Thomas Faist*

The Transnational Social Question:
An Update (2021)

*Bielefeld University, Faculty of Sociology, Bielefeld. Comments welcome to:
thomas.faist@uni-bielefeld.de

Abstract

The point of departure for a discussion of the transnational social question is a growing awareness of cross-border interdependence along crucial issues of social inequalities and their implications not only for the global South but beyond. The contention around inequalities refers to international conventions declaring social rights, actually existing social standards, and moral convictions. Surveying the normative and political-sociological theories capable of capturing the new transnational question yields insights into the framing of social inequalities. Such an analysis must also include a new aspect of the social question – climate and environmental destruction – in what could be called the socio-ecological question. This review raises the question whether concepts such as social rights and citizenship are adequate to describe contemporary social inequalities and the ways in which these can be addressed.

1. The Transnational Social Question: An Update (2021)

The world's greatest inequalities seem to be defined by national borders in addition to and overlapping with well-known markers such as class, race, and gender. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, manifold inequalities characterize relations between social groups. For example, access to food, nutrition, formal education, and medical care is vastly unequal. Consequences such as malnutrition, ill health, low life expectancy, and inadequate social protection against risks threaten the lives of many. The most commonly used measure, inequality among countries' per capita incomes, accounts internationally for two-thirds of overall income inequality. Average incomes in the richest countries far exceed those in the poorest countries, with estimates of incomes that are 40 to 50 times greater in the former (Bourguignon and Morrisson 2002). Unlike conditions in the mid-nineteenth century, when income inequality could be explained by class understood as the ownership of the means of production, the situation at the start of the twenty-first century is different. While in the late nineteenth century, around 1870, about 50 per cent of income differences could be attributed to ownership of the means of production, and about 20 per cent to location, that is, the country in which one was living, this relationship has almost reversed. In 2000, more than two-thirds of global income differences could be attributed to huge gaps in average income between countries, whereas the share attributed to class has declined considerably, to around a quar-

ter (Milanovic 2016). In other words, if we were to construct a global map of income inequality, showing where each household or individual stood vis-à-vis everyone else in the world (that is, combining information on within- and between-country inequality), the relative standing of each household or individual would be shaped in large part by whether they lived in a poor or a wealthy state. In general, while the markers of inequality may have somewhat changed over the past 200 years, the available empirical data on national incomes show unequivocally that inequality between countries in the twentieth century was higher than the inequality exhibited within any single national state (Oxfam 2017).

The current global situation is thus reminiscent of the living conditions that obtained for a majority of the population in a large part of nineteenth-century Europe. At that time and in that particular world region, the "social question" was the central subject of extremely volatile political conflicts between the ruling classes and working-class movements. Nowadays, the protests of globalisation critics, for instance at the World Social Forum, certainly cannot be overlooked. There is also an abundance of political groupings and NGOs rallying across national borders in support of numerous campaigns such as environmental, human rights and women's issues, Christian, Hindu, or Islamic fundamentalism, or food sovereignty (Evans 2006; Breman et al. 2019).

Then and now the social question has several distinct elements: first, the perception of large-scale inequalities between social groups; second, political contention around inequalities; and third, institutionalized efforts at dealing with inequalities, such as—historically in large parts of Europe—social rights within nationally-bounded welfare states or, more recently, social standards meant to apply worldwide. Given this context, the starting question is: Are we perhaps witnessing the gradual emergence of sanctionable global social norms by way of transnational social rights beyond national state borders? In other words, is there a discernible development of global social policy in the twenty-first century, implying a move from national to post-national solidarity and the corresponding rights and duties as well as policies? At the same time, the focus on the transnational aspect of the social question does not mean the occlusion of inequalities, contentions, and rights within and across national states. Quite to the contrary: one of the central issues is how solidarities on one scale may contribute to or exclude solidarities on another through institutionalized mechanisms. For example, national welfare states in Europe can be cast as enabling the social protection of large parts of the population at the expense of those who are not admitted or covered by way of immigration control. As can be seen in systematic analyses across OECD immigration states, admission policies in those countries have favoured highly qualified workers, based on human capital considerations and underlying assumptions about this category of persons being politically

liberal — an indication that class-based skills selection is connected to assumptions about cultural desirability. In contrast, regulations concerning low-skilled workers have become stricter over time, reflecting the trend that it is legitimate to simplify access, admission, and membership for highly skilled workers and those making capital investments. Indeed, it has become simpler for them to gain access, and there are fewer rules, whereas the stipulations concerning those categorized as low-qualified workers have become more numerous and complicated (Beine et al. 2016). The seminal change in migration control is the move from a decline in selection by ethnic or national origin to more class-based selection.

Historically, one of the solutions to stark social inequalities and pressing issues of the old social question in Europe, North America, and Australia has been the national welfare state and thus the institutionalization of social rights. For political thinking and debate on social inequality, two postulates were of crucial significance: equality of conditions and democracy. These postulates were already the subject of political discourse more than 150 years ago when they were analysed by Alexis de Tocqueville (1986 [1835 and 1840]) in the light of the development of democracy in the United States. In the past, social rights have been tied to (national) citizenship status. Citizenship can be understood as a continuous series of transactions between rulers and subjects. In the tradition of T. H. Marshall (1964[1950]), citizenship captures the tensions between democracy and capitalism. The central focus is the inherent tension between the idea of democracy, which is based on the notion of equal citizenship, and the social inequalities brought about by capitalism. Marshall argues that the expansion of citizenship rights, and especially the growth of social rights in the course of the twentieth century, enabled a historic compromise between social classes. In his view, social rights and social policies stabilize welfare capitalism as a legitimate system of social inequality on the national level. The possibility of this happening today on a global scale is more a normative utopian idea. There is no feasible concept of institutionalized citizenship with the postulate of equal political freedom, or of equal political rights, in any kind of global polity, although there is a tendency toward an establishment of social standards in loose association with human rights. The main difference between rights and standards is that the latter are not enforceable by persons through the legal system. Unlike social rights which can, in principle, be claimed in court, social standards are an instance of 'soft law' which implies voluntary self-regulated compliance on the part of the agents concerned.

The new transnational social question has not made obsolete the issues dealt with in the old social question, which has found expression in national welfare states in the OECD world. Rather, it has added yet another layer, namely cross-border interdependence with a global horizon. Debates around social inequalities and protection often occur on various scales

simultaneously-local, national, and global; hence the phrase the transnational social question.

2. The Perception of growing interdependence

A cross-border horizon relates to the increasing perception of cross-border interdependencies, such as international migration, military threats, environmental degradation, and climate change. There are empirically identifiable global trends in meta-principles such as the postulates of equality and democracy which show a shift in public awareness concerning transnational exchange and interdependence (Furia 2005, Inglehart 2003).

The anticipation of mass migration from Eastern to Western Europe in the early 1990s may serve as an example here. The question arose as to whether social rights could also be conferred on persons abroad, for instance in the form of a basic minimum income (de Swaan 1992). Not unlike the emergence of national social welfare in the nineteenth century, such a development, so the argument runs, could be conceivable on a transnational scale. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, de Swaan argued, the (national) ruling classes felt threatened by the 'vagabond poor' to such a degree that some states introduced welfare measures to offset this menace. The perceived threat of mass migration from Eastern Europe and the global South, so the argument continues, had meanwhile become so great that northern states could see benefits in contributing toward a welfare state at the supranational level. It is in the meantime clear that in the light of restrictive and effective controls at the borders of European immigration countries, also toward forced migrants, there is no compelling reason for implementing this measure to prevent migration. An argument similar to migration could be made relating to environmental destruction, the most visible form of which is today discussed under the label climate crisis and environmental destruction. Yet, again, social destitution and escape from deteriorating conditions by millions of people are not likely to impinge directly upon the welfare of the OECD countries. Approximately 80 to 90 percent of forced migrants have ended up in the same or neighbouring countries.

3. Transnational social protection: Social standards but no social rights

Public policies that affect social protection in the local, national, and international realms have undergone significant changes over the past decades. This is visible in the way interna-

tional, national, and transnational institutions have framed socio-economic or human development. Crucially, social policy and development thinking have moved from a focus on the national state to more emphasis on local government and international institutions (Mkandawire 2004) and terms such as 'global social policy' (Deacon 1997) have flourished. Correspondingly, social rights as human rights have been points of departure. Social rights in international conventions—usually not enforceable in courts—constitute the shared vocabulary from which political debates start. After the Second World War, United Nations organizations, such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO), began to consider social rights in conjunction with basic rights, along with political and civil rights. Explicit reference to the General Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), and even the rights of citizens to a social contract on the national state level is widespread, and so is an emphasis on the universality of human rights and citizens' rights (Brysk and Shafir 2004). They are universal in the sense that, for instance, all member states are signatories to the International Covenant on Social and Economic Rights. The essential social rights laid down in Articles 22–27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) are the fundamental right to school education, the right to work and to join or form a trade union, and the rights to a basic or minimum income, food, clothing, housing, medical care, and social security.

On a transnational scale, social standards have been legitimated as referring to social rights. The transnational regulation of employment and social standards comprises international institutions and regimes such as the ILO, social clauses in trade agreements, public codes of conduct, and the UN Global Compact; but also includes more private transnational regulatory forms such as codes of conduct for specific businesses, international framework agreements, or social labels. The governance of social and labour standards is characterised by a wide diversity of work regulations involving the traditional agents, viz. the state, the trade unions, and employers' associations, but also new actors such as social movements and NGOs. A salient point is that sanctionable rights and obligations have to an increasing degree been substituted by employers' voluntary self-regulation, especially in the case of transnational businesses. Such standards are therefore frequently private, voluntary transnational arrangements, or soft law, and their regulation relies on cooperation, rather than sanctions. The major issue for the future is therefore whether in transnational political multilevel systems such norms can be legally claimed at all.

The development of social rights and social standards must be seen within the context of a world that is highly fragmented with respect to the vast range of opportunities that citizens' social rights provide in different countries. Not surprisingly, the citizens of those states that

are marginalised and are not integrated to a significant degree through trade and investment in the world economy have hardly anything to do with, for instance, labour and social standards as defined by international conventions. To a greater degree than in the OECD world, in marginalised and so-called developing countries the formal, and implicitly also the informal, means of providing social protection are determined by transnational factors. Such factors are institutional, such as the World Bank, the IMF, and the World Trade Organization (WTO), which determine parameters through rules and the provision of finance; commercial, such as transnational capital and investments of foreign investors; civil-societal, through transnational non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the significant role they play in development aid or cooperation; and kinship systems through migrants and their remittances to their countries of origin. The heavy-handed dominance of OECD countries in the architecture of international organizations also accounts for the resistance of states, not only in marginalized countries, but also in newly industrialising and transformation countries, to common social standards through mechanisms such as the WTO. There has been, at least on the part of international organizations, a move from structural adjustment policies vis-à-vis countries in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia to policies that favour a combination of a liberal market approach with market-based insurance and targeted policies for the poor/needy, and a heavy focus on social capital and local community, characterised by keywords such as empowerment and capacity-building.

Various factors discourage one from expecting the establishment of sanctionable global social norms in the form of transnational social rights and social citizenship, but such a conclusion could be altered as a result of the mobilizing force of a politics of rights and obligations. Most important, the framing of the transnational social question as one of social rights or, more broadly, democracy and equality, brings to the fore the crucial issue in political debates and conflicts—the legitimacy of orders of inequality. Given the obvious absence of a Marshallian world on a global scale in which capitalism and democracy are linked by a world welfare state, many persons around the globe readily associate globalization (a convenient shorthand for seminal processes of social transformation; cf. Polanyi 2001[1944]) with unfair social outcomes and oppose it precisely for this reason. The anti-globalization movement builds on the feeling that prevailing patterns of trading relations and income distribution are unjust and morally reprehensible. If it is true that opposition to globalization and opposition to inequality are closely linked, tolerance of inequality becomes a key factor in the political calculus. The perception of transnational inequality and tolerance could therefore make a difference. Thus, concerned persons must have some normative notion of what a proper, justifiable, and fair distribution of income should be—a kind of everyday normative political theory. People's beliefs about inequality are relevant because their views and above all practices

feed into the political process. Considering people's attitudes, social inequalities are transnational in the sense that those who care about intra-state inequality are also very likely to speak out against the global gap between rich and poor regions (Lübker 2004). There is thus a direct link, at least on the attitudinal level, between perceptions of inequality within demarcated welfare states on the one hand and global concerns on the other.

4. Theories: Normative and political sociological approaches to social rights

The relatively autonomous world political system, with national states as its main constituents, is central to the inequalities in the distribution of social rights. Place of birth and residence is one of the main determinants of one's position in a transnational hierarchy of inequality (Shachar 2009). Social rights are institutionalized within national states and are distinct from objective rights, which protect individuals from violence or restraint. The latter thus include, for instance, freedom of association, freedom of opinion, and religious freedom. Social rights are also defined as positive rights as opposed to negative rights, which are rights to liberty, i. e. political and civil rights. Positive rights require the active intervention of the state. The relationship between negative and positive rights is not dichotomous, however. Political rights are necessary, at least in democracies, in order to create social rights. Conversely, the major theorists of citizenship — Aristotle, Cicero, Niccolò Macchiavelli, Edmund Burke, Alexis de Tocqueville, John Stuart Mill, Hannah Arendt—have all argued that, in order to participate fully in public life and to achieve recognized social membership, one needed to be in a certain socioeconomic position. Furthermore, others have pointed out that the formal equality of rights is by no means sufficient for them to be effective. They must be accompanied by substantive liberties and by institutions enforcing them (T.H. Marshall 1964[1950]).

For the conceptualization of emergent transnational social rights and social standards, there are two types of approaches, one stemming from normative political philosophy, and the other from political sociology. In normative political theory, in turn, two branches can be distinguished: a world citizenship — or cosmopolitan— perspective, and a nationality perspective. In a cosmopolitan citizenship perspective, social rights are part of a desirable world citizenship. An optimistic perspective may refer to Max Weber's social and economic history (Weber 1980[1922]) and argue that citizenship was first conceived and practised at the municipal level in ancient Greece and medieval Europe before it moved up one level and became de jure and de facto congruous with membership of a territorial national state. Citizenship rights

beyond the national state would therefore be an evolutionary leap forward (Heater 2004). Ultimately, however, this would require a global political community with socio-cultural resources such as reciprocity and solidarity to be drawn on as required. This would be a rational development of identities beyond the national level. Such a global political identity is today conceivable only as a transparent, constructed affiliation (Habermas 1998). This perspective would certainly be attractive in terms of the allocation of life chances according to legal citizenship. World citizenship would not acknowledge any privileges passed on by descent or birth within a certain territory, the most prominent of which is, indeed, citizenship. We would all formally have the same status as members of an all-encompassing global polity. Such a community would, however, be greatly endangered by a 'tyranny of the majority' (de Tocqueville 1986 [1835 and 1840]) because of the unavailability of exit options. Equally important, positive rights would require a willingness to redistribute goods. This notion is even less probable and less conceivable on a global scale than it is in regions like Europe (cf. Faist 2001). EU social policy is mostly regulatory rather than redistributive, except for agricultural subsidies.

This critique of the concept of world citizenship highlights the central elements of a republican version of national cosmopolitanism. The republican version conceives of social rights primarily as a close form of solidarity on a national scale. As a consequence, the following conditions can be fulfilled only in a national state: First, citizens of the respective legal citizenship, that is nationality, are counted as valid members of a framed political community viz. polity and in this way reproduce the socio-cultural basis for citizenship, namely reciprocity and solidarity. Second, a common allegiance has a bonding effect on the citizens and enables them to agree on substantive rights and obligations that form the basis for their membership. Third, citizenship confers participatory rights and political representation. Ultimately, world citizenship from this perspective appears to be little more than a vague cosmopolitan idea in a world lacking a fundamental moral consensus. A further criticism is that at best world citizenship would weaken the bonds that hold citizens of a national state together. And only these national bonds ensure that citizens maintain their ties to the rest of humanity (Walzer 1996). This critique of the concept of world citizenship could be disputed, however, based on empirical findings that suggest that world and national citizenship are not necessarily zero-sum notions and that the claim has to be qualified (Furia 2005). Also, it neglects the fact that national citizenship is in itself a mechanism that perpetuates transnational social inequality.

The debate over cosmopolitan vs. national perspectives can also be found in theories of justice. There has been a vivid debate on the moral significance of state boundaries, and thus the appropriate frame to which norms and rights should refer, which could address transnational inequalities. In A Theory of Justice (1971) John Rawls proposed a clear principle of distributive justice: In a nutshell, this "difference principle" says that economic inequalities within a national society are unjust unless they benefit everyone, including the least advantaged. He argued that distributive justice between different states ("peoples") is not possible because there is nothing to distribute. In his view the society of states is not a scheme of cooperation for mutual advantage and so there is no social product whose distribution is a proper matter for redistribution. Rawls's critics hold otherwise. First, under conditions of interdependence, national societies are not sufficiently separate to justify their being treated as self-contained entities (Beitz 1979). This argument concludes that the world has to be seen, in certain respects, as a single society, and therefore the "difference principle" applied, so as to benefit the least advantaged. Yet one of the questions that arises is whether such a world society is a scheme of mutual advantage, as Rawls held about national societies; think of the world economic order which systematically disadvantages peoples in the periphery. Second, there is a widespread argument that rich countries are responsible for the poverty of poor countries and that therefore they should acknowledge obligations to the latter. While theories of imperialism and dependency (e.g. Frank 1971; Wallerstein 1983) no longer enjoy widespread intellectual and political currency outside the global South, this argument is still strong in political theory. For example, according to such a claim, environmental degradation, mass poverty, malnutrition, and starvation are the price paid by the poor to support the lifestyle of all the inhabitants of the advanced industrial world. Thus, global redistribution, such as a tax on the use of natural resources, would be a requirement of global social justice (Pogge 2002). Critics of this position, mostly liberally minded economists, argue that free trade, i.e. an end to industrial and agricultural protection in the advanced industrial world, would do more to help the poor than this kind of world welfarism (Bhagwati 2004). In sum, since Rawls did not apply the difference principle to the international realm, his strongest critics contend, this absence allows for not addressing extreme global inequalities (Barry 1991). In this view the application of a principle of justice would require a transnational or global difference principle, not just an international one.

Responding to some of this criticism, Rawls later specified that a global difference principle would be untenable because liberal states would then improperly impose social-liberal doctrine on (potentially) non-liberal states. It constituted a kind of intolerance because it would refuse the right of other peoples to live by principles of their own (Rawls 1999). Rawls thus argues in favour of a pluralist idea of principles and an acknowledgement of history in setting

norms. This comes out clearly in his answer to a vexing question: What is the extent of obligation of richer toward poorer countries? Most theorists would agree that we have different and more extensive obligations toward those closer to us—family, friends, and fellow citizens—than we have toward distant strangers (see, however, Singer 1972): the key question is how different and how much more extensive? Rawls argues that our obligations extend only to helping societies that are not capable of sustaining internal schemes of social justice to reach the point at which they would be so capable, and he argues against the transfer of actual resources. For example, help could be extended to support the right kind of civil society and state administration which could serve as incubators of social rights.

An even stronger consideration of communal allegiances and pluralism can be found in the work of Amartya Sen, who gives primacy to the idea of freedom in realizing human capabilities (Sen 1999). This basic premise makes room for a world in which people value very different allegiances. While it is useful to start with the European historical trajectory, we may—in the end—need to go beyond this particular experience of the link between of social rights and (political) citizenship. A starting point may be the inclusion of contributions from the different regions of the world to discourses on the transnational social question and social rights. Amartya Sen, for example, approached the question of inequalities not from an institutional vantage point but from the perspective of individual resources. Based on liberal political theory, he has proposed the concepts of entitlement and capability. In his work on famines he does not argue for a "right to food". He places the law (social rights) in "between food availability and food entitlement" (Sen 1981: 165-6). For Sen, entitlements are not (moral) rights but a term for a person's actual ownership and exchange capabilities. Nonetheless, his argument, namely that hunger needs to be tackled at the level of entitlements, and that market mechanisms alone will not achieve this end, does point in the direction of policies that alter legal and socio-political structures. In his later work, Sen defended the idea of a "metaright" to public policies that would help make the right to food realizable (Sen 1999).

These normative considerations must be supplemented by socio-political reflections that can be empirically validated, in order to shift the focus from desirable situations to actually emerging legal constructs and especially their institutional context. In particular world polity theory, a neo-institutionalist approach (Meyer et al. 1997), has been a fertile ground for testing theoretical assumptions. It examines whether there are institutional forms, such as educational systems and social insurance systems, that are common to all states. The underlying idea is that institutional isomorphism, i. e. cases in which national states adopt similar forms of, for example, organizing schooling, can be traced to a Weberian notion of rationalization. This implies that institutions strive to appear 'modern' in adapting dominant ways of

organizing social, economic, and political life. Role models can be found in, among others, international organizations such as UNESCO for the educational field, or the EU's 'Bologna Process' for university education. Yet, while this kind of neo-institutionalist theory greatly enhances our understanding of the spread of some forms of formal institutions (almost) globally, it has not yet fully examined how such institutions are structured to contribute to the diffusion of social rights. There is clear evidence, for instance, that in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa and in Southern Asia the expansion of the education system, structured into primary, secondary, and tertiary schooling, contributes to even greater social inequality because it is exploited by local elites to secure privileges for their own offspring (Bevans 2004). Similar observations could be made in OECD states such as Germany, where educational inequalities along social class and disability have persisted over the past decades and those along ethnicity are staggering. Another question that has not yet been explored by advocates of the world polity approach is whether or not certain functions are fulfilled by altogether different systems, for instance informal systems of social security. Such systems cannot simply be categorized as 'traditional', as they are primarily the consequence of unfulfilled promises made by postcolonial states and international organizations. Consequently, and this insight goes beyond the discussion of this particular approach, social rights and other, more informal, commitments must not only be sought in state–citizen relations, but also in other arrangements such as family, kinship and communal systems, or clientelistic political practices.

World polity theory steers our attention to the processes of drawing the boundaries that constitute the objects of inquiry, such as states, markets, or systems more generally. It thus raises questions of the 'state' beyond the nation-state and draw attention to the emergence of a world public sphere. Thus, an open approach to boundaries may be a first step toward capturing the transnational social question. In his "Basic Sociological Terms" Max Weber did not define society (Gesellschaft) or community (Gemeinschaft). Instead, he discussed the associative and communal relationships (Vergesellschaftung and Vergemeinschaftung) (Weber 1980[1922]: 21-23). Drawing explicitly on Ferdinand Tönnies, Weber argued that associations and communities are based on different patterns of interaction and solidarity. This approach serves as an inspiration to pursue the question about the appropriate epistemological stance in dealing with the transnational social question. Instead of starting with the national state and the system of nation-states or with a borderless world, it may be more fruitful to use concepts such as social space to delineate the social formations relevant for the subject areas of social inequality and social protection (Faist 2019).

In sum, normative theories of world citizenship allude to a world society as a horizon of meaning and expectation that already embraces meta-norms such as equality (of opportunity), democracy, and global justice. Political-sociological approaches, on the other hand, such as the world polity approach, not only refer to global horizons of expectation, as the world citizenship approach does, but also to institutional types of multilevel political systems and multi-agency constellations — such as international regimes at state level, or networks of state and non-state organizations. It would be premature, however, to speak of world social regime or policy models akin to welfare state regimes found in the OECD world (cf. Esping-Andersen 1990).

With the help of approaches such as "critical cosmopolitanism", we may systematically combine normative theory with empirical observations. This approach goes beyond exclusively European universalistic principles (Delanty and He 2008). The conceptual premises, analytical approaches, methodologies, and methods of contributions to the transnational social question should be scrutinized. One way of doing so is to unearth the different meanings and interpretations of (social) rights and citizenship in various world regions (e.g. Mamdami [1996] on Africa and Taylor [2004] on Latin America).

5. From the social to the socio-ecological question

One of the fundamental challenges to the striving for social equality has been the human-made climate crisis, the slow-onset and fast-onset environmental

destruction of human habitat in the Anthropocene. Like the threat of nuclear war, the destruction of ecological foundations underlies life chances. Thus, this destruction preempts and precedes all other aspects of the transnational social question. It is instructive to look at the climate crisis – migration debate to get a clearer picture of the stakes involved regarding social inequalities. So far, two generations of scholarship have discussed the climate crisis–migration debate in a rather narrow framework, without considering in full that climate change is mainly an add-on to environmental destruction. The first generation dealt with the vulnerability of specific groups such as the poor, women, and children; the second with resilience, which supposedly helps to adapt to climate change. These perspectives have occluded the finding that climate change is part of a wider process of environmental destruction which indeed has varied impacts on different categories of people with respect to social inequalities (McLeman, Schade, and Faist 2016). By using a mechanistic approach to nature, the first generation of scholarship on climate change and migration seriously underestimated the

adaptive capacities of humans in the face of seminal ecological changes. The second generation of scholarship focused on a particular kind of agency. The main protagonist has been the resilient migrant who engages in successful adaptation to climate change. This newer generation has propagated a mostly market-liberal version of mobility—a mobile and docile migrant who acts in an anticipatory and preventative manner, implying reduced responsibility of the state.

Climate crisis, or environmental destruction more generally, is intricately related to globe-spanning political-economic inequalities which cause, drive, and increase the destruction of human habitat. Evidence of the latter is already visible in the increasing numbers of people who choose to leave dead land or are compelled by force to do so (Sassen 2014). Taking a combined nature-culture lens, the question is how migration in the wake of climate crisis leaves deeper structures of social inequalities intact and reinforces exclusionary mechanisms. Also of interest is how norm entrepreneurs have drawn attention to the dire fate of many migrants who engage in or are even forced into climate-induced mobility—thus constituting the transnational socio-ecological question.

With respect to changing perceptions of climate destruction, some analysts speak of a "metabolic rift" (Foster 1999). This term refers to ecological crisis tendencies under capitalism. Marx (1962 [1867]: 192) theorized a rupture in the metabolic interaction between nature and culture, which derives from the mode of capitalist production and the growing rupture between urban and rural regions. Marx held this rift to be irreconcilable with any kind of sustainability. In the meantime, however, we have learned that while capitalism has remained a pervasive force, it is "local at all points" (Latour 1993: 117). Conflicts over mitigation of and adaptation to climate change have occurred over the past years, far away from spectacular world gatherings. It has been neither (global) climate governance nor (local) adaptation but rather climate conflicts that have been propelling some progress in addressing

rampant carbonization. What needs to be determined in future research is the combination of responses to climate change which encompasses both exit and voice. It is well worth remembering that the urgent questions raised by environmental degradation, given the tens of millions of people displaced each year in their home countries, is not a scenario of the future but describes the present. For example, there is evidence suggesting a link between global warming and a greater risk of civil violence in much of sub-Saharan Africa, possibly tied to variations in the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) (cf. Burke et al. 2009: 20670–20672; Hsiang, Meng and Crane 2011).

6. Conclusion

Given the high political relevance of the transnational social question, including the socio-natural question, it is important to ask how social scientists might intervene in public debates on social inequalities reaching across borders. Academic and public debates often raise the question whether and in what ways social scientific research may form a basis for rational political decisions. While social science research indeed has implications for public policies, the main proposition here is that such a question is ultimately misleading. While social scientists serve as scientific experts, advocates of certain political and policy positions, or public intellectuals, and thus offer crucial information for describing and understanding social inequalities and social protection, one of the most important public functions of social scientists is to offer concepts and interpretations that can guide political debates in the public sphere.

References

Barry, B. (1991): Theories of Justice: A Treatise on Social Justice, Vol. 1, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Beine, M., Boucher, A. Burgoon, B., Crock, M., Gest, J., Hiscox, M. ,McGovern, P., Rapoport, H., Schaper J., Thielemann, E. (2016): Comparing Immigration Policies: An Overview from the IMPALA Database. International Migration Review 50(4): 827–863.

Beitz, C. R. (1979): Political Theory and International Relations, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Bevans, P. (2004): The Dynamics of Africa's In/security Regimes. In: I. Gough et al. (eds.): Insecurity and Welfare Regimes in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bhagwati, J. (2004): In Defense of Globalization. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bourguignon, F. Morrisson, C. (2002): Inequality among World Citizens: 1820–1992. American Economic Review 92(4): 727–744.

Breman, J., Harris, K., Lee, C. K., van der Linden, M. (eds.) (2019): The Social Question in the Twenty-First Century: A Global View. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Brysk, A., Shafir, G. (eds.) (2004): People out of Place: Globalization, Human Rights, and the Citizenship Gap. New York: Routledge.

Burke, M. B., Shanker, E. S., Dykema, J. A., Lobell, D. B. (2009): Warming Increases the Risk of Civil War in Africa. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 106(49): 20670–20674.

de Swaan, A. (1992): Perspektiven einer transnationalen Sozialpolitik. Journal für Sozialforschung 32(1) 3-17.

de Tocqueville, A. (1986 [1835 and 1840]): De la démocratie en Amérique, 2 Vols, Paris: Gallimard.

Deacon, B. (1997): Global Social Policy: International Organizations and the Future of Welfare. London: Sage.

Delanty, G., He, B. (2008): Cosmopolitan Perspectives on European and Asian Transnationalism. International Sociology 23(3): 323–344.

Esping-Andersen, G. (1990): The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Evans, P. (2006): Counterhegemonic Globalization: Transnational Social Movements in the Contemporary Global Political Economy. In: J. T. Roberts and A. Bellone Hite (eds.): The Globalization and Development Reader: Perspectives on Development and Global Change. Oxford: Blackwell.

Faist, T. (2001): Social Citizenship in the European Union: Nested Membership. Journal of Common Market Studies 39(1): 39–60.

Faist, T. (2019): The Transnationalized Social Question: Migration and the Politics of Social Inequalities in the Twenty-first Century. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Foster, J. B. (1999): Marx's Theory of Metabolic Rift: Classical Foundations for Environmental Sociology. American Journal of Sociology. 105(2): 366–405.

Frank, A. G. (1971): Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin.

Furia, P. (2005): Global Citizenship, Anyone? Cosmopolitanism, Privilege and Public Opinion. Global Society 19(4): 331–359.

Gough, I., Wood, G. (eds.): with A. Barrientos, P. Bevan, P. Davis and G. Room (2004): Insecurity and Welfare Regimes in Asia, Africa and Latin America: Social Policy in Development Context. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Habermas, J. (1998): Die postnationale Konstellation. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp.

Heater, D. (2004): World Citizenship. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Hsiang, S. M., Meng, K. C., Crane, M. A. (2011): Civil Conflicts are Associated with the Global Climate. Nature (476): 438–441.

Inglehart, R. (ed.) (2003): Human Values and Social Change: Findings from the Values Survey, Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers.

Kivisto, P., Faist, T. (2007): Citizenship: Theory, Discourse and Transnational Prospects. Oxford: Blackwell.

Latour, B. (1993): We Have Never Been Modern. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Linklater, A. (1999): Cosmopolitan Citizenship. In: K. Hutchings and R. Dannreuther (eds): Cosmopolitan Citizenship. London: Routledge.

Lübker, M. (2004): Globalization and Perceptions of Social Inequality. International Labour Review 143 (4): 91–128.

McLeman, R., Schade, J., Faist, T. (2016): Environmental Migration and Social Inequality. New York, NY: Springer.

Mamdani, M. (1996): Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Marshall, T. H. (ed.) (1964 [1950]): Citizenship and Social Class. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Marx, K. (1962 [1867]): Das Kapital, Vol. 1 (MEW, Vol. 23) Berlin, Germany: Dietz.

Meyer, J. W., Boli, J., Thomas, G. M., Ramirez, F. O. (1997): World Society and the Nation State. American Journal of Sociology 103(1): 144–181.

Milanovic, B. (2016): Global Inequality: A New Approach for the Age of Globalization. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Mkandawire, T. (ed.) (2004): Social Policy in a Development Context. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Oxfam (2017): An Economy for the 99%. Oxfam Briefing Papers, Oxford: Oxfam International.

Pogge, T. (2002): World Poverty and Human Rights. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Polanyi, K. (2001 [1944]): The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time. 2nd ed., Boston: Beacon Press.

Rawls, J. (1971): A Theory of Justice, Cambridge. MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Rawls, J. (1999): The Law of Peoples. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Sassen, S. (2014): Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Sen, A. (1981): Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sen, A. (1999): Development as Freedom. New York: Anchor Books.

Shachar, A. (2009): The Birthright Lottery: Citizenship and Global Inequality. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Singer, P. (1972): Famine, Affluence, and Morality. Philosophy and Public Affairs 1(1): 229–243.

Taylor, L. (2004): Client-Ship and Citizenship in Latin America. Bulletin of Latin American Research 23(2): 213–27.

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2005): Report on the World Social Situation 2005*:* The Inequality Predicament. New York: United Nations*.*

Wallerstein, I. (1983): Historical Capitalism. London: Verso.

Walzer, M. (1996): Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Weber, M. (1980 [1922]): Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Tübingen. 5. edition. J.C.B. Mohr.