

**Towards A Field of Transnational Studies  
and a  
Sociological Transnationalism Research Program  
By**

**Sanjeev Khagram  
Harvard University**

**Peggy Levitt<sup>1</sup>  
Wellesley College**

**February, 2005**

---

<sup>1</sup> This is a co-authored paper, jointly conceived and written by both contributors. Support has been generously provided by the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Hauser Center for Non-Profit Organizations, Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Wellesley College Faculty Research Fund, Atlantic Philanthropies, Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, and Stanford Institute of International Studies. Earlier versions were presented at the Hauser Center, University of California at Davis Sociology Colloquium, the Brown University Seminars on Anthropology and Demography as well as Sociology, the SANCOR and CISAC workshops at Stanford University, and the Princeton University Center for Migration and Development. We would like to thank the following people for their comments: John Meyer, Suzanne Shanahan, David Kyle, Woody Powell, Patrick Heller, Richard Scott, Peter Katzenstein, Joseph Nye, Jonathan Fox, Peter Dobkin Hall, Xavier Briggs, Viviana Selizer, Mark Moore, Gabriele Bammer, Josh DeWind, Marc Vantresca, and numerous others. Correspondence should be sent to [sanjeev\\_khagram@harvard.edu](mailto:sanjeev_khagram@harvard.edu).

## ABSTRACT

Each day, the news vividly depicts how social phenomena and dynamics cross, underly, transcend, alter and even transform borders and boundaries (and the structures, dynamics and actors ostensibly contained within them). The destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, one of the most potent symbols of western capitalism, by members of the also Al Qaeda terrorist network is perhaps the most powerful recent examples of the “transnational” nature of the world.

Ostensibly novel transnational phenomena and dynamics have clear historical analogues and antecedents. Indeed, human social formations, processes and activities have always been transborder and transboundary to a significant degree. Even contemporary nation-states and the nation-state system have been transnationally constituted and shaped over time and space in powerful ways.

These forms and processes of transnationality are the focus of a burgeoning yet fragmented body of scholarship across sub-fields of sociology and closely related social science disciplines. But scholars who produce this work generally treat their efforts as unconnected to each other or work on them isolation.

There is thus both tremendous value in and potential for explicating and further consolidating an emergent interdisciplinary field of Transnational Studies. In this paper, we identify five intellectual foundations for this field that offer a heuristically rich and compelling set of empirical, methodological, theoretical, philosophical, and practical ideas and options.

We further propose a specific Sociological Transnationalism research program within the field that prioritizes these intellectual foundations in a unique and generative way. We argue that this research program and the field more broadly is likely to cast new light on a range of core sociological and social scientific concerns including power, production, inequality, culture, identity, citizenship, organization and governance among many others.

**Towards A Field of Transnational Studies  
and a  
Sociological Transnationalism Research Program**

**Sanjeev Khagram and Peggy Levitt**

Social life crosses, connects, underlies, transcends, alters and even transforms borders and boundaries, as well as the structures, processes and actors ostensibly contained within them. Political movements mobilize cross-border constituencies around gender justice, environmental sustainability and traditional family values campaigns. Many adherents of pan-Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Jewish, Sikh, Bahai and other faiths (still or once again) place greater stock in their religious membership than in their country or racial allegiances. Markets are organized around trans-continental investment, manufacturing, distribution, and consumption chains. Associations set common standards for professionals in the same field working in different parts of the world. Hip hop “heads” in Gugulettu and Rio draw inspiration and borrow techniques from their Los Angeles counter parts and visa versa. The tortilla chip is now the best selling snack in the United States while the roti is the bread of choice in many Caribbean locales. Most deadly conflicts involve private militias and ethnic diasporas. And migrants and non-migrants across generations form part of thick, broad social networks linking the familial, social, political, and economic practices of those in sending communities to those in communities of reception.

The destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, one of the most potent symbols of western capitalism, by members of the Al Qaeda terrorist network is perhaps the most powerful example of the “transnational” nature of the world.<sup>2</sup> While the immediate

---

<sup>2</sup> The hearings and conclusions of the 9-11 Independent Commission appointed by President George Bush have been particularly fascinating in this regard. One of the most revealing sentiments conveyed was that what happened on 9-11 was “completely beyond our imagination”. Perhaps if those officials had access to a set of conceptual and analytical tools that elucidated transnational phenomena and dynamics such as those developed in this article, the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> would not have been so inconceivable.

response of the U.S. government was to attempt to re-inscribe the primacy and centrality of (nation-)states and the (nation-)state-system, even a superficial analysis reveals that various transnational phenomena and dynamics – from cross-border money transfer systems to criminal networks, trans-governmental police coalitions, dispersed but linked diasporic Afghans, humanitarian nongovernmental organizations and multinational business initiatives – were activated pre- and post-September 11<sup>th</sup>.

Ostensibly novel transnational phenomena and dynamics have clear historical analogues and antecedents including long-distance nationalisms, hawala financial systems, market capitalism, colonialisms and imperialisms, missionary campaigns, slave trading, workers movements, haute culture, jazz, and pirating networks, among others. Indeed, human social formations and processes have always been transborder and transboundary to a significant degree, prior to the rise and global spread of the ‘nation-state’ and ‘nation-state system’. Contemporary “nation-states” and the “nation-state system” have been transnationally constituted and shaped over time and space in powerful ways. It is no longer enough, if it ever was, to only examine and analyze experiences within or across presumably bounded or closed societies or cultures whether they are categorized as localities, regions, nations, states, nation-states, nation-state systems, empires, or world systems, etc.

Indeed, these forms and processes of transnationality are the focus of a burgeoning yet fragmented body of scholarship across virtually all sub-fields of sociology – from political, economic, cultural and comparative historical work to the study of organizations, gender, race and ethnicity, migration, demography, food, music, etc. Associated scholarship in the nearby disciplines of political science, anthropology, history and geography among others has also

contributed substantially to transnational research and knowledge.<sup>3</sup> But sociologists across sub-fields and social scientists across disciplines generally treat their efforts as unconnected to each other and work on them separately, although linkages and bridges are beginning to emerge.

**There is thus both tremendous value and potential in rigorously conceptualizing firstly the intellectual foundations of an emergent interdisciplinary field of transnational studies (TS).** Not all scholars that will or can be associated with the nascent TS field might

---

<sup>3</sup> See among others: John Angnew and Stuart Corbridge, *Mastering Space, Territory and Political Economy*, (New York: Routledge, 1995); Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Christina Szanton-Blanc, eds., *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity and Nationalism Reconsidered* (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1992), Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, eds., *Culture, Power, Place* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo, eds., *Transnationalism from Below* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1998); Peggy Levitt, *Transnational Villagers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Peggy Levitt and Mary Waters, eds., *The Changing Face of Home* (New York: Russell Sage Publications, 2002); David Kyle, 2000. *Transnational Peasants: Migrations, Networks, and Ethnicity in Andean Ecuador* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), Aiwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logic of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Nadje Al-Ali and Khalid Moser, eds., *New Approaches to Migration: Transnational Communities and the Transformation of Home* (London: Routledge, 2001); Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Nacy Abelmann and John Lie, *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995; Ulf Hannerz, *Transnational Connections: Cultures, People, Places* (London: Routledge, 1996); Suzanne Hoeber Rudolph and James Piscatori, eds., *Transnational Religion and Fading States* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997); Thomas Risse-Kappen, ed., *Bringing Transnational Relations Back in: Non-State Actors, Domestic Structures, and International Institutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Daphne Josselin and William Wallace, eds., *Non-State Actors in World Politics* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Jackie Smith, Charles Chatfield, and Ron Pagnucco., eds., *Transnational Social Movements and Global Politics: Solidarity Beyond the State* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1997); Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); Ann Florini, ed., *The Third Force: The Rise of Transnational Civil Society* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000); Sanjeev Khagram, James V. Rikker, and Kathryn Sikkink, eds., *Restructuring World Politics: Transnational Social Movements, Networks and Norms* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Sanjeev Khagram, *Dams and Development: Transnational Struggles for Water and Power* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Leslie Sklair, *The Transnational Capitalist Class* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001); various issues of the journal: *Transnational Organized Crime* (London: Frank Cass, 1995-); Nikos Passas, *Transnational Crime* (Brookfield, VT Ashgate, 1999); Ann Marie Slaughter, "The Real New World Order," *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 5 (September/October 1997); Alejandro Portes, Luis Guarnizo, and Patricia Landolt, "Introduction: Pitfalls and Promise of an Emergent Research Field," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22 (1999): 463-478; Alejandro Portes, William J. Haller, and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo, "Transnational Entrepreneurs: An Alternative Form of Immigrant Economic Adaptation," *American Sociological Review*, (2002) Luis Guarnizo, Alejandro Portes, and William J. Haller, "Assimilation and Transnationalism: Determinants of Transnational Political Action among Contemporary Migrants," *American Journal of Sociology*, (2003); Christian Joppke and Ewa Morawska, eds., *Toward Assimilation and Citizenship: Immigrants in Liberal Nation-States* (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Peggy Levitt, Josh DeWind, and Steven Vertovec, "Transnational Migration: International Perspectives," A Special Issue of *International Migration Review* 37, no. 3 (Fall 2003); Bredna Yeoh, Katie Willis, S.M. Abdul Khader Fakhri, "Introduction: Transnationalism and its edges," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 26, no.2, 2003, Katharyne Mitchell, "Cultural Geographies of Transnationality," in *The Handbook of Cultural*

identify themselves as such and, even if they do, there are diverse views about the intellectual foundations of the field. These differences, however, are as important to the vitality and prospects for transnational scholarship as are the areas of overlap and agreement.

The field of TS, we claim, consists of and can be entered through the following five intellectual foundations:

1. **Empirical Transnationalism** focuses on describing, mapping, quantifying, and classifying novel and/or historically important transnational phenomena and dynamics. These transnationalisms are generally understood to be derivative of dominant types of ostensibly bounded and/or bordered units, actors, structures and processes linked to notions of the local, regional or global but especially the nation, state, nation-state and nation-state system. This work less often explicitly questions or problematizes the borders and/or boundaries that are crossed, constituted or super-ceded.
2. **Methodological Transnationalism** involves, at a minimum, reclassifying existing data, evidence, historical and ethnographic accounts that are based on bounded or bordered units so that underlying or novel transnational forms and processes are revealed. Even more so, it requires creating and implementing novel research designs and methodologies that produce new types of data, evidence and observations that more accurately and rigorously capture transnational realities. This often requires utilizing non-traditional or multiple units of inquiry, levels of analysis and/or time frames.
3. **Theoretical Transnationalism** formulates explanations and/or craft interpretations that either parallel, complement, replace or transform existing theoretical frameworks and accounts. In some cases, they complement conventional theories by identifying and explaining different sets of phenomena and dynamics. In others, transnational accounts elucidate some aspects of particular forms and processes and add to what traditional theories offer us. Transnational theories may also compete with and better explain phenomena and dynamics that have already been conceptualized in local, national, comparative-national, international or global terms. Finally, transnational accounts might be integrated with conventional explanations to form transformed hybrid theories.
4. **Philosophical Transnationalism** starts from the ontological assumption that social worlds and lives are in the first place transnational. In other words, transnational phenomena and dynamics are the rule rather than the exception, the central tendencies rather than the outliers, the underlying realities rather than derivative by-products. It further involves an epistemological lens or perspective, a set of ways of researching, theorizing, and understanding that involves excavating, analyzing, and explicating transnational phenomena and dynamics, particularly those in which ostensibly bounded and bordered entities are embedded and by which the latter are constituted. Any explanation or interpretation that did not identify and explicate the proximate and/or deeper transnational forms and processes involved would be incomplete.

---

*Geography*, eds. Kay Anderson, Mona Domosh and Steven Pile (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003), and Roger Waldinger and David Fitzgerald, "Transnationalism in Question," *American Journal of Sociology*, 2004.

5. **Public Transnationalism** creates space to identify, imagine, propose, develop and legitimate options for social life, order, change and transformation that are conventionally obscured by prescriptively de-centering the “normalcy” of rigidly bounded and/or bordered (or the bordering and bounding of) social or cultural units, forms and processes. Innovative practices, institutions, and identities may come to light by letting go of the expectation or desirability of borders and boundaries.

The first three pillars of TS are more commonly found in the scholarly literature. The last two are less well represented because they challenge conventional paradigms and praxis more fundamentally, moving progressively beyond dominant forms of scholarship, philosophical assumptions, and prescriptive orientations.

**Secondly, we claim that a specific and generative sociological transnationalism (ST) research program can greatly contribute to knowledge and understanding, and provoke the further development of TS.** ST begins from the premises of philosophical transnationalism – that human phenomena and dynamics are always transnational and, correspondingly, high quality scholarship at a minimum requires transnational interpretations and explanations. We identify a whole array of heuristically fascinating research directions generated by turning scholarship “upside down” in this way.

In the next section, we begin by distinguishing transnational scholarship from existing paradigms and perspectives, distinctions that are further developed throughout the article. We sequentially elaborate on the five intellectual foundations for TS: *empirical, methodological, theoretical, philosophical, and public*. We then formulate a unique and generative ST research program that is based on philosophical transnationalism in the field of TS as its entry point. We then summarize our central contentions and conclude that TS will only succeed to the extent that it is open to differing philosophies of knowledge and is transnationally constituted.

## Distinguishing Transnational Scholarship

Transnational scholarship is not entirely new nor does it entail completely jettisoning extant related research paradigms and perspectives. But, as Hannerz notes, it arises in relation to both strengths and weaknesses in contemporary scholarship:

I am rather uncomfortable with the rather prodigious use of the term globalization to describe just about any process or relationship that somehow crosses state boundaries. In themselves, many such processes and relationships obviously do not at all extend across the world. The term 'transnational' is in a way more humble, and often a more adequate label for phenomena which can be of quite variable scale and distribution, even when they do share the characteristic of not being contained within a state. It also makes the point that many of the linkages in question are not 'international,' in the strict sense of involving nations – actually, states – as corporate actors. In the transnational arena, the actors may now be individuals, groups, movements, business enterprises, and in no small part it is this diversity of organization we need to consider. (At the same time, there is a certain irony in the tendency of the term transnational to draw attention to what it negates – that is, to the continued significance of the national.).<sup>4</sup>

This view, while not by any means complete, provides a good first entry into the areas of potential distinctiveness of transnational scholarship.

World systems and world society research, as well as more recent forays into globalization studies, certainly have much to say about some aspects of transnational forms and processes – particularly those that are transplanetary or at least transcontinental in their spatial character or significance.<sup>5</sup> Whether scholars are persuaded that empirical realities are well

---

<sup>4</sup> Hannerz, *Transnational Connections*, pg. 6.

<sup>5</sup> For world systems, a key source is Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) and the classic reference for world society studies is George M. Thomas, John W. Meyer, Francisco Ramirez and John Boli, *Institutional Structure: Constituting State, Society and the Individual* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1987). For an early volume that includes both approaches, see Albert Bergesson, ed., *Studies of the Modern World System*, (New York: Academic Press, 1980). Of course, much more has been produced in these scholarly traditions over the last thirty years. It is important to note that a great deal of the “dependency” scholarship of the 1970s departed from an overly rigid adoption of world unitism or systemism. We would consider much of the latter work to be firmly part of the field of TS and highly recommend Alain de Janvry's, *Agrarian Reformism in*



accounted for by theoretical claims linked to the world systems perspective, virtually no one would deny its central role in de-centering the nation-state as the only central social organizing principle of thought and practice. Building on this premise, world society scholars have compellingly argued that nation-states are constituted and embedded in worldwide cognitive and ideational scripts that account for a range of forms and processes otherwise poorly explained.

But much of this ‘globalist’ scholarship tends to equate all trans-border and/or transboundary phenomena and dynamics with planetary integration, globally recurrent stratification, and/or worldwide isomorphism. Structures and processes are understood as comparable in strength and character wherever they register. Such views thus miss the variability and multi-directionality of cultural and resource flows and interactions. David Held and his colleagues develop some of the more nuanced theoretical ideas and empirical analysis in the more recent globalization literature, but even they (probably rightly so) conceptualize globalization as, “a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions . . . generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power.”<sup>6</sup>

Thus, this work is far too often not fine-tuned enough to capture cross-border agents, structures, and interactions at different scales, ranging scopes, varying units and multiple levels that are not worldwide, global or transplanetary. Furthermore, agents are often understood to be either so heavily constrained that acting against universalistic systemic forces is under-theorized, or are so heavily constituted that they are just enacting scripts, or are just plain ‘institutionalized

---

Latin America, **citation**, chapters 1 and 2, for an excellent intellectual review of the world systems and dependency literatures.

<sup>6</sup> See David Held et al, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). Of the vast literature of variable quality on globalization, see also Frank J. Lechner and John Boli *The Globalization Reader* (Malden, MA and Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), as well as Frederick Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, *The Cultures of Globalization*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

others'. Beverly Silver points out that for world systems and world society perspectives, "local attributes and behavior are seen as the product of a unit's location in the system. The larger system has a steamroller-like quality, transforming social relations at the local level along a theoretically expected path."<sup>7</sup> Perhaps most importantly, worldist and globalization scholarship often does not adequately problematize or historicize the very existence of ostensibly bounded or bordered social units – particularly the 'world' or the 'nation-state' - and the structures and processes associated within them.<sup>8</sup>

Research focusing on the local, that has equated micro-territorial units with micro-cultural communities, also offers much for elucidating transnational phenomena and dynamics. Particularly in this age of globalization frenzy, this scholarship reminds us of the at least potential relative autonomy and thus enduring importance of other, often more personal, life-spaces. It drives home the critical importance of socio-historical context and the dangers in making universalistic generalizations that wash out critical shades if not colors of difference. It demonstrates, sometimes even valorizes, the exercise of local agency, knowledge and cultural practices.<sup>9</sup>

But while these studies yield richly detailed accounts of ostensibly local territorial and cultural spaces, they frequently miss how broader and larger social contexts and processes influence these localities. A great deal is learned about a particular site and a particular time but

---

<sup>7</sup> Silver, *Forces of Labor*, pgs. 25-26.

<sup>8</sup> It is revealing to note that a portion of the scholarship that uses the language of globalization, globality or globalism does in fact take cognizance of multi-directionality, cross-border/boundary phenomena and dynamics that are not necessarily transcontinental or planetary, as well as agency and variation across levels, scales and scopes. Unfortunately, the language that is utilized tends to either obscure these factors and facets or inadequately theorize them. For two of the better albeit not fully successful attempts of linking ideas of globalization and transnationality, see Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), and Saskia Sassen *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: The New Press, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> The list of localist scholarship that includes village studies, community studies, neighborhood studies and so on is voluminous making it virtually impossible to cite here.

not enough about how the “local” is historically situated and connected to other places, levels and scales of social interaction. By associating distinct and intact cultures with places, the possibilities of interactive transborder or transboundary forms or processes, potentially operating at different scales, ranging scopes, multiple levels, are rarely entertained. A transnationally-oriented problematic, as Arjun Appadurai so aptly writes, is: “What can locality mean in a world where spatial localization, quotidian interaction, and social scale are not always isomorphic?”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the local or micro might be understood in non-territorial terms (a specific development project or a segment of a larger commodity chain) from a transnational perspective.

The field of TS does not assume away the potential importance of the global and local, or of nations, states, nation-states and the nation-state system.<sup>11</sup> But because sociology, and the social sciences more broadly, originated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries during the increased spread, consolidation and legitimation of ‘national-states’, terms like “society”, “government,” “citizenship,” “democracy”, “culture,” “economy”, etc., often unnecessarily carry with them embedded nationalist, statist, and internationalist assumptions that have impaired our capacity to grasp transnational forms and processes.<sup>12</sup> For example, analyses of the development of twentieth century business organizations and markets are limited to single or comparative-

---

<sup>10</sup> Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, pg. 167. Some “localist” scholars certainly do a better job at taking transnationalisms into account. In particular, see the selections in Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, eds., *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1997, in particular. See also, Sarah J. Mahler, *American Dreaming: Immigrant Life on the Margins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Luin Goldring, “The Mexican State and Transmigrant Organizations: Negotiating the Boundaries of Membership and Participation,” *Latin American Research Review* 37, no. 3 (2002): 55-99; Raquel Parrenas, “Mothering From a Distance: Emotions, Gender, and Intergenerational Relations in Filipino Transnational Families,” *Feminist Studies* 27, no. 2, (2001): 361-391.

<sup>11</sup> By no means does this imply that other units such as regions are unimportant – indeed, the growing scholarship on regionalisms is particularly useful in explicating transnational phenomena and dynamics. In addition to the voluminous work on regional (especially European) integration in sociology and political science see, for example, John Angnew and Stuart Corbridge, *Mastering Space, Territory and Political Economy*; Matthew Sparke, “Between Post-Colonialism and Cross-Border Regionalism,” *Space and Polity*, 6(2), 2002, 203-213; and T. Courchene, “Globalization: The Regional/International Interface,” *Canadian Journal of Regional Science*, XVIII, 1995, 1-20.

national units and approaches rather than focusing on firms and markets as parts of transnational systems of investment, production, distribution, and exchange (which is why world system and world society scholarship is so important).<sup>13</sup> Studies of religion and politics have been similarly hampered, despite abundant evidence that movements as diverse as evangelical Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, freemasonry, trade unionism, anti-colonialism and political progressivism crossed borders and boundaries of various kinds.<sup>14</sup>

Much transnational scholarship involves probing and problematizing the assumption that nations, states, nation-states, or the nation-state system are the natural and/or appropriate, tightly sealed containers of social life. A number of scholars call into question the widespread view that

---

<sup>12</sup> This linking of knowledge and institutional orders around the “national-state” certainly has had profound implications. See James Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) and John Lie, *Modern Peoplehood*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Virtually the entire sub-field of economic sociology has explicitly or implicitly taken the nation-state form and even more so contemporary countries for granted as the obvious units of analysis if not objects of study. See Harrison C. White, *Markets from networks: socioeconomic models of production*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); Neil Fligstein, *The architecture of markets: an economic sociology of twenty-first-century capitalist societies*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Mauro F. Guillén, *The new economic sociology: developments in an emerging field*, (New York: Russell sage Foundation: 2002); and Mark S. Granovetter and Richard Swedberg, *The sociology of economic life*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992).

<sup>14</sup> The key social movement texts until recently are all domestic or comparative-national in orientation, for example: Sidney F. Tarrow, *Power in movement: social movements, collective action, and politics*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1994); Doug McAdam, Sidney G Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *Towards an integrated perspective on social movements and revolution*, (New York: Lazarsfeld Center at Columbia University, 1996); and Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, *Comparative perspectives on social movements: political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and cultural framings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Of course this changed dramatically in the 1990s with the tremendous growth of transnational scholarship on social movements. Although there is an ample body of work on religion and globalization (see, for example, Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalization* (Thousand Oaks and London: Sage Publications, 1994) and Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage, 1992)), scholars have only recently begun to formulate a transnational perspective on religion and there is little agreement about what that perspective actually entails. See, for example, Rudolph and Piscatori, *Transnational Religion*; Anna Lisa Peterson, Manuel A. Vásquez, and Phillip J. Williams, eds., *Christianity, Social Change and Globalization in the Americas* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001); Manuel A. Vasquez and Marie F. Marquardt, *Globalizing the sacred: religion across the Americas* (New Brunswick, N.J. : Rutgers University Press, 2003); Peter Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma* (London: Routledge, 2001); Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen, *Migration, diasporas, and transnationalism* (Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA : Edward Elgar, 1999); Cecilia Menjivar, “Religious Institutions and Transnationalism: A Case Study of Catholic and Evangelical Salvadoran Immigrants,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 12 (1999): 589-612; Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, Genelle Gaudinez, Hector Lara and Billie Ortiz “There’s a Spirit that Transcends the Border”: Faith, Ritual, and Post-national Protest at the U.S.-Mexico Border.” *Sociological Perspectives* 47 (2004): 133-160; Jeremy Stolow, “Transnationalism and the New Religio-Politics: Reflections on a Jewish Orthodox Case.” *Theory, Culture, and*

social phenomena and dynamics take or always took place inside contemporary countries, among states, or between nationalized societies or cultures.<sup>15</sup> This kind of nation-statism obscures the many social processes, relations, and institutions that pre-date, cross, link, underlie, transcend, and/or transform borders and boundaries, levels and scales (and the structures, processes and agents ostensibly within them). It gives too much credence to the historically recent, uneven and clearly incomplete structuration of nation-states and the nation-state system.<sup>16</sup>

But scholarship that we argue constitutes the basis for a distinctly sociological transnationalism research program often goes much further by advancing the claims that the global, regional, national, state, local, etc. can be productively viewed and analyzed through transnational philosophical (ontological and epistemological) lenses. That is, in contrast to traditional perspectives, which would see transnational phenomena and dynamics as a set of phenomena and dynamics between the national and the global, TS and in particular its sociological transnationalism variant includes another, perhaps more profound, option. Ostensibly bounded and bordered social units can all be understood as transnationally (whether over short or transcontinental distances) constituted, embedded and influenced social arenas.<sup>17</sup>

---

*Society* 21, no. 2 (2004): 109-137; and Willfried Spohn, "Multiple Modernity, Nationalism, and Religion: A Global Perspective," *Current Sociology* 51, no. 3/4 (2003): 265-286

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Matthew Sparke, *Hyphen-Nation-States: Critical Geographies of Displacement and Disjuncture* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003) as well as Wimmer and Glick-Schiller, op. cit., and Gupta and Ferguson, op. cit.

<sup>16</sup> For perhaps the best work along these lines that could be considered transnational scholarship, see Charles Tilley, ed., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), and his, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, A.D. 990-1990*, (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990). See the growing literatures on sovereignty, for example, Thomas J. Biersteker and Cynthia Weber, *State sovereignty as social construct* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and Stephen D. Krasner's *Problematic sovereignty:: contested rules and political possibilities* (New York : Columbia University Press, 2001) as well as *Sovereignty: organized hypocrisy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> There is thus an interesting set of overlaps between the Sociology of Transnationalism and Cultural Studies, particularly with regard to borderland and post-colonial studies. See Gloria Anzaldua and Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, "Goddess across the Taiwan Strait: Matrifocal Ritual Space, Nation-State, and Satellite Television Footprints." *Public Culture* 16, no. 2 (2003): 209-238; Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, "Toward New Imaginaries: An Introduction," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 1-19; Inderpal Grewel, "Traveling Barbie: Indian Transnationality and New Consumer Subjects" *Positions* 7 no. 3 (Winter 1999): 799-826. Partha Chatterjee, "Beyond the Nation? Or Within? *Social Text* 56 (Autumn 1998): 57-69; Hilary Cunningham and Josiah McC. Heyman, "Introduction:

The world is understood to consist of multiple sets of dynamically overlapping and interacting transnational social fields of variable character, scale and intensity that shape ostensibly bordered and bounded structures, actors, and processes.

Thus, the appellations “transnational” or “transnationalism” or “transnationality” are partly misnomers, in that they imply that the subject of interest is confined to phenomena and dynamics across or beyond -- whether over short distances or transcontinentally -- nations, states, or nation-states, or within the (nation-)state system. Much more is also signified by these terms.<sup>18</sup> They are placeholder adjectives, categories, and/or signifiers that help describe social realities and dynamics, offer distinct perspectives on the world, generate shared sets of questions and puzzles, as well as provide ways of asking and responding to them. Phenomena and dynamics that cross, underlie, alter, and transcend pre-national-state and potentially post-national state borders, boundaries, units, levels, and systems are included. Also included are forms and processes that cross, underlie, alter and transcend other borders and boundaries of various types and kinds, not just those of nations and states.

Again and again, however, the limitations of both everyday and even conventional scholarly language impedes the ability to clearly and easily communicate ideas about transnationality. Nevertheless, we develop a heuristically powerful set of empirical, methodological, theoretical, philosophical, and normative entry points to assist in further clarifying and establishing TS. These intellectual foundations have been and can be utilized to rethink fundamental assumptions and understandings about a range of sociological concerns such as power, identity, culture, race, gender, family, culture, art, music, science, health, citizenship,

---

Mobilities and Enclosures at Borders,” *Identities* 11 (2004): 289-302. 2004; and Edward Soja. *Postmetropolis: critical studies of cities and regions* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000).

sovereignty, governance, states, markets, production, inequality, war, conflict, development, social change, and many, many others.

### **Empirical Transnationalism**

A first foundation for the emergent TS field **involves the identification, description, mapping, quantification, and categorization of transnational phenomena and dynamics.**

Much of the scholarship on transnationalism to date addresses these tasks. Transnational economic processes and corporations, transnational social movements and nongovernmental organizations, and transnational migration and communities have received the bulk of attention.<sup>19</sup> There are also growing empirical literatures on transnational misconduct and governance but less work on subjects such as transnational religion, popular culture, or social stratification.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Indeed, we agree with leading organizational sociologist Richard Scott's suggestion to us that "trans-societalism" might better signify an approach that does explicitly does not limit itself to equating society with the nation-state and problematizes bordered and bounded units of any kind.

<sup>19</sup> The literature on transnational corporations has a very long history indeed. For an important contribution, see George Modelski, ed., *Transnational Corporations and World Order: Readings in International Political Economy* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1979). For two key books from the dependency tradition, see Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973) and Peter Evans, *Dependent Development: The Alliance of Multinational, State and Local Capital in Brazil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). More recently, see Susan Strange, *The Retreat of the State: The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and Sklair, *The Transnational Capitalist Class*.

<sup>20</sup> For transnational popular cultural production, see Juan Flores, *From Bomba and Hip Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Doris Sommer, *Bilingual Aesthetics: a New Sentimental Education* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Deborah Pacini Hernández, Héctor D. Fernández-L'Hoeste and Eric Zolov, eds. *Rockin' Las Americas: The Global Politics of Rock in Latin/o America* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004); Helena Simonett, *Banda: Mexican Musical life across Borders* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001); Lisa Parks and Shanti Kumar, eds., *A Global Television Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); Peter Hitchcock, *Imaginary States: Studies in Cultural Transnationalism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Ulf Hedetoft and Mette Hjort, eds., *The Postnational Self*. (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Neil Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the PostColonial World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Walter D. Mignolo, *Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

Identification and description are two essential tasks of Empirical Transnationalism. These include a broad range of forms and processes such as transnational ethnic communities, religions, professional associations, and terrorist groups to name a few. It also encompasses discourses, material flows, cultural interactions, and artistic genres that are produced and exchanged across borders and boundaries. A novel transnational capitalist class has emerged, according to Leslie Sklair, which includes executives of multinational corporations, globalizing bureaucrats and politicians, professionals, merchants and media that promote the globalization of capitalism and an associated consumer culture.<sup>21</sup> Mary Kaldor maps the transnational dynamics of “new wars” that involve various non-state cross-border and international actors and processes from ethnic militias to hawala financing to U.N. peace-keepers and so on.<sup>22</sup> Jackie Smith and colleagues identified the notion of transnational social movements while Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink described transnational advocacy networks as sets of activists across at least three countries linked by shared principled ideas and dense exchanges of information.<sup>23</sup>

This descriptive work has generated potentially useful generative classification systems. Consider for example the following typology of transnational collective actors categorized by their pre-dominant or central motivation. Transnational corporations are organized around profit, transnational social movements around moral values, transnational epistemic communities around scientific ideas, transnational professions around technical expertise and trans-governmental networks around common mandates.<sup>24</sup> This framework can then be extended to sort groups according to whether they do or do not employ physical violence. Transnational

---

<sup>21</sup> Sklair, *Transnational Capitalist Class*, pg. 22. Of course, work in the dependency tradition long ago posited the existence of transnational classes and class alliances.

<sup>22</sup> Mary Kaldor, *New & Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> Smith et al, *Transnational Social Movements*; Keck and Sikkink, *Activist Beyond Borders*.

<sup>24</sup> See Sanjeev Khagram and Sarah Alvord, “Locating Contemporary Progressive Civic Transnational Advocacy,” in L. David Brown and Srilatha Batliwala, eds., *Claiming Global Power: The Transnational Civil Society Reader*, Westport, CT: Kumarian Press, 2005.



criminal organizations are motivated by material gain like corporations but, unlike their profit-seeking counterparts, they often employ or threaten to use physical violence to achieve their goals.<sup>25</sup> Transnational terrorists are likely to be motivated by powerful principled ideas or even worldviews like cross-border social movements but they too use or threaten to use deadly violence like their criminal counterparts while social movement activists publicly and non-violently pursue their objectives.

Often, transnational empirical scholarship focuses on social forms and processes that are initially seen as novel or particularly important in the recent historical and contemporary period. Data are assembled to demonstrate the dramatic increase in the numbers of transnational corporations or financial flows, their expanding share of economic activity, and their growing capacity to shape social reality in various parts of the world. It is discovered that revolutionary and “ethnic” violent conflicts (most of which actually cross country borders or are involve diasporic groups) far outnumbered inter-state wars between 1946-1999.<sup>26</sup> Differences between transnational coalitions, networks and social movements constituted largely by nongovernmental or social movement organizations founded since the 1970s are identified.<sup>27</sup> The self-understandings and negotiated identities of recent transnational migrants are examined and documented.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Of course, many firms do use physical and other forms of violence so the difference between transnational corporate citizenship and corporate criminality is often a fine line...

<sup>26</sup> This statement is based on the statistical database assembled by Ted Robert Gurr, Monty G. Marshall, and Deepa Khosla, *Peace and Conflict 2001: A Global Survey of Armed Conflicts, Self-Determination Movements, and Democracy*, College Park, MD: INSCR, 2001. Indeed,, it is interesting to note, that the Cold War created an illusion of stability, as increasing incidents and growing magnitude of violent conflict around the world characterized the period between 1950 and 1989. See also Ann Hironaka’s, *Neverending Wars: The International Community, Weak States, and the Perpetuation of Civil War*,” Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005, which explains the transnational factors that contributed to the average length of civil wars increasing three-fold since 1945.

<sup>27</sup> Khagram et al, *Restructuring World Politics*.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Robert C. Smith, “Transnational Localities: Community, Technology, and the Politics of Membership with the Context of Mexico-U.S. Migration,” In Smith and Guarnizo, *Transnationalism from Below*; Nina Glick Schiller and Georges Fouron III, “The Generation of Identity: Redefining the Second Generation Within A Transnational Social Field,” In Levitt and Waters, *Changing Face of Home*; and Levitt, *Transnational Villagers*.

But as Roger Waldinger and David Fitzgerald rightfully note, transnational scholarship must be careful to not to reproduce, “the familiar antinomies of social science, most notably that of a ‘closed’ past and ‘open’ present...”<sup>29</sup> Most of the work of Empirical Transnationalism, while incredibly revealing, has been focused on phenomena and dynamics that are or are understood to be by-products of contemporary nations, states, nation-states, or the nation-state system. This unnecessarily limits the potential empirical reach and theoretical contributions that might be generated in a field of TS.

### **Methodological Transnationalism**

To empirically describe, map, categorize and quantify transnational phenomena and dynamics as we have just outlined requires additional as well as new kinds of observations, and associated methods for collecting them. A second intellectual foundation of TS – Methodological Transnationalism -- **reformulates existing data and accounts, invents new kinds of information and evidence, applies existing investigative approaches in novel ways, and designs novel research tools and designs with which to analyze, explain and interpret transnational phenomena and dynamics.**

Most existing data sets, historiographies, and ethnographies make transnational analyses difficult if not impossible. They suffer from what is called “methodological nationalism” or the tendency to accept the nation-state form, and even its contemporary borders as a given in scholarship. Many surveys are based on national-state units or are designed to make comparisons between countries. They are not intended to capture flows, linkages, or identities that cross or supersede other spatial units (or the phenomena and dynamics within them). As a result, trying to understand the regional identities that arise in response to an environmental

---

<sup>29</sup> Waldinger and Fitzgerald, “Transnationalism in Question”

crisis, the trans-territorial underpinnings of organized crime, or the very existence let alone changes in transnational stratification systems are difficult because so few data are collected that lends themselves to this kind of analysis. The researcher is forced to make inferences based on information from national (or other bounded) data sets that are unlikely to reveal the transnational forms and processes easily or cleanly.

Alejandro Portes and Luiz Eduardo Guarnizo have directed a collection of quantitative data to capture correlates, practices and consequences of transnational communities of Salvadoran, Dominican and Salvadoran immigrants in the United States. Surveys in three phases were conducted for each group in both their settlement “hostlands” and their “homelands”. The research teams used the same set of survey instruments and methods in both settings. Statistical analysis of the data sets produced several intriguing results. One noteworthy finding of this innovative research is that approximately one-third of the members of these groups engage in transnational activities on an occasional if not regular basis.<sup>30</sup> Whether this is evidence that transnational migrant ties and activities are not very important or quite pervasive is still a matter of debate, but the deployment of a novel research design generated both new data and types of observations that were not available before.

Indeed, transnational scholarship requires that research be conducted on novel or often times multiple and interacting units, scales and scopes of analysis.<sup>31</sup> Saskia Sassen and others have examined the “global city”, Paul Gilroy’s interrogated the Black Atlantic, Gloria Anzaldua’s exploration of borderlands, Arjun Appadurai’s notion of various types of scapes, or Jonny Fox and L. David Brown’s use of transnational advocacy campaigns are all examples of this kind of

---

<sup>30</sup> See the website of the Center for Migration and Development at Princeton University for more details – <http://cmd.princeton.edu>.

<sup>31</sup> Systems thinking and social network analysis, when not rigidly applied, might be particularly usefully utilized to explore and explain transnational phenomena and dynamics.

methodological innovation. While multi-sited and multi-level research is particularly useful, transnational dynamics can also be investigated by asking interviewees about the cross-border aspects of their identities, beliefs, and activities, and those they are connected to, in a single setting.<sup>32</sup> TS thus re-orientes researchers away from traditional methods of inquiry toward queries about other potentially important topographies of social life.<sup>33</sup>

Transnational scholarship also requires methods that can capture the complex temporalities in which particular dynamics or relations occur. Postmodern insights about time/space compression challenge expectations about the relationship between geography and history.<sup>34</sup> Transnational scholarship builds upon these by employing simultaneous, life-cycle, cross-generational, long duree, epiphenomenal, and cyclical categories of temporal analysis.<sup>35</sup> In general, transnational dynamics cannot be studied at one point in time in only one place because they involve multiple, interacting processes rather than single, time and space-bounded events. For example, because transnational practices ebb and flow over long periods, a one-time snap shot misses the many ways in which migrants periodically engage with their home countries during election cycles, family or ritual events, or climatic catastrophes --- their attention and energies shifting in response to a particular goal or challenge. Studying migrant practices longitudinally reveals that in moments of crisis or unexpected opportunity, even those who have never identified or participated transnationally, may become mobilized into action.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller, "Conceptualizing Simultaneity: Theorizing Society from a Transnational Social Field Perspective," *International Migration Review* (forthcoming 2004).

<sup>33</sup> See, in particular, Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, eds., *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997 for a collection that attempts to rethink the notion of "field" and "fieldwork".

<sup>34</sup> See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1989).

<sup>35</sup> See Fernand Braudel, *On History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), as well as Susan Eckstein and L. Barberia, "Grounding Immigrant Generations in History: Cuban Americans and Their Transnational Ties," *International Migration Review* 36, no 3 (2002): 799-838.

<sup>36</sup> Levitt and Glick Schiller, "Conceptualizing Simultaneity."

Moreover, what makes the outsourcing of many high-tech service jobs from Silicon Valley to Bangalore and other “high-tech” cities possible today is that when people are asleep in the former, it is the workday in the latter and visa versa. The fact that more and more “Indians” have been educated and lead professional lives that cross borders since the 19<sup>th</sup> century has also contributed to these changing economic arrangements. While simultaneity is perhaps more pronounced, even a brief foray into history drives home the necessity of still taking the *long duree* seriously. Most of the contemporary territorially demarcated states did not even exist at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Going back even farther, and in stark contrast to the current state of affairs in Iraq, Baghdad was the center of a transcontinental regional political-economic field that existed in the 9<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>37</sup>

Beverly Silver’s research strategy for her path-breaking book on workers movements since 1870 provides an exciting model of transnational methodological innovation.<sup>38</sup> She begins by utilizing both the “encompassing comparison” approach of world historical scholarship and long-standing comparative-historical methods for cross-national research. But Silver argues that these methods are inherently limited. They impede the analysis of relations between and among allegedly separate units, obscure local agency, and they are based on assumptions about the type, if not characteristics, of the bordered and bounded units of analysis even though how these units are actually constructed and transformed is a critical piece of the analysis. In response, Silver also uses a combined “incorporating comparison” research methodology and modified “narrative mode” of causal analysis to capture how relational processes in space unfold in and through

---

37 See Sanjeev Khagram and Sarah Alvord, “Contemporary Progressive Civic Transnational Advocacy,” in L. David Brown and Srilatha Batliawala (eds.), *Claiming Global Power*, Westport, CT: Kumarian Press, 2005, and Enrique Dussel, “Globalization, civilization processes, and the relocation of languages and cultures,” In Jameson and Miyoshi, *Cultures of Globalization*.

38 Silver, *Forces of Labor*

time.<sup>39</sup> These types of innovative and rigorous “methodologically transnational” research are and will continue to be an essential intellectual foundation for the field of TS.

### **Theoretical Transnationalism**

Methodologically innovative research contributes to and is shaped by theory and theory building. A third intellectual foundation for the field of TS is to **construct and test explanations and/or craft interpretations that either parallel, complement, replace or transform extant theoretical accounts and understandings.**

Many scholars recognize transnational phenomena and dynamics and have proposed theoretical accounts about them. Transnational theories interact with conventional theories in several ways. In some cases, they are parallel exercises because they interpret or explain different phenomena and dynamics. In other more complementary cases, transnational theories do a more effectively elucidate some aspects while traditional theories do a better job at explicating other aspects of the same form and/or processes. Transnational theories may also compete with accounts and models that have already been well developed in local, national, international or global terms. Finally, transnational scholarship might be used in combination with conventional conceptual frameworks to generate heuristically compelling hybrid theories.

The academic enterprise is often about which theory wins. There is no question that competitive hypothesis testing or sense making can play a vital role in the development of knowledge. In the 1970s, Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye introduced a “transnational relations” framework for mapping world politics that highlighted the role of cross-border actors and

---

<sup>39</sup> Silver, *Forces of Labor*, especially pgs. 25-40.

interactions.<sup>40</sup> But Keohane and Nye did not produce a theory of transnational relations but, instead, a pointing exercise that concluded that there were so many anomalies in the dominant state-centric realist paradigm that it needed conceptual revisiting. Rather, they elaborated a theoretical framework, eventually proposed in *Power and Interdependence*, that combined realist and transnational ideas to develop testable hypotheses.<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, many viewed the transnational relations mapping exercise and subsequent theorizing as competing with international system models that assumed states were the most powerful actors, and interactions between states the defining feature of world affairs. This competition propelled a great deal of rigorous research. Empirical evidence accumulated during the 1980s and seemed to suggest that the state-centric neo-realist (and corresponding neo-liberal) international system models better explained some key patterns and trends in world politics. But during the subsequent decade, a concerted effort to “bring transnationalism back in” was increasingly successful. This more recent scholarship once again theorized a more interactive set of relations between states and the inter-state system on the one hand, and transnational actors and processes on the other. One hypothesis that has been advanced is that it is easier for various kinds of transnational groups to organize in porous states to alter the policy making process but that they are more likely to produce policy reforms implemented in strong states. Many other heuristically compelling causal mechanisms have been generated.<sup>42</sup>

Certainly, scholarly debates about the rising and declining centrality of nation-states and inter-state relations vis a vis other actors, structures and processes across time (particularly over “long durees”) and space (particularly across multiple scales and levels) will continue to be a

---

<sup>40</sup> See Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye Jr., eds., *Transnational Relations and World Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

<sup>41</sup> Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977).

point of intellectual contestation for the foreseeable future. Indeed, Arjun Appadurai in his *Modernity at Large* argues that not only have nation-states weakened but that the nation-state system itself is in crisis as a result of the interactive and cumulative effects of transnational phenomena and dynamics. Saskia Sassen in her recent work offers a notion of “denationalization” that suggests a migration of power, authority and identity formation away from the central state upwards to inter-state and even supra-state institutions and agencies, as well as downwards to “global cities” that are the geographical loci of dominant nodes of cross-border forms and processes.<sup>43</sup> But she also claims that the “global” is transnationally, albeit variably, reproduced ideationally and materially in the “national” and the “local” implying that the nation-state form is also being qualitatively transformed and the central state not just quantitatively weakened. Thus, much transnational scholarship has and will continue to offer compelling and novel theorizing about (nation-)states and inter-state systems.

Sociological theories of the emergence and spread of a world capitalist system or a world society generally argue that states or nation-states are either deeply constrained by transcontinental material forces or constituted by worldwide cognitive cultural institutions.<sup>44</sup> Sanjeev Khagram’s research on the global rise, spread and fall of large dam building produced a hybrid transnational theoretical account building on these insights combined with conceptual ideas drawn from more nation-state centric scholarship on social movements and development. In particular, cumulative and interactive effects of complex cross-border and cross-level structuration processes transformed the transcontinental political economic fields of dam

---

<sup>42</sup> Risse-Kappen, *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In*.

<sup>43</sup> This is very similar to Strange, *The Retreat of the State*, as well as numerous others.

<sup>44</sup> Wallerstein, *Capitalist World Economy* and Thomas et al, *Institutional Structure*; Ohn W. Meyer, John Boli, George M. Thomas, and Francisco O. Ramirez, “World Society and the Nation-State,” *American Journal of Sociology* 103, no. 1 (1997): 144-181; and Andre Gunder Frank, *ReORIENT: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).



building and development over the 20<sup>th</sup> century that neither word-centric nor nation-state centric perspectives alone could have captured.<sup>45</sup>

Khagram argues that the dramatic growth and spread of large dam building was linked to transnational hegemonic ideas about progress, development and nature linked to powerful transnationally allied epistemic communities, multinational corporations, multilateral agencies, state officials, and domestic elites that promoted and benefited in various ways from these increasingly habituated discourses.<sup>46</sup> But the dramatic fall of large dam building since the mid-1970s could not be explained without understanding how transnationally allied nongovernmental organizations and social movements promoted the institutionalization of environmental, human rights and indigenous people's norms. These rules of appropriate behavior were internalized not only in central states (e.g. through the creation of environmental agencies and associated adoption of environmental impact assessments), but also at other levels of governance, in intergovernmental agencies, by transnational professional associations, and by multinational corporations. But these transnational dynamics contributed to more powerful changes in contexts with strong democratic institutions, and high levels of social movement activity that could exploit the new political opportunity structures created by increasingly institutionalized norms.

Studies of the immigrant experience in the United States provide another example of productive transnational theorizing. Most of this work aims to shed light on the process of incorporating newcomers into the social fabric, to specify the determinants of social and economic mobility and, in recent years, to explain the socioeconomic trajectories of immigrant

---

<sup>45</sup> Khagram, *Dams and Development*.

<sup>46</sup> The transnationally allied actors promoting large dams were similar to those identified by Peter Evans in his book, *Dependent Development*, but included other types of groups besides fractions of capital including epistemic communities and professional technical networks. Khagram's transnationally allied actors "from above" are strikingly similar to the Sklair's depiction of the "transnational capitalist class".

children.<sup>47</sup> This scholarship often sees transnational attachments as antithetical to assimilation. But locating migrants within transnational social fields reveals that host-land incorporation and enduring transnational attachments are not binary opposites.

Instead, Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick-Schiller suggest that thinking of the transnational migration experience as a kind of gauge that, while anchored, pivots between a home- and host-land orientation, is closer to the mark. Movement and attachment are not linear or sequential but capable of rotating back and forth and changing direction over time. The median point on this gauge is not full incorporation but rather simultaneity of connection. Persons change and swing one way or the other depending on the context, thus moving our expectation away from either full assimilation or transnational connection but some combination of both.<sup>48</sup>

Asking transnational questions about connectivity, in combination with more traditional concerns about incorporation produces potentially richer, more compelling accounts of the migration experience. The spread of Evangelical Christianity in Latin America and among Latino communities in the United States is a case in point. Pentecostal churches have gained ground not only among native Brazilians but also among Brazilian immigrant communities in the United States. The transnational networks linking people in Brazil to immigrants in the United States are channels for the flow and transfer of beliefs, resources, skills, and strategies between

---

<sup>47</sup> See Richard D. Alba and Victor Nee, *Remaking the American mainstream: assimilation and contemporary immigration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Frank D. Bean and Gillian Stevens, *America's newcomers and the dynamics of diversity* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2003); Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Legacies: the story of the immigrant second generation* (Berkeley/ New York: University of California Press/Russell Sage Foundation, 2001).

<sup>48</sup> See Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller, "Conceptualizing Simultaneity" and Ewa Morawska "Immigrant Transnationalism and Assimilation: A Variety of Combinations and the Analytic Strategy It Suggests." In Joppke and Morawska, *Toward Assimilation and Citizenship*, pp. 133-176."

individual and organizational actors at the local, state, and national levels. Domestically organized evangelization efforts are part and parcel of transnational religious movements.<sup>49</sup>

Thus the field of TS will involve multiple different types and forms of theorizing and processes of theory development. Its ultimate goal is not to arrive at a single paradigm or master narrative but to find ways to hold these different theoretical accounts and approaches in productive conversation with one another. The world is too broad, deep, and complex to be captured by just one theoretical apparatus. Instead, TS abandons that expectation, creating a broad enough tent to tolerate the productive tension between, possible co-existence of, and potential cross-fertilization among different theories and forms of theorizing.

It is entirely feasible, then, that theoretical frameworks about relations between ‘world religions’ can develop in tandem with models intended to explain inter-state cooperation and conflict. Some scholars have already argued that economic phenomena and dynamics require a transnational theoretical perspective while military and security affairs can still be understood largely with inter-state conceptual models. For some this view may be axiomatic, for others an historical artifact, and still for others a hegemonic myth.

### **Philosophical Transnationalism**

The fourth entry point into the field of TS is to adopt an alternative set of ontological and epistemological assumptions about the nature of the world and what knowledge consists of.

Philosophical transnationalism is **based on the metaphysical view that social life is transnational to begin with --- transnational phenomena and dynamics are the rule rather than the exception, the central tendency rather than the outlier, the underlying, albeit fluid**

---

<sup>49</sup> Peggy Levitt, “Redefining the Boundaries of Belonging: The Institutional Character of Transnational Religious Life,” *Sociology of Religion* 65, no. 1 (2004): 1-18.

**and variable, reality rather than the derivative by-product. Correspondingly, scholarship that involves transnational explanations or interpretations is likely to be seen as epistemologically more compelling than that which does not.**

Philosophical transnationalism rejects the notion that social life is automatically or primarily organized within or between nation, states, or other types of border or bounded social system containers. Unlike traditional social science, with its dominant “unit-ism” or “system-ism,” the ontological premise is that the nature of social worlds is fundamentally cross-boundary and cross-border. A second premise is that ostensibly bounded or bordered human organizations are, as a rule, embedded in and influenced by cross-border and cross-boundary phenomena and dynamics. Thus, for example, it is the processes of production of social difference and differentiation that should be the focus of scholarship rather than the investigation or comparison of ostensibly distinct and unitary nations, societies, or cultures.<sup>50</sup>

Philosophical transnationalism does not deny the existence or importance of bounded or bordering social groups. Rather, one of the central meta-theoretical puzzles that follows from this ontological perspective is the very existence of borders and boundaries: why and how boundaries and borders are produced in the first place as well as how they are reproduced, transformed, and endure? A transnational ontology assumes, for example, that the emergence of centralized states, nations, nation-states and the nation-state system is historically idiosyncratic -- a set of social facts that needs to be explained and interpreted, and not just stipulated as given.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, it takes a similar view of the relationship between allegedly national religions and the transnational religious communities to which they might belong. The local, regional, national, and global are not automatic, taken-for-granted social arenas but rather categories that must be

---

<sup>50</sup> Gupta and Ferguson, *Culture, Place, Power*.

<sup>51</sup> Tilley, *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*.

investigated as constructed and often-contested social facts. We are in a period now in which the “global” is being transnationally structured and contested in particular ways that are very different from the way that the “global” was transnationally structured and contested during the periods of European empires or ancient civilizations.

Furthermore, a transnational ontology can be based on the assumption that social phenomena and dynamics take place within (and across) transnational fields. The notion of fields has increasingly been utilized in various ways in sociology and the social sciences more broadly. Pierre Bourdieu used the concept of field to call attention to the ways in which relations of power and meaning structure social interactions.<sup>52</sup> Sociological institutionalists theorize and examine organizational fields of various kinds.<sup>53</sup> Most recently a leading economic sociologist and leading social movement theorist have conceptualized “strategic action fields”.<sup>54</sup> While none of these precludes the notion of transnational fields, they do not directly and systematically address this ontological possibility, and implicitly if not explicitly identify field boundaries with, within, or between the nation-state units.

The Manchester School proposed a notion of social field similar to Bourdieu by recognizing that the migrants they studied belonged to tribal-rural localities and colonial-industrial cities at the same time. Migrant networks stretching between these two (or more) sites (including, for example, the metropole of the imperial power) were viewed as constituting a single social field created by a network of networks. By understanding social relations in this

---

<sup>52</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980).

<sup>53</sup> See Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio, eds., *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), and Richard W. Scott, *Institutions and Organizations* (Denver, CO: Sage Publications, 2001).

<sup>54</sup> See Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam, “Politics, Culture and Action: An Essay on Collective Strategic Action,” unpublished manuscript.

way, these researchers introduced levels of analysis underneath, across, and beyond the study of the individual, the community, the colony, and even the empire.<sup>55</sup>

Building on Bourdieu and the Manchester School, some transnational migration scholars define social fields as a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed. Social fields are multi-dimensional, encompassing interactions of differing forms, depth, and breadth, such as organizations, institutions, and movements. National boundaries are not necessarily contiguous with the boundaries of social fields. National social fields are those that stay within national boundaries while transnational social fields involve direct and indirect relations and dynamics across borders and boundaries that may or may not be national.<sup>56</sup>

A transnational ontology goes hand and hand with a transnational epistemology. **In order to describe, explain, interpret, theorize, and alter assumptions about the nature of social worlds, expectations about how social worlds can be known and understood must also be revisited.** Philosophical transnational scholarship, building on ontological transnationalism, automatically probes the extent to which transnational phenomena and dynamics are at work and attempts to explicate the variations in their connection, scope, and strength. Any explanation or interpretation that did not identify and explicate the proximate and/or deeper transnational causal and/or meaningful forms and processes involved, while potentially useful and even illuminating, will not likely be seen as sufficient.

Tamara Kay compelling demonstrates that changes in transnational rather than national political systems and institutions stimulated alliances among the workers across Canada, the United

---

<sup>55</sup> Morawska, “Immigrant Transnationalism.”

<sup>56</sup> See also Khagram, *Dams and Development* on transnational fields.

States, and Mexico.<sup>57</sup> Beverly Silver's research revealed that the rise and fall of domestic labor movements was linked to transnational relocations of business enterprises as well as transnational diffusions of collective action repertoires.<sup>58</sup> Howard Winant has also powerfully demonstrated the usefulness of this transnational epistemological position through his explication of the dynamics of race relations over a long historical time frame and William Julius Wilson implicitly offers a transnational explanation to explain the decline of African American inner-city communities.<sup>59</sup>

### Public Transnationalism

A fifth entry point into TS is a more open ethical and prescriptive approach to scholarship. **Public transnationalism creates a space to imagine options for social order and transformation that are obscured when borders, boundaries and the structures, processes and actors within them are taken as given, especially when the nation-state and nation-state system are taken for granted as the automatic and appropriate containers within which social life occurs.** By calling into question borders and boundaries, TS opens up a range of possibilities for political positions and praxis that might not otherwise be brought to light or given serious consideration.

One part of TS fits squarely within the social science's renewed commitment to forge stronger links between theory and practice, academics and practitioners, when these binaries have already been blurred dramatically.<sup>60</sup> The goal of public transnationalism is to go beyond description, analysis, and understanding to praxis. Public transnationalism develops the

---

<sup>57</sup> Tamara Kay, "Labor Transnationalism and Global Governance: The Impact of NAFTA on Transnational Labor Relationships in North America," *American Journal of Sociology*, forthcoming.

<sup>58</sup> Silver, *Forces of Labor*.

<sup>59</sup> Howard Winant, *The World Is a Ghetto* (New York: BasicBooks, 2001) and William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).

actionable implications of TS scholarship and explicitly rejects the false neutrality characterizing much academic work. Rather than ignoring the hard set of ethical and practical questions that research poses, it embraces them.

Public transnationalism, and TS more generally, does not begin from any prescribed political position such as automatically assuming that transnational approaches are most appropriate in every case. If it is found that functioning centralized states are best at preventing human suffering from insecurities or promoting sustainable and equitable development, for example, then scholars should go further to generate more sophisticated ideas for state building in a transnationalized world. It may in fact be that strengthening inter-governmental institutions is more efficient and effective for addressing global challenges rather than experimenting with novel, multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral forms of transnational governance.

But public transnationalism as one part of the broader field of TS does legitimate transnational forms and processes as real options for practice and policy. Rather than clinging to, or trying to uncritically re-coup, a world in which national-state frames prevail, public transnationalism addresses the ways in which practical approaches to citizenship, governance, security, development and cultural diversity, among other concerns, may change when we understand the world as transnationally constituted.

Ann Marie Slaughter's persuasive claim that transgovernmental networks, which link governmental bureaucratic and legal agencies like courts across disaggregated and decentralized states across borders, are not only becoming but should be promoted as critical institutional arrangements for producing stability in world affairs is an excellent model of this kind of

---

<sup>60</sup> See for example, Michael Burawoy, "[Public Sociologies: Contradictions, Dilemmas, and Possibilities](#)," *Social Forces* 82, no. 4 (2004): 1603-18 and Craig Calhoun. "Word from the President: Toward a More Public Social Science." *Items and Issues* 5 (Social Science Research Council Quarterly), no 1-2 (Spring/Summer 2004).



scholarship (whether consensus with this scholarship driven proposal is accepted or not).<sup>61</sup> The work by Nikos Passas on the unintended negative consequences of nation-state and inter-state regulation of informal value transfer systems like hawala across borders is another example.<sup>62</sup> Thus practical, policy and institutional changes or recommendations that are transnational or have transnational ramifications are certainly already quite prevalent in the world today and the field of TS should welcome and legitimate scholarship that offers public contributions.<sup>63</sup>

States are being reformulated – assuming new functions, abdicating responsibilities for others, and redefining who their members are in response to the cross-border political practices that of migrants, refugees, and their allies. The Mexican government, for example, recently invented a special consular ID card, issued to all Mexican emigrants, including those living without formal authorization in the United States. More than a hundred U.S cities, 900 police departments, 100 financial institutions and 13 states accept the cards as proof of identity for obtaining a drivers' license or opening a bank account. These efforts reveal how the Mexican government symbolically extends its boundaries to include those without residence. It also brings to light the new functions it has taken on to deal with a Mexican nation that transcends the borders of the Mexican state.

Because the remittances they send and the political clout they wield have become key factors, a number of governments now also allow and encourage migrants to maintain some form of long-distance, long-term membership. States as diverse as France, Ireland, Greece, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, Italy, Portugal, and China give emigrants and their descendants full rights when they return to their homelands, even if they are passport holders of another country. Colombia even

---

<sup>61</sup> Ann Marie Slaughter, "Real New World Order." See also Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "Transgovernmental Relations and International Organizations," *World Politics* 27: 39-62.

<sup>62</sup> Nikos Passas, *Informal Value Transfer Systems and Criminal Organizations*; a study into so-called underground banking networks, *Onderzoeksnotities*, The Hague, WODC, no. 1999/4.

<sup>63</sup> See for example, Gregory F. Treverton, "Making Sense of Transnational Threats: Workshop Reports," Rand Documents, CF-200, 2005.

grants political rights to emigrants while they are abroad by allowing the expatriate community to elect representatives to the Colombian legislature. Policymakers are and should take into account what functions states abandon, under what conditions, and which new ones they assume and to think creatively about new approaches that adapt to transnational realities.

Public Transnationalism correspondingly also brings to light that balancing multiple, often conflicting supra-national, national, racial, ethnic, gender, religious and other identities is the daily task of increasing numbers. All too often, however, multiple allegiances and certainly citizenships are seen in opposition, if not antagonistic to one another. Identifying with several communities or several places at the same time is not necessarily evaluated as a zero-sum game. For example, members of the Ismaili community who live in many parts of the world pay “taxes” to and receive innumerable benefits (such as zero interest loans for education or starting a business) from the Aga Khan. At the same time, most if not all also pay taxes and are active citizens of the country in which they reside. This form of transnational citizenship is an option that might be useful for other cases and contexts.

There are innumerable examples of various kinds of “brokers,” “travelers,” “bridgers,” and “diffusers” contributing to the transnational spread and transformation of norms and practices, as well as promotion of greater cross-cultural understandings.<sup>64</sup> The resources, skills, and mobilization generated in one setting can be successfully applied to another. The often purposeful and targeted transnational diffusion of ideas and practices under the rubrics of good governance, democracy, and so on is an increasingly utilized tool or practice. But these transfers are by no means one way. Ideas about micro-credit, participatory budgeting, or good water use practices can be and have been systematically spread from South to North and East to West.

---

<sup>64</sup> See Joe Brandy and Jackie Smith (eds.), *Coalitions Across Borders: Transnational Protest and the Neoliberal Order* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), especially pp. 240-243.

Thus, public transnationalism does not equate transnationality or transnationalization with global westernization or Americanization. It does not assume that everything originates and flows to the rest of the world from the west and north. Civil Rights activists like Martin Luther King and Ceasar Chavez in the United States, for example, were clearly inspired by and borrowed Gandhi's strategies in South Africa and India.

Many more examples and cases of public action that are themselves transnational or flow from transnational scholarship can be offered. The point is not that all scholars in the field will necessarily engage in public transnationalism. But those who do should be supported and encouraged. And transnational policies, institutional arrangements and practical activities should be legitimated as potential options for consideration by democratic publics across varying contexts.

### **Towards a Sociological Transnationalism Research Program**

Taken together, these five, interacting components offer an exciting set of intellectual foundations for the field of TS. These foundations, as we have implied, are entry points into the field as much as different components of it. While not every scholar will work across all five, we believe that they constitute a rich menu for research, theory, debate and action. There is no necessary hierarchy among these five intellectual foundations – rather each can be understood as one point that when connected forms a pentagonal field of possibilities. Many potentially productive research programs can be assembled in this intellectual space. They should be developed and promoted in the field of TS.

In particular, we propose that a sociological transnational (ST) research program that takes philosophical transnationalism as its starting point is well worth additional scholarly engagement and effort. In this research program variant of TS, the world is assumed to be

consisting of multiple sets of dynamically overlapping and interacting transnational fields that shape ostensibly bordered and bounded structures, actors, and processes. Socially meaningful phenomena and dynamics are understood to be imbricated in contested transnational structuration processes. In Lakotosian terms, these assumption would be part of the protective inner belt from which theory would be derived but that was not open to falsification.<sup>65</sup>

Sociological Transnationalism's research tasks are to **uncover, analyze and conceptualize similarities, differences, linkages and interactions among transnational phenomena and dynamics, as well as with bordered and bounded social forms and processes, across time and space.** Doing so involves conducting analyses that capture, compare and contrast, interpret and explain the range, level, scale, and scope of transnational phenomena, dynamics, and their interactions. We recommend several different forms this research can take.

Ongoing research by Federico Besserer and Michael Kearney provides a particularly exciting example that combines several of the forms of scholarship that we consider below and argue are exemplary of the sociological transnationalism research program. They began by studying indigenous migrant communities across different parts of Mexico, the United States, and later Canada. These Mixtecs are transnational both because they cross live across various geographical borders but also because they have always been at the interstices of symbolic and cultural boundaries (as subaltern citizens of Mexico, for example). They are neither global, nor national, nor local.

Besserer and Kearney soon realized that the economic and political discourses and practices they uncovered could not be understood without also taking transnational agro-capitalist dynamics as well as political relations between local, state, and federal-level officials in

---

<sup>65</sup> Imre Lakatos, *Proofs and refutations: the logic of mathematical discovery*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

all three countries into account. In addition, the human rights' campaigns organized in the communities they studied borrowed heavily from the norms and strategies promulgated by the transnational nongovernmental advocacy networks with which these groups began working. Moreover, their pre-Mexico customary cargo systems of governance have been extended and reshaped as these communities have crossed ever wider territorial borders and numbers of symbolic boundaries. Mixteca transnational financial institutions have been established to serve the needs of community members across multiple political units in which they rarely have access to mainstream banks.<sup>66</sup>

*A first type of sociological transnational scholarship thus involves analyzing a particular type of transnational form or process across space. Do we find similar types of transnational migrant communities in Europe as the United States in contrast to those in South Africa or Brazil?*<sup>67</sup> How do the transnational experiences of people who migrate internally within a country and those who move across close or even contiguous borders within regions like Africa, Eastern Europe or the Caribbean compare to those who move from “south” to “north”?<sup>68</sup> Do transnational mining companies, for example, operate differently across distinct political units or ecosystems? How do transnational religious practices vary across social contexts? Why is a much greater share of remittances from overseas Chinese directed towards business investment compared with that of non-resident Indian groups?

For example, the existence and effects of transnational civic advocacy clearly varies by context. Growing evidence suggests that non-violent and public transnational activism is more

---

<sup>66</sup> Among their many individual and joint publications, see Federico Besserer and Michael Kearny, *Mixtepec: Ethnografía Multilocal de una Comunidad Transnacional Mixteca* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Iztapalapa, 2001).

<sup>67</sup> Ludgar Pries, *Migration and transnational social spaces* (Aldershot, Hants, UK and Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1999).

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Mika Toyota, “Contested Chinese Identities Among Ethnic Minorities in the China, Burma, and Thai Borderlands,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 26, no. 2 (2003): 301-320.

effective in changing domestic politics in countries with democratic regimes, with independent judiciaries, and high levels of grassroots civil society mobilization.<sup>69</sup> Sally Merry's work on the importance of translators in the transcontinental violence against women movement illustrates another set of spatial relationships.<sup>70</sup> Greater change was visible when activists that had acquired strategic tools while working abroad that allowed them to interpret between the supranational and the local and to transmit ideas between various contexts.

*The second type of research examines a particular type of transnational form or process across time.* How do contemporary human rights or environmental movements compare to the anti-slavery and labor movements of the past?<sup>71</sup> Are historical state responses to pirating networks similar to or different from more recent governmental attempts at controlling transnational organized crime?<sup>72</sup> Why do transnational infectious diseases seem so prevalent in some historical epochs and not in others? Scholarly exchange on the differences between transnational migration of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century with that of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century has been a particularly productive example of this type of scholarship.

*A third type investigates ostensibly different kinds of transnationalisms.* Transnational business, crime, professional, social movement, religious and migration networks all cross borders but to what degree do they act like one another?<sup>73</sup> Why do individuals join profit-making

---

<sup>69</sup> See Florini, *The Third Force* and Khagram, *Dams and Development*.

<sup>70</sup> Sally Engle Merry, "Rights, Religion, and Community: Approaches to Violence Against Women in the Context of Globalization," *Law and Society Review* 35 (2001): 39-88.

<sup>71</sup> See Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*; Khagram et al, *Restructuring World Politics*; Silver, *Forces of Labor*, and Kay, *Labor Transnationalism* among many, many others.

<sup>72</sup> It is interesting to note that indigenous peoples and pirating networks of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century were the only other non-state entities besides contemporary transnational terrorists against which federal governments declared war since U.S. independence in 1776. Of course, governments of many countries (such as the Tamil/Sinhalese conflicts in Sri Lanka) have been in long and protracted violent conflicts with transnational non-state groups (revolutionary, liberation, ethnic, etc.) of various kinds. For a more general perspective, see Thomas W. Gallant, "Brigandage, Piracy, Capitalism and State-Formation: Transnational Crime from a Historical World Systems Perspective," in Josiah McC. Heyman, ed., *States and Illegal Practices*, (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 25-61.

<sup>73</sup> John Arquilla and David F. Ronfeldt, *Networks and Netwars:: the future of terror, crime, and militancy* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2001).

transnational corporations as opposed to violent transnational terrorist groups? What explains why different transnational groups interpret ostensibly universal discourses, norms and strategies in distinct ways?<sup>74</sup> Are the factors that lead to “local” adoption of transnational fashion the same as that of transnational professional practices?

*A fourth type examines interactions among transnationalisms.* Some transnational forms and relations operate in isolation while others complement or subvert each other. Under what conditions do transnational epistemic communities alter the understandings and activities of transgovernmental networks? The social and financial organization of Al Qaeda provides another striking example. Its legitimacy and capacity partially derives from its social embeddedness in transnational (both in territorial and cultural terms) extended family, kinship and religious communities. Its complex financial organization combines both legal philanthropic and commercial concerns and illicit and criminal activities on a trans-continental scale.

*A fifth type compares and contrasts transnational phenomena and dynamics with those that are ostensibly tightly bounded and bordered (or non-transnationalisms for lack of a better word) such as those organized globally, nationally, or locally.* How, for example, do the forms and consequences of internal migration from the Peruvian highlands to the Peruvian capital, Lima, compare to those resulting from international migration from Lima to Barcelona, Spain. What difference does it make for people’s everyday lives when they identify primarily with domestic unions rather than international labor federations or “world religions”? How does the

---

<sup>74</sup> See Josselin and Wallace, *Non-State Actors*. See also Rodney Bruce Hall and Thomas J. Biersteker, eds., *The Emergence of Private Authority in Global Governance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

way in which local small firms think about business responsibility compare to the ways in which multinational corporations approach these issues?<sup>75</sup>

*A related and sixth type of analysis explores transnational phenomena and dynamics that allegedly compete with or supplant local, national, state, and global, with those that complement, interact with or transform them.* Transnationally-organized economic activities often replace nationally organized production arrangements while transnational civil society organizations are more likely to engage, shape and be shaped by domestic social movement organizations. Commodity chains relegating aspects of the production process to the far corners of Southeast Asia replaced the factories that produced entire shoes in Lynn, Massachusetts. In contrast, Indonesian or Argentine human rights organizations often link up to transnational advocacy networks. Their domestic activities complement and are complemented by these cross-border partnerships. Similarly, some argue that the Mexican government's program to issue consular identity cards to Mexican migrants in the United States (so they can obtain driver's licenses and open bank accounts) is a transnationally-organized political intervention that disrupts the sovereignty of the U.S. state. Others see this as a logical and complementary manifestation of the Mexican governments' continuing responsibility for emigrants.

The ST research program thus departs from traditional social science in important philosophical ways. First, transnational social fields and transnational structuration processes are its ontological foundations. Second, while potentially useful and illuminating, any explanation or interpretation that did not identify and explain the proximate and/or deeper transnational forms and processes at play is considered epistemologically incomplete. Implementing the ST

---

<sup>75</sup> It has been argued that local businesses, because they are socially embedded in communities, are likely to act with greater responsibility and that transnational corporations that are comparatively disembedded are more likely to fit the ideal-typical profit-maximizing firm, in a Polyani-esque way.



research program will not be easy or routine. It will require imagination, risk-taking, and perseverance. We believe the attempt is well worth it.

### **Conclusion**

TS is clearly driven by a different set of expectations about knowledge. Since a central premise is that not all theories can do all things, and that more productive insights come from combining or contrasting different theoretical explanations and interpretations, it seeks to uncover the heuristic power of these theoretical interactions. One of its primary concerns, in fact, is to understand the intersection and collision of the many layers of relations, perspectives, and cosmologies that take place within transnational social fields.

TS, therefore, allows for a creative interaction between different philosophies of knowledge - from positivism to post-modernism and from interpretivism to constructivism – in contrast to the all-too-common polarized and un-productive stalemates that arise when arriving at a single theoretical explanation is the goal. There is much room and opportunity for those interested in formulating testable and potentially falsifiable hypotheses under the umbrella of TS. But there is also support and encouragement for post-modern critiques of “regimes of truth” that mask unequal power relations. Both this expectation about the nature of the social world, and what we expect of scholarship that sheds light on it, reflect a set of beliefs about what academic interaction is capable of and responsible for doing. Instead of trying to artificially contain or clean-up complexity and constructive conflict, the TS embraces, encourages and facilitates it.

In conclusion, the overarching field of Transnational Studies will require a major step forward in transnationalizing U.S. sociology and social sciences. Clearly, there is already a good deal of scholarly exchange between and among scholars across borders and boundaries. But, in

many ways, just as field building is constrained by rigid disciplinary boundaries, so the U.S. social science community is hindered because it builds bridges selectively to particular places at specific times. For one thing, only a select group of primarily western scholars often participate. When those from the south or the east are included, they often do so as junior partners. Access to resources and opportunities among non-western scholars is limited, and legitimation process unequal because of the overwhelming predominance of the English language. The community of scholars within TS will be much more productive and successful to the extent to which the field itself becomes transnationalized. It needs to cast a broader net and encourage a wider range of transnational collaborative partnerships structured on different and more equal terms. We can learn how to do this from many of the transnational groups and processes we study.