

Transnational Studies Initiative

Conceptual Background and Goals

The *Transnational Studies Initiative* (TSI) explores and analyzes, from a variety of theoretical, methodological, and ontological perspectives, the forms and consequences of different kinds of transnationalisms, how they relate to one another, and how they define and redefine social relations and institutions. The initiative is co-directed by Sanjeev Khagram, an Assistant Professor of Public Policy at the Kennedy School, and Peggy Levitt, an Associate Professor of Sociology at Wellesley College. Both Peggy and Sanjeev are principals at the Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations at Harvard University.

Each day, the news is filled with examples of the ways in which aspects of contemporary social life cross, transcend, and transform political borders. Members of pan-Muslim, Hindu, and Evangelical Christian religious communities value spiritual identities as much, or more than, national or racial ties. Social movements mobilize trans-border constituencies around issues such as human rights, gender justice, and sustainable development. Economic production and distribution is organized around trans-continental investment, manufacturing, and distribution chains. Associations set common standards for professionals working in similar fields around the world. And migrants and non-migrants form part of thick, broad social networks linking the social, political, and economic activities of those in source countries to those in countries of reception.

The destruction of the World Trade on September 11, 2001, one of the most potent symbols of capitalism, by the Al Qaeda terrorist network is perhaps the most powerful example of the “transnational” nature of the world. While the immediate response of the U.S. government was to re-assert the primacy of the nation-state system, even a superficial analysis reveals that various transnational phenomena -- from money laundering and criminal networks to trans-governmental police coalitions, diasporic Afghani communities, and humanitarian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) – were implicated pre- and post- 9/11/01.

These transnational dynamics are not well understood, although, in many respects, they have clear historical analogues and antecedents. These include, among others, market capitalism, imperialism and colonialism, religious institutions, anti-slavery and worker’s right’s movements, and illegal pirating networks. Indeed, the world has always been in some sense transnational - even nations, states, nation-states and the nation-state system have been transnationally constituted and shaped over time and space.

Transnationalism in its various forms is the subject of a growing but fragmented body of scholarship. This work, though often interdisciplinary, generally treats transnational dynamics and institutions as if they were unconnected to one another and theorizes about them separately. Yet, we are convinced that understanding contemporary social life requires that the empirical connections and interactions between different types of transnationalism and with “non-transnational” phenomena and dynamics be made. It is no longer enough, if it ever was, to simply compare experiences across nations, states, or societies. We need to explore how transnational practices and processes in different domains relate to and inform one another.

This initiative attempts to bridge these gaps by fostering conversations between academics and practitioners working on a variety of topics, from a variety of disciplines, around the world. To

accomplish this, we have organized a series of activities including empirical research, curriculum development, and workshops and research conversations on topics such as *transnational citizenship*, *transnational identities and institutions*, *multi-stakeholder sovereignty and governance*, *religion*, *terrorism*, *arts and culture*, and *corporate citizenship/social responsibility*. Our goal is to identify the common themes, structures, ideas, and institutions that characterize transnational social dynamics and processes in different arenas, and to understand how we must rethink conventional notions about identity, citizenship, community, and society in response.

The research we conduct and the conclusions that we draw at these workshops serve several goals. First, we will produce a number of scholarly and more popularly-oriented articles, an edited volume, and several books. Second, we will create a scholar-practitioner network to encourage greater communication across this seemingly insurmountable divide. Third, the initiative is designed to help researchers, policymakers, and activists grapple with the ways in which new understandings of transnationalism require them to rethink what they do. Fourth, we aim to build transnational perspectives into the curricula of the major disciplines and to produce model courses and curricular resources for students and faculty. Our activities are meant to help those who make policy, advocate, teach, or institute business and corporate practices think about the changes they need to make when aspects of what they do are enacted across borders. Curriculum developers and teachers will use our findings to train a new generation of scholars to systematically use a transnational lens in their inquiries.

Outlined below are descriptions of the activities and sub-projects that form part of this broader project.

Creating the Field of Transnational Studies

A transnational approach to contemporary social experience represents a radical departure from nation-state-centric approaches because it calls into question the widespread assumption that social interactions automatically take place inside national boundaries. This kind of methodological nationalism has blinded us to the many social processes, relations, and institutions that cross and transcend national boundaries. It assumes that incorporation, singularity, and stasis, rather than movement, multiplicity, and simultaneity, are the norm. It gives too much credence to a nation-state project that is both uneven and incomplete.

To capture these complexities and to make these connections, we aim to help constitute and define a nascent field of Transnational Studies that brings together scholarship and scholars across fields and disciplines. Transnational Studies focuses on transnationally-constituted processes or relationships resulting from factors operating on a variety of scales and scopes. In this field, social identities and practices that cross borders are the rule rather than the exception. Research is designed to empirically ascertain to what extent, how, and with what consequences.

Toward this end, we will compile a two-volume reader that will serve as a primer for those interested in the field. The first volume will include an introductory overview to the field of Transnational Studies and the articles that are seminal to its foundation. The second volume will include exemplars of research that successfully employ a transnational perspective. We also anticipate that other curricular tools and written products, accessible to a broad range of academics and practitioners, will be produced by the initiative.

Workshop and Research Project Descriptions

The *Initiative* is organizing a series of workshops and research activities that examine different aspects of transnational relations and dynamics from a comparative perspective. These produce the data that generate a second set of project outputs. The workshops are outlined below:

The Rights and Responsibilities of Transnational Citizenship

While it is clear that many aspects of contemporary life transcend national borders, it is not clear what affect this has, if any, on the kinds of communities with which individuals and institutions identify. As people increasingly live their lives in multiple settings within multiple communities, do they also adapt multiple identities? How do these identities relate to each other? What explains why some individuals develop global affinities while others identify with more particularistic communities? What do these new kinds of belonging, and the different ways of mobilizing associated with them, mean for how we think about governance and civil society? A workshop was held in March 2004 that brought together scholars and practitioners representing various fields to examine the ideas and identities associated with transnational citizenship.

Transnational Identities and Institutions

This workshop, to be held in November 2004, will focus on how transnational practices and processes in different domains relate to one another. It will explore the characteristics of the institutional arenas in which transnational belonging is expressed. How are ideas, norms, and practices negotiated both within and between these institutions? Is there anything really new about transnational collective action or are these just different forms of what we have always done? How do sub-national, state, and supranational institutions relate to each other? Is there a consciousness in particular social arenas that global norms are being acted upon and that the local is acting back?

Multi-stakeholder Sovereignty and Governance

During the 1990s dozens of experiments in global governance, such as the World Commission on Dams, Minerals, Mining and Sustainable Development Initiative, Global Reporting Initiative and Global Compact, were initiated. Most of these claimed to be transparent and participatory multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral endeavors addressing critical problems that states and the inter-state system could not or would not address. The participants in these novel institutional arrangements included multinational corporations, international professional associations, transnational nongovernmental organizations, intergovernmental agencies and other cross-border non-state groups, in addition to state actors. These initiatives generally entailed a commitment to link economic, social and environmental issues in a holistic manner. Some see these new forms of global governance as usurping the authority of states and intergovernmental agencies. Others see them as important complements to state and inter-state regulation. Still others claim that these experiments hold the promise of an alternative multi-stakeholder model that can unseat unilateralism and multilateralism. But why did these institutional arrangements emerge in the first place? This component of the TDI explores from where they draw their capacity and legitimacy. How are they organized and how do they relate to more conventional international regimes and institutional arrangements? Are they democratizing? Do they promote human security and sustainable development? Are they sustainable over the longer run?

Religion

Religion is an increasingly salient, yet little explored, arena of transnational activism. The prominent role of religion in identity formation, its capacity to mobilize adherents around particular

causes, its fluidity across political boundaries, and its association with long-established regional and global networks of adherents and resources makes it a critical element of the broad phenomenon of transnationalism. In what ways, institutionally, does religion involve transnational flows of people, financial resources, and ideas? How is religious authority exercised transnationally and how does this impact local religious life? To what extent can we differentiate religiosity and ethnicity in religious organizations? How do transnational religious bodies and service providers relate to governments in the countries/cities in which they are located? A workshop to address these questions, in which scholars and practitioners representing broad religious affiliations and institutions will participate, is tentatively scheduled for late spring/early summer 2005.

Transnational Social and Financial Dynamics of Terrorism

While important research has been undertaken regarding causes of terrorism, actors involved, and strategies to counter terrorist activities, an integrated and comprehensive analysis of the social and financial organization of terrorism that links such work to other transnational phenomena has been lacking. A workshop was held in October 2003 in collaboration with Brown University's Watson Institute to address these gaps in our understanding of this form of transnational violence. More than 35 scholars, journalists, government officials, and stakeholders from organizations working in this area came together to consider questions about the organizational, financial, and transnational dynamics of terrorism. The workshop was based on the assumption that the financing of terrorism is part of its social organization and that this must be understood using a transnational, comparative lens. The workshop was structured in three parts: 1) the social organization of terrorism, identifying terrorist groups, and describing their organizational forms; 2) analyzing terrorist financing as a case study in the social organization of terrorism; and 3) contextualizing the detailed analysis of terrorist groups in the contemporary study of transnational phenomena.

Arts and Culture

As one of the most enduring and fully institutionalized transnational domains, the arts offer particularly illuminating opportunities for investigating not only the variety and changing character of transnationality but also the role of individuals and institutions in the globalization process. Artists, works of art, and artistic styles, as well as culture portrayed using various artistic mediums, have long histories of moving across national borders. These exchanges involve complex interactions between states, markets, and nongovernmental organizations, as well as the development of transnational networks of producers, consumers, and organizational intermediaries. They also involve an extraordinary range of institutions, including government agencies and programs, museums, colleges and universities, scholarly disciplines and societies, for-profit and nonprofit performing arts organizations, media and broadcasting enterprises, and networks of art dealers, agents, and promoters. The development and dissemination of high, popular, and indigenous arts, crafts, antiquities, and performances and their associated histories, classes, national borders and regimes provide valuable opportunities to explore the complex and multi-centered ways art is produced, promoted, distributed, and consumed. A workshop on this topic is planned for the fall of 2005.

Corporate Responsibility and Social Regulation

Sanjeev Khagram and Suzanne Shanahan, Assistant Professor of Sociology at Duke University, are nearing completion of their research project about social accountability of corporations. Based on their findings to date, Sanjeev and Suzanne have conceptualized a way to understand corporate responsibility and social regulation that highlights their multilevel and interactive dynamics. By

focusing conceptually on the broader notion of corporate citizenship, they examine a variety of behaviors ranging from corporate responsibility to corporate accountability as well as dramatic cross-country, sector and firm level variations in behaviors from the 1970s to the present. In addition, they propose a field approach to corporate citizenship that better explains some of its counter-intuitive dimensions. Conceptualizing corporate citizenship as a transnational field also brings to light its contested nature. Finally, they have developed a set of tentative propositions about the role of transnational cross-sectoral activist and professional networks in promoting, spreading and deepening the social accountability of corporations. One forthcoming publication is a Harvard Business Review/Latin America (November 2004) article on Brazilian social balance sheets.

Work in progress synthesizing the findings from these activities will be published as part of the Hauser Center Working Paper Series (See Working Paper No. 24 – Constructing Transnational Studies). We will also present our work at various scholarly conferences and at invited lectures. Along with scholarly and popular articles, a synthetic volume analyzing the identities, ideas, and institutions characterizing transnational dynamics will be a central product.

Initiative Timeline and Support

The TDI was launched in 2002. The workshops and research projects both underway and in the planning stages will be completed by the fall of 2006. A portion of the start-up funding for this project was generously provided by the Atlantic Philanthropies. Funding for specific project components has been provided, to date, by the Ford Foundation (*Rights and Responsibilities of Transnational Citizenship*) and the Rockefeller Foundation (*Transnational Identities and Institutions*). More information can be found on the Initiative's website at www.transnational-studies.org and on the Hauser Center website at www.ksg.harvard.edu/hauser. Please contact Sarah Alvord (sarah_alvord@harvard.edu), Program Officer, with any questions.