Migrant Diplomacies: Rethinking Diplomacy Beyond State-Centric Perspectives. A Civic Bi-Nationality Experience from North America

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Abstract

There is a pressing need to extend our thinking about diplomacy beyond state-centric perspectives, as in the name of sovereignty and national interests, people on move are confronting virtual, symbolic and/or material walls and frames of policies inhibiting their free movement. My point of departure is to explore migrant activism and global politics through the transformation of diplomacy in a globalised world. Developing an interdisciplinary dialogue between new diplomacy and sociology, I evidence the emergence of global sociopolitical formations created through civic bi-nationality organisations. Focusing on the agent in interaction with structures, I present a theoretical framework and strategy for analysing the practices of migrant diplomacies as an expression of contemporary politics. A case study from North America regarding returned families in Mexico City provides evidence of how these alternative diplomacies are operating.

Keywords: *diasporas; politics; transnational; hybridity; engagement.*

Introduction

In this article, global political processes[2] are considered as transforming nation-states into a post-national political stage with different effects and scales (Keane, 2009; Tormey, 2015; Sassen, 2006, 2007; Scholte, 2018). Despite reactions to these global dynamics, such as white nativist movements defending their national interests and patriotic values (e.g. the Trump administration, Brexit in the UK and right-wing actions in some emergent economies and mainland Europe), these nativist political reactions are not stopping the development of the global processes, if we recognise the consolidation of a global plutocracy and the deepening of a global multidimensional inequality between people and countries around the globe (Fraser, 2017; Milanovic 2016; Sassen, 2015; Villaroya, 2016). So, with the current challenges posed by global politics, diplomatic studies issues that were not previously significant for scholars are coming to the fore (Badie, 2013; Constantinou and Sharp, 2016).

One of these is the inclusion of migrant activism that attempts to influence diplomatic circuits and global agendas regarding human mobility from within their state or multilateral institutions. Such mobilisations are confronted with virtual, symbolic and material walls as well as frames of policies inhibiting the free movement of people (Agier 2016; Alejo, 2018; Alund and Schierup, 2018; Bello, 2017; Bada and Gleeson, 2019; Brotherton and Kretsedemas, 2017; Brown 2015; Castañeda, 2019; Cohen and Van Hear, 2017; Delgado Wise, 2018; Jones, 2016, 2019; Nichols, 2019; Marshal, 2018; Rosenberger et al., 2019; Voss and Bloemraad, 2011; Wee et al., 2018).

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[2] To observe these processes, I follow McGrew´s definition of global politics: "the politics of an embryonic global society in which domestic and world politics, even if conceptually distinct, are practically inseparable" (McGrew, 2014: 15).

This article contributes to the literature on new diplomacy (Badie, 2013; Cornago, 2013; Constantinou, Cornago and McConnell, 2017; Constantinou and Der Derian, 2010; Dimmitter and McConnell, 2016; Riordan, 2003; Scholte, 2009), specifically migration diplomacies, through rethinking the theory and practice of diplomacy from beyond state-centric perspectives. In international relations literature, the notion of migration diplomacy is well established in the study of the processes and policies oriented toward migrants or refugees' agendas as well as diasporas as strategic agents, who reinforce the presence and negotiations between receiving, sending or transit states (Adamson and Tsourapas, 2019; Delano, 2018; Maley, 2013). Within the literature of new diplomacy, there are significant efforts to recognise the practice of diplomacy by migrant or diaspora agents, such as that discussed in human geography (Ho and McConnell, 2017), scholarship on elites and networks (Stone and Douglas, 2018), and diasporas in relation with public diplomacy (Brinkerhoff, 2019).

According to Badie (2013b: 26), today, anyone can be an "international maker" and societies comprising individuals and groups are "actively producing" their diplomacy (Badie, 2013: 87). However, conventional literature on diplomatic studies ignore pluralism and its different manifestations, such as indigenous, para-diplomacy, local, corporate and citizen diplomacy, because official state institutions do not engage in them (Cornago, 2016). The specific contribution of this article is to advance on the notion of migration diplomacies as an expression of "global socio-political formations" (Sassen, 2007; Beck, 2003). Adopting an interdisciplinary approach that draws on diplomatic studies (new diplomacy) and sociology (collective action), this study identifies the emergence and practice of migration diplomacies as a platform that moves contemporary global politics beyond present-day state-centric perspectives. To this end, I recognise diplomacies beyond states-led diplomacy in a globalised world and identify examples of bi-national activists practising diplomacy in North America (Mexico and the United States).

The current North American political environment is defined here as an expression of contemporary white nativism. Against this backdrop, I argue that it is necessary to rethink what is diplomacy as a political tool of nation-states. The argument is relevant when a nation-state, in the name of sovereignty, territory and national interest, is excluding people from political communities how is happening with the Mexican-American or central American people deported into Mexico from the United States (Caldwell, 2019; Golash-Boza, 2017). Between 2008 and 2016, more than 2.8 million Mexicans with irregular legal status were deported from the United States to Mexico and of those, 1.7 million people were born in the United States. Moreover, amongst these, 773,000 minors were born there (Escobar, 2015: 256). Recently, under the programme "Remain in Mexico" (MPP), the United States has been deporting Central American people to Mexican territory. With this being the current climat, it is relevant to study how new paths of migrant activism are emerging and developing with the experience of returned and deported people. What kinds of migrant activism is emerging with this political environment in North America?

I structure this article in the following sections. First, I present my analytical strategy and methodology, which I follow with the theoretical framework that I use to frame the notion of migration diplomacies. Subsequently, I evidence the practice of migrant diplomacies carried out by returned activists in Mexico City and also within Chicago, which presents a political environment characterised by white nativism in North America.

Analytical strategy and methodology

Following a holistic approach of sociology of collective action (Máiz, 2017), I argue that migrant diplomacies develop strategies based on how their agents perceive their political environment. They build their perspective of the world, promote alternatives, and acquire motivations to mobilise. To develop the notion of migrant diplomacies, in my analytical strategy, I focus on the agent interacting dynamically with institutional frameworks. I understand that the interactions between collective action and institutional frameworks are necessary to produce social change and a radical transformation in contemporary politics. To recognise how migration diplomacies operate, it is appropriate to observe how this activism interacts in specific contexts. I draw upon the scholarship of the sociology of collective action to observe the interconnection between political opportunities and the repertoires of mobilisation (activities and narratives) (Máiz, 2017). I recognise that mobilisation repertoires serve as a platform to study the activities and narratives of migration diplomacies and from which to observe the positions and codes of organised migrants' mobilisations (Mora *et al.*, 2018). Subsequently, I examine the programmes, projects, organisational structures and their discourses (Wong, 2012) that enable them to act as diplomatic agents.

I adopted a traditional qualitative case study methodology to examine the Centro de Educación y Formación para el Desarrollo Social (CEDES). The selection of this case is justified for the following reasons: 1. The organisation was created in Mexico City and is led by migrants; 2. Since its inception, the organisation has been working with returned people in Mexico City with a binational perspective;[3] 3. Even though CEDES is a small grassroots bi-national organisation, it allows me to show how the migration diplomacies are considered fundamental to defending their rights themselves; and 4.- The organisation promotes dialogue with governments and institutions at local and global levels. The case study analysis was carried out from 2010 to 2019. To develop my analysis, I used the process-tracing approach[4] to clarify CEDES´ bi-national activism orientation and demonstrate how the organisation's focus shifted according to the development of migration diplomacies. For this qualitative research, I gathered information through primary sources, including Facebook, twitter accounts, documents, and reports. I also conducted five semi-structured interviews with the organisation´s members (migrants) in Mexico City and Chicago between November 2016 and May 2019. At their request, I have protected the participants' identities and anonymised the data.

Theoretical Framework: Migration diplomacies beyond state-centric thinking

In this article, civic bi-nationality activists (Fox and Bada, 2011) are positioned as diplomatic agents. To frame this position theoretically, I turn to the literature on new diplomacy (Constantinou, 2013; Cornago, 2013; Constantinou and Der Derian, 2010; Costantinou, Cornago and McConnell, 2017; Dimmitter and McConnell, 2016), and I follow the "critical and reflective intellectual trajectory" (Dimmitter and McConnell, 2016: 6) set out by scholars who are thinking about the "multiplicities and pluralities of diplomatic practices, actors, and spaces both in the past and contemporary period" (Dimmitter and McConnell, 2016: 6). To recognise the notion of migration diplomacies, I follow the definition of Constantinou, where diplomacy does not only mean the relations between the nation-states and their institutions. For, diplomacy can be "broadly understood

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[3] I identify this organisation as an expression of the long history of bi-national activism in North America and as an example of others that are developing action with deported and returned people in Mexico City, such as those of "Otros Dreams en Acción" as well as the recent demonstrations "Florecer Aquí y Allá" in the Zocalo and the "Vigilia" in front of the American Embassy (July, 2019).

[4] Process tracing here is "an analytic tool for drawing descriptive and causal inferences from diagnostic pieces of evidence, often understood as part of a temporal sequence of events or phenomena" (Collier, 2011: 824).

to emerge whenever someone successfully claims to mediate and negotiate for territory or a group of people or a cause or successfully claims to mediate between others engaging in such representation and negotiation" (Constantinou, 2016: 23). In line with new diplomacy perspectives, it is possible to think beyond dominant narratives that tend to relate diplomacy with external activities of the nation-state as a natural (Rose, 2019) condition. This narrative allows us to erase complex histories about how diplomacy has evolved as part of human contact around the world (Constantinou and Der Derian, 2010; Constantinou, 2013; Cornago, 2013).

To consider migration diplomacies that operate with a "transnational diplomacy perspective" (Badie, 2013), I appeal to the logic of "civic bi-nationality" (Fox and Bada, 2011; Bada, 2014). This concept refers to the civic "practices that are engaged both with US civic life and with migrants´ communities and countries of origin" with different organisational formats (Fox and Bada, 2011: 142). I recognise the complexity of the "civic-bi-nationality" (Fox and Bada, 2011) and migration civil society (Fox and Rivera-Salgado, 2019) concepts. However, I differentiate them from the notion of migration diplomacies for the following reasons. Migration diplomacies operate with a multiscale perspective in a global political context (Alejo Jaime, 2017; McGrew, 2014). Even though their actions are localised, I understand them as expressions of the emergence of global socio-political formations (Sassen, 2007, 2018). Thus, migrant diplomacies are understood in a globalised, networked, and interdependent world that goes beyond static nation-state understanding of people´s interactions. Within the notion of migrant diplomacies, I understand civic bi-nationality activists as democratising agents with the capacity and know-how to promote migrant rights through formal and non-formal channels and who also, are contributing to the transformation of global politics in the twenty-first century. However, when studying migration diplomacies, it is necessary to remember that migrant activists "pursue different goals, goals that are sometimes opposing and sometimes complementary" (Constantinou, 2012: 460). These migration diplomacies are an expression of emerging of post-national citizenship identities (Collyer, 2017; Tan, 2017; Schattle, 2019) and contribute to the pluralism (Cornago, 2016) of contemporary diplomacy. Within this theoretical framework, I recognise the idea of migrant diplomacies as an expression of new diplomacy without considering, whilst also not denying, the nation state's role as the legitimate channel to defend concerns regarding the everyday life of migrants.

Findings and Analysis: Identifying the Practice of Migration Diplomacies in North America

The political environment that migrant diplomacies face in North America is characterised by "white nativism"[5] (Alejo, 2018; Mudde, 2017). I define nativism as a "mechanism to redraw the boundaries between them and us and justify the maintenance of privileges of a particular group" (Guía, 2016: 13). Nativism takes shape through a set of "eclectic policies" that redefine "who is the real people of a determined political unit and who, therefore, must have more rights and power to decide the characteristics of that society in front of a group considered exogenous and unable to assimilate the essential characteristics of the original group" (Guía, 2014: 111). According to some scholars, the emergence of contemporary white nativism stem from: the expansion of segregation among the native population from the recent economic crises; the loss of confidence of the white nativists in the state; as well as the demographic transformation in Western societies and it impact on the native population (Guía, 2016; Huntington, 2014; Kaufmann, 2018). It appears that nativism

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[5] For non-static approaches about whiteness and nativism in the United States, see Coates, (2017) and Mudde, (2019).

is not *per se* a constitutively anti-immigrant political position, but its construction is complex because it has a worldview that endows a specific political community, i.e. the state. The state must be defended according to a unique version of its history and a proud sense of belonging. Thus, under nativism, a nostalgic version of a nation and an attitude against the foreigner have combined from which anti-immigrant positions arise as the consequences and not the causes of how people's coexistence is defined and organised (Alejo, 2018).

Golash-Boza (2017) and Kretsedemas and Brotherton (2017) argue that Trump´s migration and border policies can be seen as continuing previous administrations' stances, mainly, Obama´s policies on deportation (Golash-Boza, 2017). In light of this continuity, I adopt the perspective that white nativism is a specific component of Trump´s politics (Alejo, 2018; Appadurai, 2017; Mudde, 2019; Young, 2017). Specifically, the "Make America Great Again", and recently, the new slogan "Keep America Great" used for his 2020 electoral campaign, assist the administration in promoting white nativism and racial violence against migrants, exposing them as invaders, in particular, those with irregular legal status in the United States. Accordingly, the subsequent policies, with a different scope of implementation, are to be based on a tacit agreement that the security of developed societies can be achieved by the discarding of the presence of agents with unwanted and incompatible values and attitudes. Three actions show how the president has employed white nativism to strengthen his perspective of securitisation of the border and the migration policies of the United States. First, the administration created the VOICE Office (Voice of Immigration Crime Engagement) in 2017. VOICE is within the Homeland Security Department (HSD) and seeks to help people affected by criminal activities carried out by foreigners (Alejo, 2018). Second, through the programme "Remain in Mexico" (MPP), the United States has deported Central American people to Mexican territory (Gzesh, 2019). Finally, regarding migration from the South, there is the signed agreement between Guatemala and the United States in which the former accepts being a third safe country (Selee, 2019). Within this global white nativist environment (Beckett and Wilson, 2019), I analyse the practice of migration diplomacies. For this, I follow Constantinou´s definition of diplomacy, which led to me considering the migration diplomacy developed by migrants to defend their rights. In this regard, I view diplomacy as "human being(s) engaged in a particular kind of social practice" (Sharp, 2013: 59) and not in terms of "how to strategise to get our way with others" (Constantinou, 2013: 143).

I focus on CEDES' activism and its bi-national repertoire, including its organisational infrastructure, programmes, and activities that it uses to work with returned people in Mexico City. The case study organisation, CEDES, is a network of grassroots organisations created for two kinds of migrants: Mexico City´s migrants returned from the United States and Mexico City´s migrants in the United States. Returned activists founded CEDES in Mexico City in 2010. According to the response of one participant, the organisation started "in response" to the "tension and the vulnerability of human mobility", for migration "has taken on greater relevance in recent years in Mexico" (Interviewee 1).

CEDES affirms that migrants face "situations of discrimination, racism and violation of human rights" (Interviewee 2) as the resettlement processes in Mexico have not been friendly, and there is often a negative sociocultural environment for returned and deported people. In the interviews, the participants gave evidence relating to how this hostile context operates in Mexico City. The first point to highlight is that those who return to their place of origin and those who for the first time migrate from where they born, or have grown up, "do not want to go to Mexico". The second point is that returned people are not "always welcomed" by their families as they were money providers,

and in their new situation, they can no longer contribute, thus ending up being rejected. The third point is that the returned people have "lost their standard of living" because they have "low wages to restart their lives". The fourth point is that after an "exhausted life" product of living in an irregular legal situation, the returned people have "feelings of failure". The last point that the interviewees mentioned is that these returned people suffer "racist and xenophobic actions" and "they face mockery, abuse and bullying" from the locals, who treat them with "distance and rejection" (Interviewees 1, 4 and 5).

Due to these complex situations in Mexico, interviewees from CEDES argue that the returned people require "solidarity, comprehension and empowerment" (CEDES, 2018). CEDES requires governments to take "concrete actions to resolve the crisis experienced with human mobility" and to do this, the organisation proposes "bi-national, regional and even multilateral" alliances (Interviewee 1). With returned people, the organisation promotes interculturality as they work with them, because "cultures, races, beliefs are shared, mixed and linked" (Interviewee 1). Moreover, recognising that the process of education is slow, they "hope to help the young people to face a globalised world" (Interviewee 2). To develop its migrant diplomacy in North America, CEDES has created a bi-national organisation structure, with offices being established in Chicago (Cicero area) and México City (Alcaldia Magdalena Contreras). With its bi-national repertoire, the organisation promotes that "the migrant communities, their families and communities themselves achieve the methodologies for their development since the ultimate goal is the prosperity of the community in the places of origin and destination" (Interviewee 1). In Mexico City, CEDES has a project of "bi-national education" oriented toward children and young people born in the United States. Within this project, CEDES has two programmes. The first is the "Clinic of Integral Assistance to Migrant Girls and Women in Return" through which CEDES gives psychological and legal assistance. Through these activities, the organisation ensures that they learn their rights as returned migrants. The second programme is the "Intercultural Classroom", in which CEDES teaches American culture and the English language. The target audiences are children and young people born in the United States. These courses are led by an American citizen (woman) who lives in Mexico City. The main goals of these activities are "to promote" links with American culture and the English language. Furthermore, CEDES tries to keep these children and young people connected with the place where they born and grew up. This is important, because these returned people will want to go back to the United States, and they need "to have the skills and abilities to defend their rights as American citizens with a binational perspective" (Interviewees 2 and 3).

In light of the evidence from the CEDES case study, I identified that returned people have constructed dynamic and hybrid cultures for themselves as products of their life story defined by mobility. Hence, it is not accurate to identify the migrants´ moves in a linear way, namely, leaving one nation-state and arriving in another. Returned people express that they will try to go back to the United States, particularly those who have American citizenship. For them, their lives on the move do not conclude with their resettlement in Mexico. With this in mind, the migrant diplomacy developed by CEDES promotes and defends the "other experiences" and "the abilities" (Interviewee 1) that migrants have acquired in their lives. For this organisation, if global and local institutions recognise those characteristics of migrants, the returned people will be able to identify opportunities to restart their lives with dignity (Interviewee 1). I argue that migration diplomacy flows in a non-linear and multidirectional transnational way, back and forth, comprising flexible and non-static interactions between people and places of origin, transit or arrival. So, with the notion of migrant

diplomacies is possible to recognise the complexity and diversity that characterises migrant activism, which is defined and constructed by their mixed experiences as people on the move.

Conclusions

In this paper, I have demonstrated how political action beyond the nation-state is happening. I problematised the notion of defining diplomacy as an activity exclusively belonging to the nation-state, its elites and the international system. Beyond the structural transformation of institutional frameworks of contemporary diplomacy, I focused on migrant activists as producers of their diplomacies with specific characteristics as part of global politics. I investigated the repertoire of CEDES to contribute to the new diplomacy literature relating to diaspora and migration diplomacies (Brinkerhoff, 2019; Ho and McConnell, 2017; Stone and Douglas, 2018). With the case study selected, I evidence how binational organisations in North America are operating with a post-nation understanding of returned and deported people´s interactions to develop their repertoire (narratives and activities).

I have argued that it is essential when studying migrant activism to analyse contemporary diplomacy beyond state-centric perspectives because this calls upon us to rethink the challenges between state and society under global politics regarding human mobility. In global politics, diplomacy cannot be thought of solely in terms of national interest or modern international systems. Contemporary human mobility problematises modern concepts of citizenship, frontiers and sovereignty. State-led diplomacy does not represent or negotiate with the understanding of communities that are not defined by static belonging to a nation-state, a territory or a unique national history. I observe that the nation-state does not recognise the plurality and complexity that coexist within and outside of its political communities. It is appropriate to rethink the socio-political function of diplomacy (Badie, 2013; Cornago, 2013; Constantinou, 2013) in a current global white nativist environment that does not recognise the complex thinking and sense of world (hybrid culture and post-national identities) developed by returned and deported people product of their lives on-move (Caldwell, 2019; Castañeda, 2019; Golash-Boza, 2015). With the notion of migrant diplomacies, I refer to the migrant activism that seeks to represent, negotiate and defend concerns regarding the everyday life of migrants. The evidence presented in this paper in relation to this concept gives good grounds for the rethinking of the nature of the social functions and institutional framework of the nation-state.

To close this article, I invite readers to extend the understanding and thinking around diplomacy beyond the rational calculation of winning-losing strategies deployed by the realist perspectives seen in global politics or through governance approaches. Diplomacy practised by migrants, as I have shown, can be put in practice for the encounters between cultures and people, recognising the others as part of a post-national thinking everyday life. However, I have made clear that new diplomacy as a nascent process is an evolving and incomplete set of rules that makes official representatives of governments or states, even scholars, very uncomfortable (Badie, 2013b).

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