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Big Questions, Real World Puzzles, and Enduring Challenges:A Tribute to Aristide R. Zolberg

Ary's work has shaped the thinking of an entire generation of scholars who study international migration, across all fields of the social sciences. In the first graduate seminar I took with Ary back in the late 1980s, he quipped: "There are those scholars who pose excellent questions relating to the big picture, and there are those who only ask narrow and sometimes insignificant questions and devote their time to doing sophisticated empirical work." This remark struck me and has continuously puzzled me over the course of my own academic career. Needless to say, Ary's remark was made tongue in cheek. While Ary loved big questions and huge comparisons, he paid attention to empirical detail to engage with big questions. I learned from him to look very closely at specific cases, identify patterns, but be careful about unwarranted generalizations. I cherished Ary's ability to observe such apparently mundane social practices like alternate-side-of-the-street parking rules in New York City—and yet connect them to larger features of political systems. He was an acute and astute observer of political and social processes. Ary insisted on grounding his big questions in what he called "real world" puzzles. This style of asking questions has been an enduring challenge to my work although or perhaps because I have engaged in different ways of approaching international migration—mostly from a transnational angle. It is in this spirit that I have come back to big questions, real world puzzles, and methodology in three ways—comparative work on states in global perspective, the role of the national state in cross-border transactions, and the relevance of diversity for inequalities.

First, Ary's example has encouraged me not only to ask big questions but also to engage in close-up empirical analysis. As the author of "How many exceptionalisms?" (1986), he was certainly averse to simplistic structuralism—perhaps a response to the dominant paradigms of the 1950s. One of the reasons I thoroughly enjoyed my time at The Graduate Faculty as a graduate student was the excitement of a new beginning with those scholars who engaged in historical sociology and politics and history. All of them worked in various ways on state and society in global context. Ary always encouraged me to keep on asking about the contemporary relevance of T.H. Marshall's concept of "social citizenship"—especially important considering that I was interested in how heterogeneities other than social class, such as migration experience and gender, play a role in accessing social rights and determining corresponding outcomes. My specific approach while writing my first book was to trace the social mechanisms of how the "political" shapes social outcomes, mostly in how welfare states in North America and Europe deal with immigration. Engaging in comparative

analysis in global perspective was also important in my later work on dual citizenship, when I began to understand how comparative political analysis can fruitfully be used to follow a seminal and global trend—in this case the increasing tolerance of states toward dual citizenship around the world, and the different trajectories national states in Europe have taken in this corridor. More recently, I have pursued this concern with world society comparisons in my work on the transnational social question, that is, why—given the huge inequalities around the globe—there is less social protest than one might expect. Again, this is an extension of Marshall's question about social citizenship, posing it this time about heterogeneities intersecting national states.

Second, Ary's question about how states manage migration engaged my thinking from a range of perspectives. Already in the late 1970s he had connected the 'inside' and the 'outside,' namely points of origin and destination of international migration. Early on, he went beyond the well-entrenched division of labor between "international migration" and "assimilation." He insisted that people, migrants and non-migrants alike, are socio-moral actors: They come from somewhere not just geographically but also culturally, and they enact their own history—albeit not necessarily of one their own making. Oddly enough, my work on transnationalization (the cross-border social process), transnationality (the degree of cross-border transactions a person engages in), and transnational social spaces (cross-border social formations) was fed by the recognition that national states are inextricable institutions of cross-border transactions. It has often been remarked facetiously by critics of the 'transnational turn' that proponents have missed the importance of the national state. Yet this criticism was always superficial. Quite to the contrary, scholars of the transnational in migration have insisted from its beginnings in the late 1980s on the pivotal role of the national state in a global political-economic sense.

The challenge extended by Ary's work for my own has continuously been to clarify that role—for example, by connecting transnational life worlds with institutions regulating membership in communities, organizations, locales, and states. In the felicitous phrase of Max Weber, for example, what is the elective affinity between cross-border societal formations on the one hand and overlapping national institutions such as multiple citizenship on the other? To answer such a question has meant for my work that a perspective on state involvement in border controls in terms of their (allegedly) positive or negative impacts on welfare states, or on the working class in the North, is too narrow. To clarify, normative questions about the relevance of borders in an unequal world have rightly gained prominence in debates on international migration. In addition, there are interesting empirical puzzles about the correlation between types of welfare states and the degree of immigration restrictions, to

which I have also contributed. However, this normative debate is not at the core of a transnational approach in migration studies. Instead, it is the transnational pattern of social life which has formed a point of departure. In Germany (2010), for example, not only about 80 percent of migrants but also about 30 percent of non-migrants entertain cross-border transactions, such as sending goods or money, staying abroad for long spells, or having friends or relatives in places outside the country of residence. This also means that transnationality is not only a characteristic (heterogeneity) of migrants but that non-migrants are also transnational in significant ways. Methodologically, the point of departure from a transnational lens is a borderless world, in which boundaries of all sorts—among them state borders but also access to institutions—intervene. Above all, a transnational perspective takes account of the (re)production of state borders as a specific type of boundary and of the function such borders take. This methodological stance is not to be confused with the normative presupposition of the desirability of borders, or the contrary—a borderless world. Yet it is to insist on the empirical fact that social life is not neatly confined by national containers. Needless to say, national states are crucial institutions of regulating borders and (re)distributing resources and status. But to analyze cross-border transactions meaningfully from a social science perspective, we need to ask how national borders have become a social fact that is reproduced and is taken for granted so that the apparent social constitution becomes invisible by institutionalization. In the end, the regulation of cross-border social life necessitates the study of the institutionalization of various boundaries among which national borders and national institutions such as citizenship play a key role. Only then are we in a position to study international migration as a specific instance of cross-border transactions that is part of and/or may result in dense social formations across borders, so-called transnational social spaces or even world society. This stance has been central to the agenda of methodological transnationalism that I have been part of developing. Though Ary would not have agreed with such a perspective, his insistence on the crucial role of national states in international migration has been a keen reminder that certain institutions matter more than others in shaping spatial mobility and cross-border connections of mobile and sedentary agents alike. Ary's macro-comparative insights need to be heeded by scholars working in a transnational vein because there is always the danger of forgetting about the endurance and flexibility of national institutions in a global world. To neglect the seminal role of national states in boundary formation, as Ary observed, is, for obvious reasons, probably more widespread among sociologists than among political scientists.

Third, all through his work from the 1960s onward, Ary insisted on the importance of taking account of the production and regulation of diversity in its manifold forms—especially in its linguistic and religious forms. This concern ran through his work continuously, starting with

his studies on the party system in West Africa in the 1960s through his work on the linguistic divisions in Belgium in the 1970s and 1980s and culminating in his famous article, "Why Islam is like Spanish?" in the late 1990s, co-authored with Long Litt Woon. Ary never fell prey to reducing accounts and explanations to one of the most overrated concepts in the social sciences, ethnicity. Instead, his starting question was how to deal with various forms of diversity. This question has lately inspired my interest in the causal mechanisms which connect various heterogeneities—among them ethnicity, gender, and class, but also transnationality—to unequal outcomes and life chances, namely social inequalities. For example, is it true that cross-border transactions significantly improve life chances, or is the reverse true, namely, that it is a dead end, which contributes to the segregation of migrants? Often, in both politics and academic research, so-called highly qualified migrants are seen as an instance of the former while labor migrants are seen as an instance of the latter. In other words, in the case of global elites transnationality enhances careers—the higher the income, the better the level of education; and the broader the network, the more opportunities a person has. Quite the contrary is true in the case of labor migrants where it is usually held that transnationality furthers segregation—the lower the income, the lower the level of education and the smaller the network, the more marginalized a person is. As my colleagues and I at Bielefeld University in the Collaborative Research Centre "From "Heterogeneities to Inequalities" have found in empirical studies in European contexts, the picture is not in fact so polarized—there is no such dichotomy. There is both a continuum of transnational engagement on the part of migrants and non-migrants, and transnationality per se is associated neither with economic or social success nor with social, political, or economic marginality. Instead, all the empirical (quantitative) evidence suggests that there is a good deal of "middling transnationality," that is, transnationality as a characteristic also of persons occupying middle positions in social income and status hierarchies. Transnationality is an uncommon and new heterogeneity. Yet even in this case it becomes evident that binary categorizations—along the lines of the highly qualified as characterized by "good" transnationality and labor migrants embodying "bad" transnationality—are the result of processes of categorizations which rank groups of people and are thus the stuff that produces and reproduces inequalities, in this case resulting in the categories of "desirable" and "undesirable" migrants. The social mechanisms by which this occurs are not simply socio-economic ones, such as exploitation and opportunity hoarding, but also semantic and symbolic ones in which Ary was also interested when writing about cultural diversity, that is, cultural heterogeneity. Comparing the US and Europe, he alerted us to the outcomes involved in boundary making, such as the blurring, crossing, and shifting of boundaries. It is a task for further research to specify the specific mechanisms involved in boundary making and develop a taxonomy of the general and specific mechanisms involved.

To conclude, in his own inimitable way Ary dealt with the paradox of dividing the world into different categories, especially ethnicities. I vividly remember the following anecdote, conveyed to me by Ruben Rumbaut: When asked which ethnic category he would check in the census, Ary simply responded: “Human.” After all, Ary was not only a towering master in posing academic puzzles but also a quite practical and effective lateral thinker against well-entrenched presuppositions which have persistently made assumptions underlying diversity invisible by dividing people into allegedly distinctive categories. Ary’s enduring contribution to international migration studies and beyond suggests that big questions and fundamental issues in the social sciences gain their relevance from very concrete puzzles.

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