

SPECIAL SECTION

**The transnational construction of local conflicts
and protests**

Edited by

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Introduction: What can Transnational Studies offer the analysis of localized conflict and protest?

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Abstract: After reviewing the strengths and limitations of Transnational Studies, including its methodological nationalism, this article calls for the field to develop a theory of power. A transnational theory of power allows us to set aside binaries such as internal/external, global/local, or structure/agency, when analyzing historical and contemporary social processes and conflicts. Previous and current scholarship on imperialism can contribute to this project by facilitating the examination of the role of finance capitalists and of states of unequal financial and military power. However, Transnational Studies also must assess the contestatory possibilities of transnational social movements. The articles in this special section contribute to the development of Transnational Studies by examining past and present transnational constructions of locality, identity, authenticity, and voice, within social fields of uneven power. The articles also illuminate the types of transnational practices, conflict, and struggle that emerge.

Keywords: conflict, imperialism, locality, methodological nationalism, Transnational Studies

The development of theory in Transnational Studies is currently at a standstill. Scholars have pursued a number of discrete topics with a focus on cross-border processes—culture and media, migration, social movements, diasporic identities and long-distance nationalism, gender and family, and religion. In approaching these topics, some researchers highlight the global circulation of ideas, symbols, representations, and images, while others examine social and organizational relationships that cross borders. Yet, there have been too few occasions when scholars bring to-

gether this research to ask comparative questions of significance for social theory, such as how transnational processes shape our experiences of locality and conflict.

The articles in this collection take helpful steps toward theory building by examining the meaning of locality from a perspective that acknowledges that while nation-states still divide the global terrain into discrete territories and separate regimes, the borders of these states have never confined social dynamics, the extraction of wealth and resources, and the exercise of

power. In order to discuss the important contribution that the articles in this special section of *Focaal* make, it is first necessary to step back and place their research within the development of Transnational Studies.

Overview of Transnational Studies

The term transnational refers to processes that extend across a specific set of state borders so that particular states become actors whose exercise of power shapes but does not contain cross-border processes (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994; Glick Schiller 1999, 2003, 2004; Kearney 1995; Mato 1997). Of course the significance of transnational processes was a basic premise of various counter-sociologies that challenged the container model of society, which confined social analysis within particular nation-states. These alternative social theories range from nineteenth-century Marxism and diverse writings on imperialism to twentieth-century statements about global connection including Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems theory, Andre Gunther Frank and Walter Rodney's development of underdevelopment framework, and Niklas Luhmann's vision of world society. In general, efforts at globe-spanning conceptualization have been marked by inadequate theorization of the connection between locality, the state, and global systems and processes. Meanwhile mainstream social science theory persisted in confining its analysis to processes encapsulated by state boundaries.

In the 1980s, in fields as diverse as international relations, international migration, and anthropology, there was some indication that the alternative theorists would finally move disciplinary paradigms beyond the container model of society (Nye 1988; Portes and Bach 1985; Wolf 1982). However, it was not until the 1990s that Transnational Studies became significant in many fields. David Harvey's 1990 book *The condition of postmodernity: An enquiry into the origins of cultural change* can be said to mark the emergence of Transnational Studies. Building on earlier work, from Marx to Lefebvre, Harvey

connected changes in political economy with global cultural transformation. He posited a compression of time and space that was shaped by the restructuring of capital markets, which he termed flexible accumulation. Unfortunately, the Transnational Studies that followed in the next fifteen years popularized a new or revitalized set of descriptive terms—that were rarely clearly defined—and produced normative statements rather than theory. As Don Kalb (2005) has pointed out, many researchers failed to note that their scholarship, rather than actually describing current trends, reflected and reinforced the emerging free-market neo-liberal ideology that followed the end of the Cold War.

Particularly lacking was a theory of power that could address the changing nature of the state and the refurbishing of forms of imperial domination. In fact, despite the focus on the transnational, all variants of the first wave of Transnational Studies can be said to have produced a new version of methodological nationalism. Methodological nationalism is an intellectual orientation that assumes the national border to be the natural unit of study, equates society with the nation-state, and conflates national interests with the purposes of social science (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002a, 2002b).¹

It is true that some of the initiators of Transnational Studies announced the emergence of a brave new world of cultural flows unrestrained by 'borders and boundaries' (Kearney 1991).² Scholars were encouraged to turn their attention to tracking and analyzing global flows of capital, labor, ideas, media, and identities (Appadurai 1990, 1996). However, even as they heralded the new fluidities, celebrated the postmodern, and bid goodbye to grand narratives, much of the initial writing in Transnational Studies reintroduced and reified bounded and static conceptualizations of culture, the historical past, identity, community, and internal and external processes of the state. Core concepts of mainstream social science were rarely critically examined and recognized to be the offspring of a century of methodological nationalism.³

The weaknesses of Transnational Studies were exacerbated by the emergence of several distinc-

tive subfields of study that focused on different kinds of global flows: Global Cultural Studies, Diaspora Studies, Migration Studies, and Globalization Studies. These divisions in many ways paralleled the terminology of 'scapes' formulated by Arjun Appadurai (1990): ethno-, media-, techno-, finance-, and ideo-scapes. These neologisms, Appadurai argued, made it possible for scholars to conceptualize the "new global cultural economy a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models" (1996: 32). Much of the work in Transnational Studies reflected and reinforced this interest in 'the new global cultural economy'. By sharing Appadurai's premise of global disjuncture and rejection of an analysis of centers of power, each of the new subfields of Transnational Studies was marred by an inability to confront the emergence of the United States as the only super-power after the Cold War, its wielding of political and military power, and its relationship to global financial institutions. In short, in the 1990s few scholars concerned with transnational processes spoke of imperialism.

As noted, studies of global flows generally ignored "power relations, [and] the continued hegemony of the center over the margins. Everyone became equally 'different', despite specific histories of oppressing and being oppressed" (Lavie and Swedenburg 1996: 3). This failure to identify and address the workings of power affected the study of locality. Researchers did not explore or theorize the ways in which transnationally extended power defined locality and shaped our concept of local struggle.

Global Cultural Studies focused on the present moment in which all was disjunction, disorder, and transformation. Scholars in this field defined transnational processes as novel and transgressive, occurring in response to the dramatic changes in communication technology wrought by contemporary global capitalism. They turned their attention to the rapid dissemination of commodities, images, and representations of identity, contrasting the contemporary moment of fluidity with the stasis and fixity of the past. Their image of the past was reinforced

by their use of a Geertzian concept of culture, which imagined webs of signification that were transmitted within specific, stable, and historically discrete localities. Debates about power were not totally absent. Some critiqued the McDonaldization of the world while others celebrated new realms of freedom, creolization, and possibility (Appadurai 1996; Bhabha 1990; Hannerz 1996; Ritzer 1993). However, the debate was framed so that the past histories of migration, colonialism, state building, war, and conquest vanished while the present moment was one in which de-centered individuals contended with anonymous global forces and flows.

It was on the basis of this dichotomous, a-historical view of history that the concept of hybridity was popularized and celebrated as if the mixing of ideas, practices, dress styles, and identities was something new. The entire enterprise was in fact an unacknowledged recycling of an earlier literature on trans-culturation. The term trans-cultural has a long, although unacknowledged history in anthropology. As developed by the Cuban theorist Fernando Ortiz in 1940, the term stressed that cultural processes that crossed the borders of culture were a two-way street. Ortiz sought to critique the concept of acculturation by describing the mutual cultural influences that first connected Europe and Cuba and then linked Cuba and the United States (Ortiz 1947; see also Gunew 2002). But because of the methodological nationalism of the time, the concept and the understanding of social processes embedded in it remained underdeveloped. Moreover, the concept of trans-cultural, although an advance over the assimilationist or colonial ideology of the time, had its problematic aspects. In recognizing mutual cross-border influences, the vastly differential power of the colonizer and the colonized was obscured, while the foundational cultures that mutually influenced each other were conceptualized as bounded, uniform, and stable. When Transnational Studies emerged it favored the term hybridity rather than trans-culturation but continued to depict cultural fusion as a product of the blending of unchanging, traditional cultures.

While Global Cultural Studies popularized the term hybridity but continued the tendency to portray the past as static, Diaspora Studies turned to the study of historical continuities. Scholars in this sub-field examined narratives of identity that were legitimated by myths of common origin, descent, and dispersal. Consequently, Diaspora Studies often portrayed cultural identities as bounded, a-historical, and essentialized. The first wave of Diaspora Studies focused primarily on cultural representation rather than on transnational politics or state building, although more recently scholars have turned their attention to the long-distance nationalism of diasporic populations (Brazier and Mannur 2003; Fuglerud 1999). While some diasporic scholarship focused on the experience of forced migration and exile, increasingly scholars have applied the term diaspora to all migrating or historically dispersed and marked populations (Cohen 1997).⁴ In either approach, the thrust of Diaspora Studies has been to project a population united by its globe-spanning common identity and history.

In this way, Diasporic Studies reproduced the foundational ideology of the nation-state, although it projected its concept of identity and culture into a cross-border space. In the classic nation-state building project, the population within the borders of a nation-state is imagined to share a homogeneity of culture, history, and identity. Differences of class, politics, gender, and region are erased or of little account within the unity of the nation. Diasporic Studies projects a similar national unity but extends that unity within containers of descent and historical experience that extend across state borders.

By utilizing concepts of transnational community, transnational space, and trans-locality many scholars of Transnational Migration Studies similarly reinforced methodological nationalism. The term transnational community generally signifies a group of people who share an identity and culture, although they live in localities situated in the territories of more than one nation-state. As used by ethnographers such as Peggy Levitt (2001) and Robert Smith (1998) the term referred to a group of people who left

their home village to live in a city of a different nation-state, but organized themselves to maintain home ties. By doing so they became what Levitt has called 'transnational villagers' and others called trans-localities. To project transnational villagers as a community that creates its own form of transnational space can leave the state untheorized. With the growth of Transnational Migration Studies, researchers also deployed the term transnational community for migrants and their descendents, settled in one or more countries, who maintain homeland ties and organized to establish, influence, or support the politics of their native land. In this latter usage, nation-states become more visible but as with Diaspora Studies and all forms of nationalism, identity was naturalized and differences in power and wealth subsumed within the homogeneity of the imagined transnational 'community'.

In some writing, researchers made use of a metaphor of space to project the sense of cross-border community. In so doing they have opened Transnational Migration Studies to criticism for obscuring rather than elucidating social processes (Bommes 2003). However, other writers have chosen to use the term transnational space to signal specific and mapable features of social relationship rather than dwell on projections of shared identity. Thomas Faist for example defined transnational space as "characterized by a high density of interstitial ties on informal or formal, that is to say institutional levels" (2000: 89; see also Pries 2001).

From the beginning of Transnational Migration Studies, there were a handful of scholars who offered a critique of the concept of community and its ideological implications and argued that it was important to trace actual social relationships that crossed borders (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994; Glick Schiller and Fouron 1999). Unfortunately, many migration researchers took no notice of the central conceptual difference between the Social Field approach and Transnational Community Studies. A social field can be defined as an unbounded terrain of multiple interlocking egocentric networks. Network is best applied to chains of

social relationships that are egocentric and are mapped as stretching out from a single individual. Conceptualizing social fields as networks of networks allows us to map the indirect connections between disparate individuals who do not know each other or even know of each other but yet are mutually shaped by each other.

The merit of this approach is that it distinguishes between actual social relations and ideological constructions; community is not assumed. The researcher is challenged to ascertain whether or not those who share network connections also share common identities and utilize communal ideologies. However, the Transnational Social Field approach, while it does not obscure relations of power, does not necessarily lead to their investigation. Moreover, it has often been used to study only the social fields that connect migrants with a homeland, again legitimating a transnational form of boundary making that neglects the operation of forms of power that extend more globally.

The growth of a scholarship of globalization, dominated by an interest in economics and political institutions, had the potential of providing Transnational Studies with a much needed theory of power that could elucidate processes of exploitation and oppression that extend across borders. However, once again the terms used and the questions raised obscured more than they clarified. Globalization was defined as a set of processes through which the world became more tightly integrated. Most writers soon acknowledged that the current period of globalization was not the first time there had been an accelerated integration of global connections, although they differed in their periodization of the ebbs and flows of globalization (Friedman 2000; Mittelman 1997). Paralleling the situation in Global Cultural Studies, the debate centered on an evaluation of globalization. Defenders saw globalization as a process that brought increased prosperity and democracy to people around the world. Critics noted growing inequality, war, exploitation, and a 'race to the bottom' as workers found themselves stripped of all protection of wage levels and working conditions (Brecher and Costello 1994). Less effort was expended in

identifying and locating specific sets of actors who benefited from and gave leadership to the extraction of wealth. While certain institutional forces were identified—most commonly the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank—the relationship between these institutions and states of very different degrees of financial and military power remained undertheorized.

Reuniting Transnational Studies by theorizing locality and power

The diffuse nature of contemporary Transnational Studies and the failure of its scholars to systematically define their terms kept researchers from addressing several issues that are central to the field and require theory building. To summarize, practitioners of Transnational Studies proved unable or unwilling to identify and locate sources of unequal global power in a world that continues to be divided into nation-states. They have failed to confront the methodological nationalism that sustains the use of bounded categories such as internal/external despite research on cross-border processes. The six articles published in this special section of *Focaal* directly confront these conceptual concerns. The authors struggle to establish the meaning of the local within transnational processes. In so doing they clarify the theoretical issues that stand as barriers to the further development of Transnational Studies and make significant contributions to this new field of study.

The articles are the product of a conference in which many of the disparate strains of Transnational Studies were brought together so that research on religion, gender, social movements, identity, and neo-liberal globalization could all be subject to a common set of analytical concerns. The conveners of the conference on "Transnational aspects of localized conflict and protest", held in Soesterberg on 19–21 December 2004, asked: Is there still space for locality, for local identities that are not completely mediated by transnationalist influence in this context of globalization? Initially, they answered

the question in the affirmative, offering two premises:

- (1) There is a set of issues that remains eminently local: local conflict and protest, mounted in the name of localities or local interests.
- (2) Transnational relations, symbols, and discourses translate into the make-up of local protest.

The articles produced in this special section take the discussion of the local as it is experienced through conflict and protest some steps further than the initial premises of the conference. Taken as a whole, these articles challenge Transnational Studies to rethink the local not only as it is experienced today but historically as well.

As they do so, it becomes apparent that what is local within transnational processes varies. For the authors of three of the articles, Saleminck, de Theije, and Spierenburg, Steenkamp, and Wels, the local is a locality within a state, whether it is a city or a region. In contrast, both Laungram-sri and Salman are concerned with the tension between a national government and its power to represent the nation in contrast to 'external' forces. Their differentiation of internal and external actors resonates with the fault lines that Ghorashi and Tavakoli describe between Iranian feminists who continue to live in Iran and those in the diaspora. In all six articles, the meanings of inside/outside and internal/external are addressed dynamically over time and within fields of uneven power. Questions about the meaning of the local configured by the inequalities of globe-spanning unequal financial, military, and symbolic power underlie all six articles.

When taken together, the articles provide evidence that Transnational Studies can give scholars an entirely new way to define and study the local and that this approach is useful in the study of conflict and protest. The articles set the stage for a grounded theorization of power that brings together the new scholarship on imperialism and the complexities of struggle and survival contained within place-based ethnography. The recently revitalized discussion on imperialism,

which offers theories of power that extends across state borders, has had little or no impact on Transnational Studies. Yet an understanding of how locality and power are structured by transnational processes including that of imperialism is necessary in order to move the field beyond the level of description so that it can contribute to theory building in the social sciences.

Developing a transnational perspective on the local and a global theory of power

Setting aside methodological nationalism, the authors in this issue develop new insights into the experience of locality by examining the ways in which transnational and global processes affect people situated in a particular place and time. They recognize that building a social science that moves us beyond methodological nationalism does not mean dismissing the significance of states or nationalism within globalization processes. Despite several decades of the neo-liberal restructuring, states continue to be significant actors. Their police powers are being reinforced and legitimated by the globe-spanning 'war on terror' and its concomitant neo-conservative ideology of order (Brenner, Jessop, Jones, and MacLeod 2003; Eckert 2005; Harvey 2003).

By moving beyond methodological nationalism, the authors of these articles have taken important steps toward setting aside the binary categories imposed by nation-state thinking, including that of the local and the global or the national and the international. They have begun to think transnationally by understanding that within past and current moments of heightened globalization many day-to-day social processes extend across state borders so that the local is not only mediated by transnational processes: the local is transnational. This transnational perspective on the local does not deny the agency, interests, or struggles of people situated within particular places; it does challenge us to rethink the meaning of locality.

Before the rise of nation-states, locality existed within dynamic relationships to empire formations and trade networks that existed in

Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Europe. Even these continental categories obscure the millennia of connections that made the places such as Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean, and the Sahara domains of connection rather than regions with borders. As opposed to long-distance flows of people, goods, and ideas, transnational processes are much newer. We can link them to the development of the modern state, its concept of borders, and its legitimization through the nineteenth and twentieth century ideology of the nation. Ideas about nation and peoplehood in each particular state cannot simply be seen as examples of a 'derivative discourse' but they do provide us with potent examples of the transnational construction of a conception of bounded and territorially-based locality (Chatterjee [1986] 1998). It was through this modern concept of the nation, linking the territory of a state to a history, culture, and identity, that we learned to ignore the historical processes that constructed modern nation-states. The concept of nation as it became normalized obscured the long-term and long-distance flows of people, ideas, resources, and military force and the colonial processes that had produced nationalist ideologies and state-building processes, and grounded them within territorially-based states.

By building on this historical perspective of how the meaning, identity, and boundaries of both the national and the local are often experienced and defined across borders, scholars can begin to develop a contemporary transnational perspective on the local. Taking us beyond the ultimately nullifying constructionist view that all spaces are products of human creation because their meaning is configured through social and cultural constructs, the authors allow for particular histories, individual actors, and social relationships. Developing a transnational perspective on the local requires more than a discursive move; it requires a different reading of history and an ethnographic methodology that probes process, social relationships, and representations of interconnection. The transnational perspective also calls on researchers to set aside the conventional contrast between the local and the transnational. The local turns out not

only to be influenced by the transnational but to be a specific site of the materialization of transnational processes. That is to say, the local not only is transnational, but also, there is no transnational that does not have specific and particular local enactments.⁵

As Transnational Studies begins to develop its theory to encompass locality as an experience produced across space and time, it must also address power as it is structured, enforced, and contested within states and across state borders. Here, the transnational perspective on the local can benefit from the insights of contemporary theories of imperialism. At the same time the theorization of imperialism must develop a transnational perspective on the local that includes the role of individual actors, relationships, and transnational social fields in creating the contexts of consent or challenges to domination.

Scholars of Transnational Studies tend to treat all nation-states as if they were equal and sovereign players. Such an approach obscures the extension of the power of some states through financial, military, and cultural means into the domain of others. The extension of the power of a territorially-based regime into the political, economic, social, and cultural life of other territories and states can usefully be called imperialism. Unlike the concept of globalization, which does not address directly the continuing military significance of states, the term imperialism allows us to examine the ways in which ideological construction and economic and military force work in different ways to serve the interests of a particular state. And it allows us to develop a global perspective that puts politics back into the discussions of globalization by adding to the analysis of capitalist penetration the fierce rivalry for global dominance between competing and colluding imperial and sub-imperial powers.

Past and contemporary theorists of imperialism have described several different forms (Cooper 2003; Hardt and Negri 2000; Harvey 2003; Lenin [1917] 1976; Luxemburg 1972; Magdoff 1969, 2003; Mann 2003; Reyna 2005). In its classical form imperial states conquer and rule over colonies, and there has been a recent flurry

of books about empire. Marxist theorists have been less interested in describing empires than in understanding the relationship between capitalism and systems of domination that made domination possible even without military occupation and direct colonization. The theory they developed saw in finance capital an instrument of intervention in formally sovereign states that facilitated control without constant colonial systems of supervision. Currently finance capital can take the form of loans, investment, and foreign 'aid'. The power of capital, wielded through the World Bank, and various development banks and funds backed by the military force of a state or an alliance of states, penetrates economically into multiple polities and constrains their actions and policies. Since World War II, this form of imperialism has dominated.

Most theorists past and present have had relatively little to say about the social relationships and ideologies through which imperial institutions are maintained and legitimated both within a core imperialist state and globally. Both Harvey (2003) and Arrighi (2005) draw on a neo-Gramscian concept of hegemony to understand how US imperialism struggles for consent to its domination, but their analysis remains more on the level of state elites than of local people. The articles in this special section, as they build a transnational perspective on the local, provide invaluable insights into the transnational social fields within which consent may be secured or contested.⁶

These articles analyze the ways in which globally circulating ideas about rights, community, gender, morality, and identity can normalize oppressive regimes or provide charters for struggle. They demonstrate that transnational processes are not the translation of relations, symbols, and discourses into local protest. Rather symbols and discourses take on meaning within transnational relations, which are the substance out of which senses of authenticity and locality are built.

Both Marjo de Theije and Oscar Salemink provide a historical perspective on two localities shaped initially within the constitution of colonial empires. In both articles identities and cul-

tural practices in specific places are created through transnational processes and over time. Nation-state-building processes and state actors participate in the construction of locality but state boundaries do not delimit the forces and power that are imbricated in this construction. Marjo de Theije traces three sets of transnational actors or organization—the Catholic Church, Portuguese settlers, and Brazilian nationalists—that were each shaped by the colonial experience. She traces continuities to the present-day situation in which Brazilian actors including national and church officials seek to benefit from the contemporary global tourist industry and its marketing of authenticity. Through these examples, Marjo de Theije demonstrates that locality within Brazil and the very concept of the nation-state can only be understood as part of broader transnational forces. It is true that at any one time, a sense of the local may seem to be distinctively differentiated from and in opposition to transnational forces. For example the religious brotherhood, *Ordem Terceira de São Francisco de Assis* (Third Order of Saint Francis of Assisi) of São João Del Rei of Minas Gerais, seemed to be authentically local in their struggle against the universalizing claims of liberation theologians. However, a broader transnational perspective provides a different picture: a historical vantage point reveals that an institution that currently may appear to be a manifestation of locally rooted culture, in fact had a cross-border colonial origin, situated within fields of unequal power. The brotherhood was originally created within the context of the eighteenth-century Portuguese colonial project and its alliance with the Catholic Church. The twentieth-century claims of the Brotherhood to be the voice of the local actually upheld an elite-based Catholicism that had originated elsewhere. However the Brotherhood's assertions of authenticity were validated by the Brazilian state officials when they understood that the São João Del Rei church could be marketed globally to tourists in search of local indigenous culture.

Even as transnational processes create and then commodify the local in Brazil in ways that may oppress the disempowered, these processes

have also generated global rhetorics or sets of ideas that contribute to struggles situated in particular places. As de Theije shows, women in Garanhuns, a town in the northeastern state of Pernambuco in Brazil, became devotees of a globally circulating charismatic Catholicism that centered on individual redemption within a universalistic church. Yet within this explicitly universal frame of reference, the women constructed the local through charitable practices for the street sweepers and homeless children of their city. Within their transnational construction of morality and faith-based acts, they waged a place-based struggle against oppression. De Theije convincingly demonstrates that Catholicism in Brazil has created the local within transnational social fields. The church has never been a disembodied ethos but rather consists of a set of actors operating within various institutional arrangements that stretch between particular places and are shaped by changing distributions of power vis-à-vis colonial regimes, the Brazilian state, and the contemporary neo-liberal global regime policed by US imperialism. The meaning of local religious practice and identity is produced within this cross-border setting.

The articles by Oscar Salemink and Pinkaew Laungramsri also identify colonial regimes as actors that concretized, legitimated, and situated the political identities of particular populations. These same populations later challenged the post-colonial states. Laungramsri notes that while the Burmese Shan's claim to independent state status looks back to a 'historical feudal system', both British and then Japanese colonial regimes granted the Shan a 'distinctive status'. Salemink provides a historical exposition of the cross-border production of the local in his study of the transnational construction of indigenous and human rights among Vietnam's Central Highlanders. In both cases locality is concretized and modernized through globally circulating ideologies of difference.

Salemink's article points to a continuing definition of Highlander difference through newer transnational forms of identification. In the past, the Central Highlanders struggled in the name of a nation rooted in French colonial percep-

tions of the region and its people. The struggle today is framed around religious freedom rather than national liberation. In changing circumstances, an underground movement of evangelical Christianity, originating in US-based networks of churches, was adopted as representative of Highlanders, whose localized struggles are now defined as religious. In this Vietnamese example—as in Laungramsri's case study on the Shan women's movement on the Burmese-Thai border—the use of a globally circulating rights agenda brings sets of transnational actors into a social field that contains very place-based struggles such as land claims. Salemink reminds us that rights regimes are constituted by institutions and organizations and contain social fields; they are not disembodied global discourses. As such, rights regimes include not only narratives and representations of identities but relationships of unequal power that can include networks linked to the US imperialist agenda. The evangelical Christian networks that extend between the United States and Vietnam are certainly part of the US imperial reach (Glick Schiller 2005a, 2005b; Oldfield 2004).

In the Shan case, activists access a rights regime that calls into question violence against women, even as their narratives intersect with rather than supersede the older transnational discourse of national liberation. Laungramsri is concerned with the social positioning of gender within the imagining of nation, as well as the efforts of Shan women activists to reposition women within the transnational Shan struggle against the violence of the Burmese state. By broadly circulating a report, *License to rape*, which detailed the use of rape by the Burmese military, the diasporic Shan's women's movement strategically invoked the growing global movement protesting violence against women. Their goals have been not only to contribute to the Shan struggle against the Burmese state but also to re-envision the relationship between Shan women and their nation.

A significant body of research in Transnational Studies documents the seminal role of diasporas as a cross-border force that contributes to the ideas and practices of what is defined as

local. The role of a vociferous diaspora in the creation of various forms of locality, addressed by both Laungramsri and Salemink, is also of concern to Halleh Ghorashi and Nayereh Tavakoli. Their contribution highlights the contradictions that may emerge when a diaspora seeks to define the politics of homeland struggles. Ghorashi and Tavakoli demonstrate that although women within Iran and within the Iranian diaspora have been speaking in the name of Iranian feminism, until recently they spoke from different experiences and understandings. At first glance this article contains a very different position on locality than the others, documenting a division that follows the divide of the Iranian border. Iranian women living within the borders of the nation-state are shown to differ from their 'sisters' abroad in their modes of struggle and stance toward the Iranian government. Even within a shared Left politics, the view from the diaspora and from within the homeland was different. The diaspora was unable to see or comprehend the forms of resistance adopted by women who continued to live in Iran.

However, because Ghorashi and Tavakoli adopted a historical processual mode of analysis, they are able to deepen the transnational perspective on the local. They demonstrate that at times or in situations in which local actors cannot build transnational social fields, as was the case when the Iranian regime limited interaction between political exiles and feminists within the borders of Iran, the distinction between internal/external can be meaningful. A transnational construction of the local requires more than discourse and cyberspace communication. Cyberspace can facilitate the communications of transnational movements such as the international women's movement and its Iranian participants but it takes a transnational social field to shape common perceptions and social positioning. Only when feminists living in Iran began to meet with those in the diaspora in conferences and through academic exchange could the internet aid internal resistance and foster transnational connections. The significance of actual social relations is understood by forces of reaction. The repression of the Iranian state, for

example, is aimed at restricting interaction and the establishment of a social field that includes movement back and forth. While the state censored some blogs and internet sites, it directed most of its ire at people who participated in building a television network or attended women's conferences. The state was as much if not more concerned with people coming together than it was in the electronic communications.

The temporary disruption of social networks in Iran created sharp differences in perceptions between Iranian women who shared a similar class background and political orientation. Today, repressive governments find that it is difficult to impede transnational social fields. Institutions of finance capital, which loan money and set the conditions of trade, insist that various non-government organizations, 'emergency aid' organizations, and missionizing churches have free access to states with which they do business. When states are penetrated in this way, the continuing use of the terms internal and external may obscure more than it illuminates.

Spierenburg, Steenkamp, and Wels's article on the Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area in Southern Africa illustrates the sterility of using the internal/external divide in the analysis of what is often thought of as separate national histories. Salman's article on the recent politics of Bolivia provides another example of the futility of this analytical divide. Both articles highlight the several centuries of cross-border processes that provided the foundation of the contemporary nation-state-building projects of Bolivia and the Southern African states. This history, as well as the importance of imperialist modes of intervention, makes an explanatory framework that invokes an internal/external divide extremely problematic.

The recent history of Bolivia is an excellent case study within which to ask whether concepts of a global/local or internal/external divide provide researchers with an appropriate analytical framework. The Bolivian state and entrepreneurial interests embraced a neo-liberal agenda within a transnational field in which democracy, the free market, and structural adjustment plans of lending institutions were accepted as inextric-

cably linked. US rhetorical and organizational devices such as the drug war or the war on terrorism, designed to legitimate their direct policing of citizens of other states, were deployed by the Bolivian 'political classes' to bolster their power. However, these elites found their domain of political power dramatically attenuated because, as they accepted and used forms of imperial penetration in their own interests, their claims to national sovereignty stood exposed. Moreover, 'the political classes' faced another set of transnational actors: transnational non-governmental organizations that were part of social movements against neo-liberal reforms. These organizations provided international scrutiny, which limited the elite's efforts to react violently and to legitimate the use of state violence. Salman finds himself asking whether there remains the possibility for an authoritative, legitimate voice called national society. He speaks of the enormous difficulty the Bolivian population encounters in recognizing shared interests and shared fates.

In what at first might be seen to be a totally different question than that of Salman, whose article on Bolivia ends with a plaintive call for a unified public interest in a national society that can establish an alternative to neo-liberal capitalism, Marja Spierenburg, Conrad Steenkamp, and Harry Wels ask whether 'local communities' can defend their interests against national agendas supported by a global advocacy for wildlife and environmental conservation. They highlight the marginalization of 'local communities' in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area in Southern Africa. Spierenburg, Steenkamp, and Wels's and Salman's seemingly different questions reveal how neither the term 'local community' or 'national society' adequately conveys the transnational construction of locality.

Spierenburg, Steenkamp, and Wels view global conservation constituencies and Southern African elites as convenient allies in a transnationalism running roughshod over the wishes of an estimated 27,000 affected villagers. However, their description reveals that the members of the affected 'local communities' are not villagers rooted in a specific geographic place but

people who have sought variable coping strategies and identities to survive genocidal wars fueled by trans-border interests. Their locality within the period of the war, as well as today, is an aspect of their need to respond to and struggle against larger and more powerful interests, ones that reflected the Cold War and the US efforts to open the world for free market capitalism. The reality of those 'villagers' since the 1990s reflects the success of the US strategy, which has now made Southern Africa ripe for the development of nature tourism. Moreover, villagers must defend their interests against a global press that defines local survival needs as short-term, backward, and jeopardizing the need to defend the planet and its endangered species. In this new configuration of forces, villagers face new forms of disempowerment and find new allies in non-governmental organizations, which are as transnational as the conservation forces.

By the end of the 1990s, the scholarship on non-government organizations had made it clear that we must look beyond the rhetoric of these organizations and investigate their connections to powerful states and funding institutions. Many non-governmental organizations do the work of powerful states, emerging as the 'left hand' of imperialism, to build on but also extend and rethink Pierre Bourdieu's felicitous metaphor. Bourdieu (2000: 2) pointed out that certain financial institutions, which he termed the 'right hand of the state', serve to restructure state institutions to directly service neo-liberal interests; however, there remains the 'left hand of the state'. The left hand of the state consists of social services that are the trace of social struggles of the past for a just state with redistributive policies.

While Bourdieu was willing to see such state agents as a source of struggle, one could just as well argue that most become at best flack catchers, and more usually agents of pacification who tranquilize or criminalize the millions who suffer from the new state policies and consequent drastic reduction of state services. Similarly, while the right hand of imperialist states, the World Bank, the IMF, and their coterie of international lending institutions directly organize the privatization of public resources or their exploitation for private

profits, a set of institutions provide an ideological cover in the name of protection of the planet, its resources, human rights, democracy, and civil society. It is necessary to be aware of the one-two punch currently being delivered by transnational institutions and the non-governmental organizations that they support through funds and recognition. It is equally important to note that there are alternative social movements critical of neo-liberalism and the fundamental logic of capitalism, rooted in struggles for social justice and economic sustenance for people throughout the world. If the villagers of Southern Africa are to combat the oppressive conditions they face then they must acknowledge that the essentialism of the indigeneity that they deploy can only remain strategic if it reflects and contributes to broader social movements for equity.

How do scholars committed to social justice respond to this world in which private greed claims to speak in the name of the needs of the planet, Christian fundamentalism is defined as a global human right, and the people most willing to respond to the needs of the local homeless are women concerned with a universalist Charismatic Catholicism? Certainly we need to acknowledge that transnational fields and flows can implement imperial agendas, even as they celebrate locality, authenticity, hybridity, nature, difference, and identity. Our challenge as scholars of Transnational Studies is to contribute to emerging social movements that challenge imperialist interests and to strengthen struggles for social justice and economic redistribution, here, there, and everywhere. In their demonstration of the transnational construction of the local and their highlighting of past and present forms of the penetration of transnational power, that I have argued is best understood as imperial, these articles help Transnational Studies toward its next steps.

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conflict and protest” which took place on 19, 20, and 21 December 2004 in Soesterberg, The Netherlands. Organized by members of the departments of Culture, Organization, and Management and of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam (VU), it attracted twenty-four scholars from around the world.

The idea for this conference first emerged in 2002 among a number of members of the research program “Processes of identity formation and shifting alliances in kaleidoscoping societies”, hosted by the departments of Culture, Organization, and Management and of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the VU. These researchers had in common that they wanted to take their cue from the newly emerging theories of transnationalism when looking at local processes that anthropologists typically study, in order to see how transnational networks, exchanges, and flows transform these constructed and experienced ‘localities’.

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Notes

1. The term was first used by Herminio Martins (1974) and then by Anthony Smith (1983) and Ulrich Beck (2002). Andreas Wimmer and I have found it useful in critiquing the development of mainstream social science and Migration and Transnational Studies.
2. For a summary of the initial arguments see Kearney (1995).
3. There were exceptions even in the first wave of Transnational Studies. Rouse (1991) and Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton Blanc (1992) queried these core concepts, although Rouse initially underplayed the continuing significance of the state.
4. See Sheffer (2003) to track the changing definition of the term.
5. Initially, the term glocalization (Robertson 1990) and more recently the term trans-locality have become popular as ways of conceptualizing transborder connections. Often analysts who used these terms neglected the historical role of nation-state building in the construction of locality. They also often lack a theory of state and imperial power.
6. It is important to take note of the role of fundamentalist (born-again) Christianity in constructing transnational social fields. Within these fields, activists portray the United States as the 'savior' nation and call for 'one superpower under God' (Glick Schiller 2005b). These fundamentalist Christians promote not only consent but also active support for US imperialism.

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