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International, global, transnational: Just a matter of words?

In the globalized world of the last fifteen years, "international" has given some ground to the term "transnational". It is loosely used in formulations like "transnational studies" and "transnational projects". Avoiding the negative implications of "globalization," transnational suggests something more fluid, beyond the concept of nation. Lurking in the newer term, however, may be both a threat to the legacy of the international age and also a way of disguising its tenacity.

The complicated story of cultural exchange, both private and state-sponsored, between and among nation-states, did not begin as recently as we often like to think. Organizations such as the British Council, the USIA, or the Goethe Institute are indeed products of the latter half of the twentieth century, along with such phenomena as generous budgets for cultural exchange as part of foreign policy, and foundations and non-profit organizations that further complicate the playing field. Nevertheless, the story has a significantly longer heritage.

In the case of the United States, for example, private funding secured the immensely popular overseas tours by the Fisk Singers, an African-American vocal group singing traditional songs and spirituals, during the 1870s. As an example of a different tradition, the Alliance Française was formed as early as 1883 in Paris with both intellectuals and diplomats guiding it from the beginning, although it was not a government agency as such. Both these examples involved, at least at their fringes, a strategic deployment of cultural credit in a world in which culture was slowly taking on a new significance. In that era also, claims to nationhood, especially by ethnic groups buried in larger formations such as the Austro-Hungarian or British Empires, were being expressed as cultural as well as political projects.

Later in the twentieth century, of course, culture and the arts became one site at which global tensions and ideological conflicts were played out. Information, civic education, and cultural ideas were all virtual battlefields of World War II and major concerns for the post-war occupation authorities, and the high profile of the Office of War Information in the Roosevelt administration was a recognition of their importance. During the Cold War, the world tours of the Russian Bolshoi Ballet were high-octane affairs, and the opportunity for defection to the West by a member of the company often drew more attention than the pieces they were performing. Generally, whether privately or publicly funded, the artists or cultural programme went abroad to testify to the cultural vitality of their home countries. It was a sub-genre of diplomacy, but nonetheless one that many nations took seriously.

That very quality, however, is what made it *international*. It was a matrix of cultural exchange between nations as traditionally constituted entities, and many countries preferred formal treaties on cultural exchange, which meant mutual recognition as well as the possibility of controlling the identity and significance of the culture thereby "exchanged". In the United States in particular, there was a great deal of unease, mostly on the conservative side of the debate, about giving a government imprimatur to cultural activities and cultural production, even if the operational area was overseas. In the congressional debate around the establishment of the United States Information Agency in 1953, the Eisenhower administration had to overcome a certain amount of hostility. The fear that government-sponsored culture would take root in America surfaced at regular intervals. Once the Cold War justification vanished in 1990, needless to say, the USIA was essentially dismantled and assimilated into other State Department activities. That has, of course, led to significant and still unresolved problems in respect of the United States' desire to revitalize cultural diplomacy and find new methods of communication with the Arab and Muslim world.

Over the past twenty years, however, we have been encouraged by events and convention to think globally in terms of economies, and social and political systems. Globalization refers to the integration of these systems across national boundaries and includes the attendant mobility of people (especially workers), ideas, products, and capital. It was popularized as a buzzword in the 1980s, although it first appeared in an economic context in 1959, when it was used, benignly, to talk about globalized quotas.¹ A short time later, McLuhan and Carpenter² coined the term "global village" and spoke of the global tribe, seeing both of these as outcomes of the electronic age. More recently, globalization, especially in the cultural sphere, is seen as an intimidating force serving (as a first priority) the corporate and (as a second priority) the political interests of powerful nations — the United States in particular. Globalization often carries the same negative connotations embodied in such terms as the "Coca-Colization," "McDonaldization," and "Americanization" of cultures: processes that are seen as serious threats to cultural identity. The move between "international" and "global" is a Kuhnian shift, according to some theorists. As a powerful metaphor, globalization suggests total integration into a single dominant system; "a world system that covers the entire globe".³ Economic and political implications aside, the effects, both real and imagined, predict a world in which homogenization is the cultural norm, and in place of the ideal of multiple and equal systems co-existing for mutual benefit while maintaining individual cultural integrity, the image of a globalized world is one in which distinct cultural identity no longer exists.

In this evolution of terms, the most recent manifestation is "transnational". It is used, sometimes loosely, in such hopeful-sounding formulations as "transnational studies" and "transnational projects" that cheerfully leap over traditional academic and political boundaries. But the term also finds its way into combinations that evoke something less desirable, such as the forced transnational migration of refugees, which often renders its victims without the support and protection of the nation, or something more chaotic and dangerous as in the case of transnational terrorism. The term has crossed the multiple boundaries of scholarly disciplines, often with increasing ambiguity as it is applied in newer contexts. In some cases, "transnational" is little different than from the term "global" and some scholars use the term "post-national globalization" in an effort to be more precise.

It is interesting to note that all three terms — international, global, and transnational — share the same basic lexical definition, that is, "extending across national boundaries", although it is clear that, connotatively, especially in the arena of cultural policy, the words differ greatly in shades of meaning and usage. Yet one wonders if transnational — even if it implies something new and different — is simply the latest buzzword, a move beyond the controversy of *globalizing* without the substance of new practices. Indeed, we have yet to come to (empirical) terms with the idea of global. In their social network approach to the analysis of globalization, Kim and Shen maintain that attempts to articulate globalization into a formal theory are lacking.⁴ The more recent appearance of transnational as a term to describe a newer manifestation of cultural, political, and economic integration has received even less scrutiny. The danger is that we have replaced the old metaphor for the new, without the reflection or analysis needed to create effective policies and practices that can translate expectations into hoped-for realities of cultural exchange.

What is clear, then, is that the flow of culture into, out of, and even within countries has a lot to do with how we understand these terms. Because global, international, transnational, and the underlying framework of "nation" itself define the territory on which cultural activity can take place, the very meaning of "culture" and the identities we construct both individually and collectively depend acutely on the territory — and the possibilities — these terms delimit and define. Despite claims, for example, that we have entered an era of increasing de-nationalization,⁵ cultural identity and national identity remain closely bound together for many people around the world, for all manner of reasons ranging from the political to the economic, socio-cultural, and even the personal. The question of differences between the terms global, international, and transnational, therefore, is not merely an academic one.

The question to be answered in unpacking these terms is what they signal in the field of culture that will require the attention of the policy practitioner, the cultural manager, the individual artist, artists as a stake-holding group, and the individual (non-artist) citizen. What, for example, does the word "choice" signal in terms of cultural policy? In terms of cultural production, activity, or participation? In terms of cultural identity? One possibility is that transnational integrations are the outcome of historical trends that pose new challenges foreshadowed, but not realized, under international and then global schemes. If globalization, for example, is seen correctly as a threat to cultural ideas and identifications, recognized — if not always protected — in international relationships, then transnationalism may be seen as one effort to correct the consequences of those threats and to circumvent their challenges. We look at two areas of impact to consider these questions: the challenges and opportunities of increased mobility, and the impact of transnationalism on cultural identity.

The mobility of culture is historic. Though we do not claim it as a sole explanatory feature, the development of civilization is intimately bound up with the flow of cultural goods, artistic products, and artists. The travelling artist, in search of an audience, is both ubiquitous and archetypal in social history as well as in literature and song. This mobility is now accomplished through all manner of technological means, both actual and virtual, and is accompanied by the increased mobility of all peoples including audiences in search of artists. In addition, there is the increased quantity of artistic goods from one part of the world that can be had in another, with few limitations, even taking economic disparities into account (the vast array of pirated music CDs available in China, for example).

A common but flawed assumption is that transnationalism describes a context in which the mobility of individual agents is a dynamic product of freely made economic choices. The ideal image of a transnational culture seems to be one in which organizations and individuals engage in the exchange of ideas, participate in cultural activities — as artists and/or as audience — move from place to place at will, taking advantage of loosened borders and barriers in order to benefit from, and contribute to, the flourishing of arts and culture. A dancer, a poet, or a cultural manager travels from Country A to engage in creative work in Country B. Not only does the individual artist or cultural worker benefit (in opportunities for work and artistic development, engagement with new audiences, meeting fellow artists from another culture) but both Country A and Country B benefit as well from the exchange, for example in terms of tourism or sales of cultural goods. In this scenario, the artist is the means for both importing and exporting new, enriching cultural experiences to and from each country. While international alliances have been sufficient in the past to achieve such exchanges, a transnational focus aims at more fully integrated relationships that encompass a wide variety of relationships including social networks, economic policies, and other relationships that not only facilitate but enhance the creative exchange. This scenario leaves out some problems, however.

Olivier Audéoud has documented some of the obstacles, difficulties, and other hindrances to the mobility and free movement of artists and products in the cultural sectors that currently exist in the European Union.⁶ His study suggests that the kind of integration that transnationalism promises has not yet been achieved. Artists and other cultural workers who seek employment outside their home country may be disadvantaged due to the lack of integration of laws and policies, which then impose employment inequities. These include laws governing work permits, social protection such as health care, protection of intellectual property, and taxes. The problem is especially acute in the case of newly trained artists and cultural managers who may be limited to short-term, freelance positions outside of their home country. This kind of integration, rather than erasing national boundaries, depends acutely on cooperation between nations. In the case of mobility within the EU, for example, coordination at the level of the European Parliament facilitates these agreements and may be considered transnational, but the structure of such agreements is nevertheless founded upon the realities of "nation" — that is, the governments of the member states.

Other barriers include those that are less dependent upon national policies, relying more on the interaction among non-governmental organizations. For example, Audéoud cites the need for training of artists that cuts across national boundaries in order to ensure acceptability, and even standardization of training practices so that artists from one country will receive equal training, and therefore equal advantage in hiring. This kind of standardization may demand the cooperation of governmental agencies in granting certificates or degrees, but the important component is the training itself — whether it is accepted by other artists, by organizations, or by individuals hiring these workers. It relies heavily on relationships, therefore, that are forged and that operate outside of formal, governmental structures.

It is worth mentioning here that Audéoud sees the movement towards transnationalism as less important to the general public than to those working in the cultural sphere. This also constitutes a non-policy barrier of sorts.

[Interviews conducted for this study] give the overwhelming impression that the public in the [European] member states shows little interest or curiosity, or is simply indifferent, to the cultures of other EU countries. This inward-looking attitude has a direct impact on the mobility of artists, cultural workers and their productions in the EU. This is the reality that has to be faced and to recognize this situation would be a first step towards a commitment at policy level to seriously consider a more outward-looking approach to foreign artistic cultures.

The implication for cultural managers, of course, is the need to work towards forging these commitments, but it also signals the need for ground-level work in educating the public about the value of creative work in general and the more specific benefits that result from cultural exchange. In any case, the view of transnationalism presented thus far emphasizes the value, above all, of increased openness or fluidity of barriers to facilitate cultural exchange, at least within the cultural community. In this sense, "transnational" as a concept is not a new arrival. Aspects of it at least have been around for some time, even if they have appeared under a different label. In particular, the "internationalist" thinking that was behind the League of Nations and similar potentially worldwide institutions in the early part of the twentieth century had in many respects a transnational rather than an international vision at its core. As one scholar has suggested, the international term "cultural internationalism" is a very useful one for describing the kind of activity and intellectual approach that seeks to get behind, around, or below the standard structures and ideologies of relations between nation-states, be they economic, military, or diplomatic.⁷ "Cultural internationalism" is not meant to deny the existence of national cultures, but to make a distinction between the kind of attitudes and policies that see culture as essentially part of "the national interest", deployed for example to support the foreign policy of the nation-state, and the kind of policies and attitudes that are oriented to understanding a nation's or a community's place in the wider world. It is also a useful category in and of itself, as it puts the cultural dimension before the international dimension, and thus potentially opens the door to a number of things that don't fit the normal paradigm.

To that extent, "cultural internationalism" is the closest alternative term to "transnational" and captures something of its more open character. It is this meaning that is at the core of much of the current activity around creative and cultural exchange, such as was evident in the 2005 Catalyst Conference in Manchester (UK), which included papers, discussions, and a database dedicated to Transnational Cultural Policy. This and similar efforts to strengthen international alliances facilitating creative and cultural exchange are not posed as challenges to the primacy of nations, and in fact often hold national and cultural diversity in high regard. Such alliances represent the positive side of transnationalism and in fact are useful in both identifying and overcoming barriers to cultural exchange and the mobility of cultural workers.

A more subtle problem noted by Ghosh and Wang is the "taken-for-granted situation" of the transnational age, "where travel both physical and virtual is made easy [and] transnationals have both choice and freedom of movement between sending and receiving countries."⁸ Citing the work of Westwood and Phizacklea (2002), they express concern that:

increasingly the term "transnational" is being used to refer to the growing number of people who have the freedom, legally

and economically, to move across borders and between cultures, doing business their own way [...] We point out that [...] the stories of financially poor transnationals are sometimes eclipsed.

The situation they describe is problematic because we lack sufficient data to show whether either of these pictures is correct, to what extent, or with what consequences. It appears that the benefits of transnational creative exchange accrue to the more affluent in any society, and may continue to do so regardless of what particular policies are in place. Further study may reveal also, however, that the ideal of free movement and easy transition from one culture to another is, generally, less often realized than we would like to think. Other scholars note that economic migration, especially when it is non-voluntary, may work against the notion of transnationalism as emancipatory or as a positive force in cultural exchange. For this reason, a number of scholars caution against taking too celebratory a view of transnationalism, especially one that sees it as a hedge against global dominance or a "hegemonic logic". They suggest the need for "a more nuanced analysis [of] the enduring asymmetries of domination, inequality, racism, sexism, class conflict, and uneven development in which transnational practices are embedded and which they sometimes even perpetuate".⁹ The significance for cultural managers and those engaged in cultural policy is to recognize transnationalism as a multi-faceted, multi-local process that may be experienced in many different ways, by different individuals and groups, depending upon the factors listed above and including the motivations for mobility, whether it is forced or voluntary, and its effects on cultural identity.

An alternate reading of transnationalism focuses on sub-national relationships that question our understanding of what constitutes a nation and the ways in which mobility, politics, and cultural identity become intertwined.

In the early part of the twentieth century, Randolph Bourne used the term "transnational" to talk about changes in the dynamics of American culture; specifically, his description introduced a new way to look at the relationships between the many cultures comprising American society.¹⁰ Instead of a national culture, Bourne understood the United States to have a transnational culture evidenced by its increasing heterogeneity, brought about in turn by the regular absorption of new cultural groups through immigration. Although cultural conservatives would disagree, from this perspective the United States has long been challenging, or undermining, the traditional assumption, implied in the concept of the ethnic nation, of a homogenous cultural group identity. This particular American history may fit well with current trends toward transnationalism in political and economic spheres; however, the relationship between citizenship, economic activity, identity, and culture is just as sensitive in large diverse polities as it is in smaller communities.

In the initial formation of the European Union, for example, integration of economies took precedence over concerns of culture. There have been many subsequent efforts, in amendments to the Maastricht Treaty, to strengthen the way in which monetary and economic union address the issue of culture, specifically as assurances concerning the preservation of national differences. Europe, after all, invented the idea of the nation-state, though it has, ever since, steadily eroded it, most recently with the creation of the European Union itself. This, in fact, is the paradox of transnationalism as it is currently conceived. It wants the best of both worlds: preservation of national identity but the increased mobility and economic advantage of loosened or

de-activated national barriers.

The case of intra-national relations poses additional complications, however. Substantial linkages of language, ethnic identity, and historical experience may make it very difficult to imagine how — to take one example — Kurdish art and culture might fit into international cultural exchange between nation states. The Kurds do not have a nation of their own, and sometimes the intra-national relations between Kurdish and other ethnic groups in a particular nation-state in which Kurds live can be problematic.

In order not to get caught up in real-world examples subject to many qualifications, it might be easier to consider the case of the imaginary ethnic nation of the Alembics, who live in a number of different nation-states in a broad but identifiable geographical area, including Cardassia, a relatively modern and diverse country, but one that suffers from large disparities between its most urban and educated regions on the one side, and its most rural and underdeveloped parts on the other. The Cardassians are also somewhat hypersensitive to any potential threats to national unity and territorial integrity. As far as the name goes, apologies to the writers of *Star Trek: Voyager*. It doesn't take a great deal of imagination to sketch out a situation in which culture and politics begin to diverge. The Cardassian government, for example might be more than ready to sponsor an Alembic traditional music group on tour in the US, provided that the group is clearly identified as an ethnic community within the Cardassian Republic. This would even enhance Cardassia's standing as a modern nation conscious of the diversity of its population. Receptions would be held in the Cardassian embassy and consulates-general in big cities. At press conferences, the musicians would presumably emphasize that they were artists and performers, not politicians, and refuse to make any kind of statement that could be interpreted as support for Alembic nationalism.

It would be a very different scenario, of course, if such a tour was organized by an independent Alembic organization (the Alembic Alliance), based in, say, Paris or Chicago, who wanted to emphasize above all that Alembic culture is unique in its style and expression, representative of a specific kind of history and experience, and clearly a "national" rather than a regional or sub-national culture. Indeed, the very fact that ethnic Alembics live in at least four different countries (Cardassia plus three other countries in that part of the world) tends to make Alembic culture *prima facie* a trans-national culture. It cannot be contained within any one traditional nation-state, and neither could any one trans-national nation-state represent such a concept within the legacy of inter-national cultural politics.

Therefore, if the Alembic Alliance is really only a cultural organization dedicated to bringing the Alembic artistic legacy to the world, then any hostile response to them on the part of Cardassia may be considered somewhat hypersensitive, or even paranoid. Nevertheless, cultural politics are just that, politics, and if the Alliance's vision for the broader Alembic future is the creation of a new country, Alembia, out of bits of the surrounding countries, then one can argue that the Alliance's attitude to the transnational quality of Alembic culture is ultimately one of tactical manipulation of this open status and expresses a clear preference for a new, ethnically defined, nation-state in which Alembics can live among their own.

This somewhat whimsical example sketches out in a more concrete form our thesis that the transnational dynamics of culture and cultural exchange —

culture that is not the property of one nation–state but perhaps of many and of none at all — are not merely the traditional international variant under a different name.

Transnational cultural politics is not, therefore, simply a matter of cultures that sit astride the borders of nation–states. It is also an issue of global migration and communication dynamics, domestic and foreign cultural policy, and travel regulations. As Benedict Anderson notes in an essay entitled "Exodus", the movement of culture and audience is one of "the integral components of the transnationalization of advanced capitalism."¹¹ Indeed, it's ironic that Anderson deploys the term "transnationalization" in his piece in an anthology entitled *Internationalizing Cultural Studies*. In any event, the interface of new communications technologies (and cheaper access to them), new patterns of migration that are redefining global social space often in unnoticed ways, and the notions of culture and personal/group identity is a place where the future of culture is being created, and concepts and institutions must inevitably change to meet that future and possibly help shape it.

These developments, though often encouraged by policy, may be seen as an evolutionary trend in which transnationalism is not the cause, but the consequence of mobility. In other words, transnational describes a set of features about the contemporary world, one that the cultural community must come to terms with through practices and policies. Nevertheless, if the trend is to move beyond the limitations of nation in building alliances beyond traditional national barriers, it is still in the context of nation that these alliances operate. Yet, there are oppositional voices.

Opposition to the concept of the transnational and the idea of cultural internationalism comes from two different sources. One objection, touched on earlier, is the traditional complaint raised by nation–state actors: that the transnational idea undermines the identity of sovereignty at least in the cultural field (which can of course be very sensitive); one good example of this would be the recent indignation, during Spring and Summer 2006, over the US national anthem being sung at demonstrations in Spanish by Hispanic immigrants. The other source of criticism and opposition is the radical multiculturalists.¹² Their opposition is more an expression of hostility to the legitimacy of any idea — even one that challenges the institutional status quo — that would involve universalist principles or globally valid "master narratives". From their viewpoint, cultural internationalism seems to imply a kind of active, contemporary world culture towards which everyone from various local or regional cultures would, or should, orient themselves; such a process, however, may not be politically neutral (or, more simply put, the "internationalism" can begin to look like good old Western Civilization in a new and deliberately misleading disguise). In a slightly different variant of that position, others might see cultural internationalism or transnational cultural work as posing very little threat to the traditional order of state power and national citizenship. In other words, where the nation–state supporters see a culture–led undermining of certain key assumptions about sovereignty and the identity of culture and citizenship, the multiculturalist critics observe the inability of culture to offer a serious challenge to precisely those assumptions that provide a cultural "packaging" for the social and economic power–structures of the nation–state.

We suspect that it will take much work to deal effectively and sensitively with the issues of transnational cultural politics in negotiation with traditional nation–state actors (eg official agencies responsible for cultural representation

or diplomacy), the representatives of the globalized economy (investors, media conglomerates), and the political, postcolonial, and multiculturalist critics (eg in the academy or in activist organizations). In any case, our position is that the reality should receive as much attention as the choice of metaphor.

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