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Imagining *Refugia*: thinking outside the current international migration architecture

The refugee summits in the US in September 2016 rounded off no less than seven major international meetings in 2016 that set out to address the 'refugee and migrant crisis' of recent years, resulting in the prospect of 'Global Compacts' to promote 'safe, orderly and regular migration' for refugees and migrants by 2018. While the aims and sentiments articulated were worthy and worthwhile, there is a general lack of confidence that such summitry holds promise of real progress, or that the three traditional 'durable solutions' (local integration, resettlement and return) can address the challenge on the scale needed.

This contribution takes as a starting point various recent proposals that depart from the usual three 'durable solutions' and international migration architecture, and that think about alternatives. Strands to consider include charter cities, ideas for safe areas, and special zones for refugees and migrants. One attention-grabbing set of proposals explores the idea of new nations, cities or polities for refugees and migrants. These suggestions – particularly the idea of 'refugee islands'-- have usually been dismissed as fantasies by the refugee commentariat. However, perhaps such seemingly outlandish proposals should not be dismissed out of hand. In this presentation, after reviewing these proposals, I explore the possibility not of a new 'refugee nation', but rather a new kind of transnational polity – *Refugia* -- governed by refugees and migrants themselves, and which links refugee and migrant communities globally.

In an exercise that I characterise as 'pragmatic utopianism', I argue that such a transnational polity is imperfectly prefigured in many of the transnational practices that refugees and migrants deploy and the environments in which they (sometimes in alliance with sympathetic citizens) find themselves today. Camps and communities in countries neighbouring conflicts, neighbourhoods in global cities, transnational political practices and money transfers, emergent communities and activities in disparate locations *en route*: all are fragments that taken separately do not seem to promise much. But in the aggregate they could add up to *Refugia,* imperfectly prefigured. Consolidating them somehow into a common polity might prove to be a way out of the current impasse.