the changing historical conjuncture that migrants face as they try to live their lives across borders. *Nations Unbound* described conditions that existed in the 1980s and 1990s. Yet people continue to study transnational migration as if the world hasn't changed—as if people can, in fact, live simultaneously in two or more places. But border regimes are changing, citizenship rights are being attenuated, and the possibility of gaining permanent residence, and the possibility of obtaining citizenship in another country is being attenuated. Currently it has become much more difficult to settle or to move or to legally achieve family reunion. You see this restriction on for family reunion taking place in Europe, for example. These changed conditions mean that the basic assumptions that we made about the way migrants can hedge their bets and live in two or more places and maintain home ties while they settle has to be rethought. You can't talk about transnational migration without examining both the conditions that make it necessary and the national and border policies that facilitate it or restrict it. We were writing at the time when the Mexican immigrants could come without documents and then, sort of, wade across the Rio Grande, and then go back and forth. They faced hassle, but not a wall. They were not risking their lives every time and not paying thousands and thousands of dollars to get to come to the United States. And the process of migration is becoming ever more expensive and dangerous for many people. The consequences are vast family indebtedness, the involvement of criminal gangs, and the growth of a whole migration industry of surveillance, detention, and fees; all this has greatly increased the difficulty of movement, even as conditions at home, including war and economic crisis, make it increasingly difficult for people to continue to live where they are.

So, we have to examine the whole way we look at migrancy and also update a global perspective on migration in light of the current conditions, the current conjuncture, and what that means for how we understand both mobility and stasis. So that perhaps answers your question about whether my understanding of transnational migration has changed.

DC: You have focused recently on issues of cosmopolitanism and worked to bring new meaning to the term. Why and how has your focus shifted towards issues of cosmopolitanism? Can you explain some of your evolution as a scholar?

NGS: I wouldn't exactly say my work or my focus has shifted. I try to encompass my reading of cosmopolitan sociability within the global perspective I've been developing and my understanding of how migrants live their lives by settling and maintaining various forms of transnational ties and responding to the barriers and racialization they face in both their mobility and settlement. My work on the processes of settlement responds to the fact that emplacement is now taking place within a growing anti-immigrant political movement and moment that claims that the problem with "these people" is that they won't learn our ways. That's what the politicians keep saying in both the US and Europe, using somewhat different terms in different places, too. The narrative claims that "the problem with these people is they just keep their culture and they keep their language." In the US, people who proudly identify as the descendants of immigrants claim that immigrants used to assimilate but now these people just keep to themselves and their culture, and so the new immigrants are threatening our social fabric. And, any evidence of transnational ties is taken as evidence that people aren't settling.

So, in response, I needed a set of concepts to look more closely at the process of how people settle, and with whom they actually build social ties, and who gets involved in transnational networks. And I felt that there was some way that we could use the term *cosmopolitanism* to speak about what happens on the ground as migrants settle, because I found over and over again is not that people hang out with people

who are like them because they share an ethnicity. Rather, migrants socialize with people who are like them in all kinds of ways and these ways may have nothing to do with their national background. They make ties with people because they share the social position of parents who face the common challenge of raising children, or because they are neighbors or they're co-workers or they're professionals, or they have some kind of interest together. Perhaps they share an interest in video games, or they like the same films. There are all kinds of ways in which people connect to other people that are not seen by politicians and many social scientists because they assume that immigrants only hang out with people who share their background.

Now the standing definition, for many people, of cosmopolitanism has been openness to the *other*, tolerance of the *other*. That creates a uniform community of the "we," the national we, in the sense of a homogeneous, racialized "we" like "we white folks," "we white folks in the UK," "we white folks in the US", or something like that. The uniform "we" is then thought to be cosmopolitan when this "we" has an appreciation for a diverse other such as migrants. Diversity in this reading of cosmopolitanism is a positive good because it makes life more interesting and more variable.

But I thought we could challenge the way the term "cosmopolitanism" has come to be used, just as we had challenged the way migration was understood. We could challenge settlement. Okay? And we could say, actually, people who were considered native and those who were considered immigrants form ties based on domains of commonality that they come to share in their daily interaction. And the reason we don't talk about this is nobody looks and we need a term to highlight these domains of commonality—and I've called it *cosmopolitan sociability*. And of course when people form such social bonds they aren't made on the basis of feeling that they have everything in common, but only a particular domain of commonality. Of course, no one, whether kin or lover, ever forms a fully encompassing social bond. However, acting on domains of commonality is one of the ways that people of migrant and non-migrant backgrounds connect to each other. So that's what I tried to do with the concept of cosmopolitanism within debates about migrant emplacement.

Furthermore, I began to realize that we can extend the concept of simultaneity to make it clear that not only do migrants both form ties of cosmopolitan sociability that are part of their emplacement within a new locality, but they also maintain their family networks, as well as various ties across borders, which may or may not be organized by ethnicity. And, through migrants' transnational ties, people who are not of migrant background but have established forms of cosmopolitan sociability with migrants also become part of transnational networks. So, migrants have all kinds of transnational ties and they have all kinds of local ties, simultaneously. Migrants do not live with networks defined by national origins or ethno-religious background either in their new home or transnationally.

DC: Is the concept of cosmopolitanism applicable to all migrant communities?

NGS: Well, I don't use the word "migrant community" and I am not applying it to all migrants. The whole trajectory of my analysis is against assuming that migrants form communities. Whether migrants form a "community" and if and when they use the term "community" is a research question. My response to your question also reflects my own experience with immigrants from Haiti. I began working with immigrants from Haiti when, during the early days of migrant settlement, many people from Haiti didn't want to know each other because they were divided by class and they were divided by politics. So when they met each other and they realized that the other person was also of Haitian background, they would check out the family background of this person. Is this someone I want to know, you know, or not. And so there was certainly not a sense of a community. I don't think it was unique to Haitians. It wasn't just them. As you know, people who migrate from the same country have regional, political, religious, and

class divisions.

Then, the anti-poverty programs of the 1970s provided Haitian immigrants with money to form organizations using the word *community* and *Haitian community centers*, okay? And then those people who received the funding that enabled them to provide immigrant services adopted these terms. I worked closely with them and we would speak in the name of “the Haitian community.” We would go to meetings and say “The Haitian community wants this; the Haitian community wants that”, and were trying to get resources for English language education and job training to Haitian immigrants. To do this we would imagine and project the narrative of community.

Most Haitian immigrants in New York City knew nothing about this. When Haitians were labeled as “people with AIDS” in the 1980s and then there was a huge outpouring of resistance to this labeling on the part of Haitians and tens of thousands of the people came into the street, they claimed to speak as a Haitian community. At that moment, and in the sense that the term became embodied and visual, there was a Haitian community, at least at that time, in relationship to those issues. But, if you just assume that people are a community, you can’t see the processes and the structural forces that contribute to this identity, okay? So that’s one thing.

And if you define your unit of study and analysis as community, you can’t see cosmopolitan sociability. In terms of cosmopolitanism, I’m saying that people of migrant backgrounds form ties with each other based on some kinds of domains of mutuality, of commonality. Some of these ties are affective and there is an emotional aspect to cosmopolitan sociability. At the same time, there is a substantive aspect to cosmopolitan sociability in terms of people coming together in relationship to things they are interested in and that they share. These common interests or activities don’t tie them totally together and for all times. However, people do often come together around interests or perspectives or activities they share. And migrants do this not just with other migrants. They do this with non-migrants, too. We can’t just assume that just because you come from the same country or the same ethno-religious group, you like each other, you think that you share the same culture, or that you bond with each other and form a community. When a social bond is actually formed, whatever the background of those who come together, we could call that *cosmopolitan sociability*.

DC: Thank you. And you said that movement doesn’t necessarily create cosmopolitanism, but what about the individuals who never move? How can these individuals be considered cosmopolitan? Do they need to know someone who has moved or migrated?

NGS: No, I think it’s a false equation to link mobility to this openness to domains of commonality, to openness to not “the other” but other people. I think this is part of the human capacity that we tend not to study. It doesn’t make sense to only focus on mobility. Some people move, learn new things, meet new people, and these experiences do foster openness. However, other people move, and they’re traumatized and they never come out of this trauma. And they don’t want to go any place except exactly what they know. A classic case in my own family history was an in-law who migrated from Russia, learned just the trolley routes in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania to specific places she needed to go. She wouldn’t go any place else but complete her errands and come back home, you know. So, people are different, and part of our problem is that we just categorize people in terms of migrant/non-migrant.

We use the national border as some kind of division between people’s behavior. This is, I think, extremely suspect. Sometimes it matters because there are border regimes that brand difference and make people behave in different ways depending on their legal status. If you’re undocumented, you have to hide more, so that will restrict you in particular ways. But to assume that a migrant experience is always the relevant explanation—whether you are claiming it makes cosmopolitans or communitarians—is just

bad social science. So if you're living in a place and you've never moved and you've never gone anywhere, and you read or you watch television and you watch films, and that gives you a sense of bonding with other people, then you may develop your cosmopolitan sensibilities without ever moving. And then when you meet people who are classified as different from you in some way, may not be ethnically—it may be you're Catholic and they're Protestant, you know, and suddenly you find the capacity to see some kind of shared human experience that otherwise you wouldn't have had because of your upbringing—could be the bonding that I call cosmopolitan sociability.

DC: Much of your work challenges binary thinking in relation to culture, nationalism, and identity. For instance, you discuss the dichotomy of self and the stranger. Why has this sort of thinking been such an issue in the social sciences? How is your understanding of cosmopolitanism helpful in challenging this problem?

NGS: Yes, I ask myself that all the time. Why the persistence of this binary? It is so strong. It came through some of the discussion that we just had. We are taught to just automatically assume migrant community/non-migrant or movement/non-movement, and we are encouraged to think in terms of binaries. Now, there are different trains of thought, different kinds of theories about this. I mean, the structuralists, including several variants of structuralist theory from those of Lévi-Strauss, for example, and those that base themselves on linguistics, and some readings of brain science, say this is hard-wired. We humans learned to think and learn languages in terms of contrast, so, of course, we learn to think in binaries. I don't think that. I think that's an imposition of a western category on top of the brain science or on top of a reading of Amazonian myths. I think it works the other way around. I think actually people have a capacity for multiplicities, and, if you really do a linguistic analysis, all phonemic contrasts are not binary. Computers may work in terms of positive and negative charges of electricity.

Humans seem in different cultural traditions or places to have concepts of simultaneity and multiplicity that don't seem to have developed within modernist Western social theory. You can interpret concepts of Ying and Yang as a binary or you speak in terms of interdependence and relationality, which is very different from a contrast. So, this is a topic of ongoing debate. But I do think in Western social science there has been that an assumption that binaries can be traced to the origins of society. This assumption has been accompanied by a sort of a just-so story, a narrative of origins. A mythic past is projected which begins with people living in closed communities where they say all those outside their communal boundaries are "the stranger." So the binaries of self/other and community/the stranger have been built into Western social science and political science, sociology, and some people read anthropology that way. But if you go and you actually look, even at the anthropological works that are cited to prove that pre-industrial society was constituted around bounded community, you find something different. People may have lived in villages and in some cases may have claimed that their neighbors were cannibals, but they also intermarried with the neighbors. Moreover, the boundary between the lands of the village and its neighbors or the dividing line between one culture and another was often very flexible and mobile.

DC: How do we use cosmopolitanism to understand the establishment of Hindu temples in major urban cities throughout the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia by migrant communities? Do Hindu temples indicate a preservation of "Hindu religious identity" in a foreign land? How might the concept of cosmopolitanism be applied to this context to understand how migrants maintain a particular identity?

NGS: Well, I think that that kind of narrative needs to be considered in relationship to historical and current research and investigation, because Hindu temples in India and the concept of Hinduism, as

you know, have changed over time. And, you know, the concept of Hinduism as a unified religion was a development of British colonialism. There is an important body of scholarship that documents this change and traces how the British officials and intellectuals categorized and fixed religious boundaries in India that previously were much more fluid. In the villages there was—and in some places still is—a great deal of local multiplicities of religious practices drawing from what we now identify as different religions at the time that the British arrived. Over time the British created a concept of Hinduism, with a capital “H”, as compared to Islam with a capital “I,” but actually that’s not what people practiced, and, in some ways, it’s not what people still practice. So on the ground you have this multiplicity.

Then, when people migrate, religions always change and, depending on where they migrate, they change in different ways. So, to read what you find in London as Hinduism is to ignore the ways in which practices and beliefs have actually changed. Because you have people who come from different parts of India with different traditions, and then they come to London and they adopt a new set of practices established by a particular temple as Hinduism or establish a new temple. There’s variations; what is practiced and believed in London may not be what’s on the ground in India, and there is variation within London. So we can’t have this category “Hindu temple,” or “Hindu community”, if we look on the ground. Sometimes there is a continuity of a particular group, kin-based, caste-based group, that is now continuing and calling itself the Hindu community. In other cases, people from different kinds of more regional traditions come together at the same temple, and in that situation there are people from different traditions who would never have met otherwise.

In such cases, there is bonding, a form of openness to commonality—in that sense a form of cosmopolitan openness to commonality—that these migrants wouldn’t have experienced back home. In such cases, migration can lead to a form of openness. But, as compared to other kinds of openness, religious practitioners may at the same time draw a line between those categorized as believers and all others. However, although the degree to which practitioners are comfortable with a multiplicity of beliefs varies in different places and periods of time, not all forms and instances of religious belief impose binaries. So, that’s how I approach that.

DC: So, the book *Whose Cosmopolitanism* has a lot of different definitions of cosmopolitanism, and some are a little bit problematic. I was wondering, how do some cities use cosmopolitanism as a marketing tool? What are some of the more problematic understandings of the concept? And what is the relationship between cosmopolitanism and capitalism?

NGS: Ahh, okay. A few small questions.

DC: Just a few.

NGS: Okay. So, let’s start with those people—not me—those people who define cosmopolitanism in terms of openness to the other. And let’s look at the task that faces city developers and local politicians who, in a very neoliberal world, find that they can no longer depend on national resources or public resources to build their city. Cities have always been, to a certain degree within Western capitalism, at least, in competition with each other. If you look at the world’s fairs, such as the Chicago Exposition held at the end of the nineteenth century, or other 19th century incredible expositions such as the one in Paris, you see city-based projects with national resonances organized with the goal of attracting investment in those cities. So competition between cities and city branding are not totally new. It’s just, for a number of years, especially in the 20th century, nation-states invested resources into urban public works, and there were city-based tax structures with public monies to build urban infrastructures such as the sewers,

water systems, mass transit, roadways, parks, and libraries, schools, and clinics.

Now, cities find themselves again more on their own without national support of adequate tax revenue to stimulate employment or to maintain or build infrastructure, so they have to attract private capital investment. And, to attract capital, they also have to convince investors that they have the workforce that will make the city a perfect place to invest in various kinds of “post-industrial” sectors including high-tech, knowledge, science, health, and tourism. So, cities work to brand themselves in order to attract investors. It’s almost as if urban developers are reading from the same playbook in trying to brand their city. They’re convinced that they need a certain kind of creative youthful workforce and that they need to have a certain kind of image to attract that work force.

People such as Richard Florida have gone around the world preaching that cities that successfully attract capital and regenerate after deindustrialization are those known to be creative. Such cities must attract a creative workforce, and this workforce is key to attracting investment and revitalizing a city. Therefore, the question becomes, “How do you attract these creative people?” The assumption also in the work of Florida and like-minded urbanists is that high-tech people are young, mobile and they like to consume culture difference. And they like diversity. They don’t want to live in a boring city where everybody is the same. They like restaurants and shops that offer food and goods from all over the world. They like cities that are a bit edgy. So it’s in light of this received wisdom that cities started to brand themselves as cosmopolitan, with the idea that this label announces that creative youth should “come here, you will get a taste of the other. We are the city that has the taste of the other.” This narrative was stronger before the crash in 2008, but now Florida has re-emerged and is revitalizing his narrative, and urban regeneration continues in both powerful cities such as New York, London, and Singapore and disempowered cities such as Detroit or Liverpool.

Now, there are all kinds of contradictions in branding a city as cosmopolitan and instituting tax and zoning policies that encourage gentrification and high-end housing. Because the more urban developers regenerate city centers and raise real estate prices and rents as they gentrify to attract “the creative class”, in Richard Florida’s words, the poorer people, racialized people, including many people of migrant background—those who create the ‘edgy’ diversity of the city—are pushed to the margins. They are pushed out of the industries, the jobs, and the shops they’ve developed. Of course, “migrant” is a category that includes multiple classes and levels of education and skill. As we know from sitting around this table, and everywhere these days, there are international students, professionals from all over the world, skilled workers, large and small business owners, as well as construction workers and a wide range of service workers of migrant background, and all of whom are needed to build the city. But the cosmopolitan city builders only cater to one sector of that population, and the cost of housing, food, transportation, education, and other necessities becomes more expensive for the low paid workforce and small business owners in the city, including those of migrant background.

DC: How might you respond to critical views of cosmopolitanism that link the concept to consumption, neoliberalism, and nationalism?

NGS: Well, this is part of what I was saying in the previous answer. It’s one variety of the use of the term. It ignores the way people actually build cities. Cities everywhere have always been built by migration—rural, urban migration, as well as migration across borders. Rural people are culturally different than people in the city. Countries have regional diversities of language and culture. So all these diversities, not just the diversities from other parts of the world, have always built the city. But this is ignored in an understanding of what cities are, and how people relate to each other, in the neoliberal version of cosmopolitanism marketing to a particular strata of high income, mobile people who are assumed to

consume the cultural difference of a so-called cosmopolitan city. The irony is that, if you do research with people considered to be the creative classes or you look at how these populations live, they are usually the least open in terms of their social relations. Those who consume in the city centers gentrified through neoliberal tax and housing policies live in gated areas. They're afraid of other parts of the city and other people. They only know people of their same class. They fill some of the stereotypes of the provincial even though they're mobile because they live in their own very sheltered world. Not all of them, but many of them. They live in a sort of an expat world—so they go from city to city, but they don't really form the social ties that less well-off migrants often form in terms of local life because less well-off migrants have to find whatever kinds of social ties they can in order to help themselves. Does that respond to your question?

DC: Yes.

NGS: And nationalism. That's an interesting question because cosmopolitanism is often seen as the opposite of the nationalism. Sometimes the term is linked to highly mobile professionals who are thought to have no local roots and no nation. Now, it's true about many capitalists. Capitalists have no loyalties in their efforts to maximize their profit. They invest and develop space and resources wherever they most benefit, regardless of its effect on the 'home' country of the capitalist or the corporate entity. In general, corporations and their investors seek the cheapest labor with the least restriction and the least taxes and the most benefits, period, bottom line. However, big corporations may benefit from nationalist rhetoric and fund extremely nationalist movements if these movements protect corporate profits, tax breaks, and their control of labor conditions, including institutional racism. In addition, there are profits to be made both in the arms industry and wars fueled by nationalist rhetoric.

If capitalists in their actions have no nation, what is the relationship to the ninety-nine percent of the people who are not major capitalists? These people are capable of a multiplicity of identities. They can be caught up in nationalist rhetoric and yet, at the same time, they constantly are subject to the disruptive nature of capitalist cycles of creation and destruction. The disruption leads to anger and fear and a search for answers. Yet most people have all kinds of ties and possible identities because they live in a world that is actually constantly refigured in ways that link the "here" and "there". They can have imaginaries or social ties that link them to elsewhere while people who travel can live in a very cocoon-like world—so that's one problem. And linked to that is the fact that, if people have multiple identities, they can have a rooted identity and an open identity at the same time and one doesn't necessarily negate the other. It can, but it doesn't necessarily.

I learned this when I was working with Georges Fouron, and it comes out in our book *George Woke Up Laughing*. I have always been skeptical—having grown up in the United States—of nationalism. By distinguishing between a national culture and those defined as culturally, racially, and religiously different, as well as legitimating wars of aggression, nationalism seemed to me a justification for and exploitation of people around the world. Yet Georges Fouron, who shared my political outlook in many ways, was a fervent Haitian nationalist. But when I went to Haiti and we interviewed very poor people, who were living in squatter settlements and who had almost nothing, I began to see a different side to nationalism in a country such as Haiti. The people who interviewed expressed their fervent sense of being Haitian and their nationalism. I realized that in an oppressed nation-state such as Haiti, where people are racialized and stereotyped in ways that are integral to the history of slavery and the continuing exploitation of the population and the whole country, an assertion of nationalism is a claim for racial equality. So, for poor people in Haiti, the Haitian flag stands for their past revolution against slavery where the Haitian people led the world in demanding equality. The flag tells the world "We're just as

good as everybody else.” That is what it means to be Haitian, to be part of a proud nation that has defied slavery, stood for the equality of all human beings and the message of the French Revolution, which proclaimed liberty, equality and fraternity.

So there can be a nationalism that speaks to the rest of the world. The other thing these people, these impoverished people, were saying to us is, we stand with oppressed people, everyone. The Haitian flag stands for all oppressed people, not to be on top of them, not to be better than them, but to stand for their struggle for social justice everywhere. This was articulated to George and me by people who had never gone to school and never studied the French Revolution. However, there was a strong oral tradition of revolutionary resistance that exists in Haiti, so that’s where nationalism and what I would call cosmopolitanism can come together.

Now, that’s what the Haitian flag means to poor Haitians—and not what it means to rich Haitians. The rich Haitians and the international capitalists to whom they are allied and by whom they are supported militarily and financially use nationalism as a way of staying in power and exploiting the majority of the people. However, today, in a historical conjuncture in which increasingly capitalists’ profits are being made by accumulation through dispossession in the former centers of capital and among people who have been racialized as the majority populations in Europe and the Americas, there may be a new basis of unity among the dispossessed. In this conjuncture, all nationalism becomes a barrier to forming movements based on a sense of a commonality, a common need to build a humane, just world.

DC: What kinds of projects are you working on now?

NGS: I’m working on a book about the relationship between migrants and disempowered cities or cities that don’t have a lot of wealth and power. In this book we note that most of our theorization about migration comes, or has come until very recently, from scholars’ studies in global cities. And that’s not the only place where migrants live. It’s not the only place where other people live, right? Here we are in Lexington, Kentucky. In the last ten or fifteen years there finally has been more research on migrants settling in the south of the US—that is, settling in what are considered non-global cities—although they are part of globe-spanning networks of differential power. But much of this research is not theorized. So now we have research beyond cities considered global, but it isn’t put together. For the past fifteen years we have been asking, what if we begin here and we say, how can we broaden our understanding of migrant settlement and transnational connection by understanding how migrants build cities that are not these globally powerful cities? So we’ve written about this in, actually, the past fifteen years. We’ve written a series of articles about this and edited a book, *Locating Migration*, but we’ve never been able to bring the different aspects of our research together in our own book. We’ve critiqued the idea of ethnic entrepreneur and we’ve showed how, in these cities, people of migrant background build businesses that cater to everybody and become part of the city economy. And we’ve looked at religion and we’ve seen how people of migrant background use religious networks to build ties to a city and the social fabric of the city. We’ve looked at Pentecostalism, particularly—how people have worked with people seen as native to the city or country to make claims that they speak in the name of Jesus. And, therefore, their vision is a claim to the land. They claim that newcomers belong to the city in which they are settling because the dividing line is not between foreigner or native but between those who are on the side of Jesus and those who are on the side of the devil. These kinds of religious narratives can become part of local politics and change the view of people toward migrants.

I’ve also looked at cosmopolitan sociability—how people actually build ties to local people, and how that kind of sociability is actually part of city making. Now we are trying to bring together the different aspects of our research that we have published as articles together and write a single book that

then challenges and develops the concept of displacement and emplacement. So the other thing that's going on in this book is to theorize the changing global conjuncture. We argue that in the current historical conjuncture there is a revitalization of the processes of capital accumulation through dispossession. We argue that contemporary accumulation through dispossession in the seemingly disparate disempowered cities we have studied—Manchester, New Hampshire in the US, Halle/Saale in eastern Germany, and the Turkish city of Mardin on the Turkish-Syrian border—tie together the migrants who settle there and the people who consider themselves native. Those considered native and migrant both face displacement in terms of not only physical mobility but also social mobility because of accumulation through dispossession. They have been displaced by the neoliberal processes of urban regeneration we have discussed above. When cities compete with each other and redevelop, there are large parts of the local populations who are losers. The glitzy city center development doesn't do anything for the life of most of the people, and the redevelopment really isn't necessarily a success. Public monies are borrowed to fuel private real estate development, taxes taken from public services to pay interest on regeneration loans, and the result is wealth for some and dispossession for many. People lose their pension, housing, benefits, and social in some places, and their country and future in other places. So, we want to see whether we can theorize these processes of dispossession, displacement, and struggles for emplacement and understand what's behind the processes of settlement and connection between migrants and non-migrants in disempowered cities. So that's the project.

DC: And who are you working with on that project?

NGS: Ayse Çağlar. She's a professor of anthropology at the University of Vienna. So she brings a different background and a different history. She's also been educated part in Montreal, part in Turkey, and part in Germany. So she has the sense of multiple emplacements, and we find it very helpful to think together. She's a wonderful scholar, you should check out her work.

DC: Thank you. Finally, we'd like to know what advice you have for us or beginning scholars, scholars who are just starting to engage in issues of transnationalism, migration, and cosmopolitanism.

NGS: I would say that it's very important to look at the changing conditions in the world and to theorize that. What I'm most concerned about, that's what I spoke about yesterday, and that's why I didn't want to offend people, but I used the term *dead ends*. I think that the kind of migration and transnational migration scholarship that's been going on produces interesting, valuable descriptions, but if the project is to really understand the world, much of the current scholarship doesn't take us there. And if the project is to have a scholarship that is part of the struggle for social justice, it definitely doesn't take us there because to do that we have to understand what's going on as it impacts us in the mutual constitution of the local, national, and global. We need a *multiscalar* analysis. So many students, especially in something like anthropology or, I would say, in literature say, "How can I do that? It's not my specialty, I don't study economics and I'm just here. I'm just here in Lexington, Kentucky. What can I do? What can I do about understanding the whole world?" But that's why I emphasize, the whole world is right here. Transnational connections change Lexington, change where we are, change what we see, influence the writings of novels and films, influence migrant life wherever we are—and we have to be able to understand the way in which we are part of globe-spanning networks of power to see what's happening in front of us. So by looking at how the global and the national and the local are constantly interacting in front of our eyes and within our daily life, we can speak to the current situation.

However, this also does take some comparative reading. I think the other thing that really bothers

me—it's a bigger problem in European education including the UK than in the US—is that people don't read comparatively. It doesn't mean you have to launch a whole comparative project. But you don't know what's unique about your research material unless you know about what other people have found. You need to know what your research question looks like in other people's research conducted in places and in other times. For example, people in migration studies are always claiming that some practice or identity process is unique to "their" group. And I think, my goodness, migrants from Poland in New York City did that a hundred years ago. Or migrants from India or China have done similar things when compared to Moroccans or Iranians or Haitians.

And that's one of the fascinating things about migration research. The challenge is to explore not just the differences but also the similarities. Why do people who come from different places in the world do such similar things? Why do so many migrants build transnational families, no matter what kind of family structure they have? You know, what is it in the social situation of migration and the challenges posed by the insecurities of capitalist economies and their racialized interfaces that lead migrants who are supposed to be so culturally diverse to certain kinds of similar responses? And then, given these similarities across time and space, what's different? Because the current conjuncture has its own challenges to people's attempts to migrate and live transnational lives. So we need this kind of comparative perspective. So I would urge students who are interested in engaging the literature in the transnational migration paradigm and ideas about cosmopolitanism to read historically and comparatively so they have some sense of the forces that define their own research question.

DC: That's very helpful. Thank you for meeting with us.