

B. Riccio

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Over the past twenty years scholars have increasingly examined the dynamics by way of which migrants shape social fields and multiple ties that connect in multidimensional ways people across borders of nation-states. “Transnationalism” provides readers with the most compelling analysis of this transnational perspective in the study of migration and its relationship with other forms of globalization. It stems from the work of the author as researcher and as director of the ESRC Transnational Communities Programme at the University of Oxford (1997-2003). Indeed, the volume conflates a revision of some of Vertovec’s articles that represented milestones in the anthropological and sociological study of transnationalism. Drawing and, at the same time, focusing on such approach, this volume convincingly shows how transnational migration is affected by and overall contributes to various types of socio-cultural, political, economic and religious transformations.

One amongst many qualities of this book is the clarity with which it manages to illustrate and critically discuss the diverse and numerous studies, which help us better understand contemporary migration. Especially with the first two chapters, the author provides a morphological and comparative theoretical discussion of the main definitions and approaches together with the most severe criticisms towards the transnational perspective. The second chapter recapture key concepts in the social sciences, such as networks and social capital, to engage with the newer forms of transnational connections. In both Vertovec differentiates and disaggregates social processes where many scholars tend to conflate them by following a mere academic fashion.

After having established a common lens with the reader, the other four chapters, which are very balanced between theory and empirical instances, explore and assess types of transformation brought by migrant transnationalism and ranging from socio-cultural, to political, economic and religious changes. This take allows the discussion to present a more processual picture than a too mechanistic and static notion of transnationalism would allow. More precisely, the discussion of everyday socio-cultural change shows how misleading can be the dichotomy between assimilation and transnationalism that characterizes most of the American sociological debate during the end of the 1990s. Drawing on numerous ethnographic examples it demonstrates how migrants may follow successfully paths of inclusion in receiving societies being simultaneously engaged within translocal projects.

These reflections led to the chapter on political transformation. Here the reader understands that despite migrants’ experiences and trajectories are profoundly anchored in the material, legal and social constraints and possibilities that grow out of the local and national places which migrants inhabit, transnationalism relates and often contributes to some relevant transformation of the nation-state model and its triad “identities-borders-orders” [p. 86]. This nexus is challenged by various kinds of migrant transnational practices encompassing the growth of dual citizenship, migrants’ homeland political projects and Diaspora policies stimulated by governments. “Today there is no longer a singular norm equating national/ethnic identification, political community and place

of residence” [p. 100]. One may wonder if it ever existed such a singular norm in the past, but what is sure nowadays is that one witnesses a change and diversification of political assets. However, this chapter teaches us to feel free from the need to affirm nation-state’s end, or, on the other hand, its endlessness, and instead focus our analyses on the multiple ongoing transformations, which characterize state practices in relationship with transnationalism and vice-versa. Both nation-state and transnational migration are interactive parts of the same picture.

In the same vein, but with a slightly more policy-oriented style, the fifth chapter takes into account the economic dimension. Without falling into any celebratory representation, the chapter discusses the impact of remittances, hometown associations’ activities and circular migration in terms of potential development of the context of origin. Perhaps the chapter on economic transformation would have been better located before that on the political challenges mentioned above, seen that often remittances and other activities undertaken by hometown organizations may constitute a springboard for political development in terms of translocation of substantial (instead of formal) citizenship across borders. However, all chapters are interconnected and the author manages to cross-refer systematically avoiding any pedantry at the same time.

The richer and denser chapter is the sixth, which focuses on religious transformation. First there is an analytical discussion of the different meanings of Diaspora trying to distinguish it from other related concepts such as religious minority and transnationalism. “Diasporas arise from some form of migration, but not all migration involves diasporic consciousness; all transnational communities comprise diasporas, but not all diasporas develop transnationalism” [p. 137]. Then, drawing on many ethnographic examples, the discussion goes on analyzing the relationship between religion and, respectively, minority status, diaspora and transnationalism. The conclusion of the chapter foresees five potential trajectories of religious transformation: remaining intact, homogenization, ecumenism, universalism and cosmopolitanism.

As Vertovec reminds us in the conclusion of the book, these trajectories would well adapt to socio-cultural transformations too. It is up to researchers to explore which path, or combination of paths, the specific transnational community taken into account may follow. For its analytical stance and clear way of discussing even complex processes, this book is a must for students as well as scholars of migration studies, sociology and anthropology.

Bruno Riccio
Università di Bologna