Defining Transnationalism

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Abstract

This article offers an introduction to the essays in the theme issue, an overview of the reasons behind the recent resurgence of interest in transnationalist phenomena and a consideration of what the term means. Its places the topic in the different fields of international, world, regional, local and national history. The essay argues that transnationalism is best understood not as fostering bounded networks, but as creating honeycombs, a structure that sustains and gives shapes to the identities of nation-states, international and local institutions, and particular social and geographic spaces. A honeycomb binds, but it also contains hollowed-out spaces where organisations, individuals and ideas can wither away to be replaced by new groups, people and innovations.

The life and career of a minor international celebrity of international relations in the inter-war period, Julius Moritz Bonn, mirrors both the content and the time-span addressed in this theme issue. Bonn's life and work exemplify the way in which the destinies of individuals, institutions and countries are closely interrelated, and draw out the varied, multi-textured forces which shape them.[1] He was a German Jew who was variously, and often simultaneously, employed as an economist, propagandist, government advisor, national government official, agent of the League of Nations, university teacher, Liberal party politician, author and broadcaster in Germany, Britain, Ireland and the United States. His paths crossed with Albert Einstein – their expulsion from Germany, on the same day in April 1933, made headlines around the world – a more famous example of a man whose life traversed a number of boundaries, from unofficial to official work in a variety of capacities and in a number of nation-states. The pattern speaks to a cosmopolitanism of the inter-war period that is more readily associated with the career of the twenty-first century academic, and

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1 Patricia Clavin, 'A "Wandering Scholar" in Britain and the USA, 1933–45: The Life and Work of Moritz Bonn', in Anthony Grenville (ed.), *Refugees from the Third Reich in Britain: The Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies*, Vol. 4 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 27–42.

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it highlights the challenges before us when it comes to defining transnationalism and transnational actors. It speaks to a fluidity of categories – national and ethnic identity, professional attribution, political affiliation and cultural attachments that challenge any attempt to assign Bonn to a particular category. Bonn himself had strong views as to the categories to which he did and did not belong, refusing, for one, to claim his Jewish identity.[2]

Bonn's life is a useful reminder that transnationalism, despite its early identification with the transfer or movement of money and goods, is first and foremost about people: the social space that they inhabit, the networks they form and the ideas they exchange.[3] The influence and character of these networks defy easy categorisation. As Bonn discovered, it was precisely his ability to operate within and without political office, and in a number of countries, that gave him the opportunity to make a contribution:

> As an advisor to the Chancellor I had had little influence: no party and no economic group was backing me. My advice had often been ignored. But when I left the civil service [in 1920] this changed. When the more intelligent bureaucrats no longer saw a rival in me, they became more confidential. Moreover, I was no longer tied down by official secrecy. I could say what I wanted to say, where and when it suited me. The front page of the leading Berlin dailies . . . were at my disposal whenever I desired to air my opinions. I was becoming a favourite with the public. After I had reconciled myself to being a nobody, I suddenly bobbed up as a somebody.[4]

The orientation of this theme issue towards the activities of 'somebodies' is deliberate. The articles address the history of political, economic and financial communities, because this history has tended to be marginalized in the cultural emphasis of much recent writing on transnationalism.[5] More importantly, perhaps, because political, economic and financial communities lie at the heart of both nation-states and international organisations, these studies provide the opportunity to explore the value of the transnationalist approach in relation to what is frequently seen as its opposite, the nation-state. As a result, connections and, equally importantly, cleavages, quickly become apparent, be it between discrete units of policy-making, between those nations that are members of particular transnational and international

2 For a discussion of the international community of financial advisors to which Bonn belonged, see Marc Flandreau, ed., *Money Doctors: History, Theory, Policy. The Experience of International Financial Advising, 1850–2000* (London: Routledge, 2003); for Einstein's place in a wider community, see Gabriele Metzler, *Internationale Wissenschaft und nationale Kultur: deutsche Physiker in der internationalen Community, 1900–1960* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 2000).

3 Saunier has drawn our attention to the fact that transnationalism maybe nothing more than an easy route for historians whose social and cultural backgrounds, personal and professional trajectories, lifestyles and activities develop through border crossings. This recognition should save us from a 'derived historiographical fallacy that we might turn an idiosyncrasy into a scientific paradigm'. See Pierre-Yves Saunier, 'Going Transnational? A First Aid Kit', in Marilyn Lake and Ann Curthoys, eds., *Breaking Down National Borders in Historical Thinking*, forthcoming.

4 M. J. Bonn, *Wandering Scholar* (London: Cohen & West, 1949), 259.

5 This trend appears set to continue. See the list of topics selected by the German H-Net strand on Society and Culture for discussion in 2005 (H-Soz-und-Kult) under the heading 'Transnationale Geschichte', accessed at http: \ geschichte-transnational.clio-online.net.

institutions and those who are not, and between the sorts of issues political transnational communities seek to address and others they do not.[6]

For historians whose primary focus is the role of culture in international relations, or the history of multiculturalism within one country, transnationalist encounters are frequently characterised as 'border crossings'. The notion carries a poetic potency which, to borrow David Thelan's words, suggests a consideration of 'how a particular phenomenon passed *over* the nation as a whole, how it passed *across* the nation, seeing how it bumped over natural and manmade features, or how it passed *through*', transforming and being transformed.[7] 'Border crossings' permits the study of encounters that both attract and repel, between people, institutions and artefacts of all kinds, which are represented and analysed through a host of different types of evidence.[8] But the sheer variety of encounters is dazzling, so dazzling that it is difficult to keep transnationalism in focus. This is not in itself necessarily a bad thing, but the notion of 'border crossing' does suggests a horizontal movement through frontiers, be they of a nation or a differently defined social culture. The expression also carries with it the implication that, through these crossings, borders break down. But, when studied from a certain perspective, that of the behaviour of transnational communities of merchants or criminals, it is also apparent that particular groups exploit and work to sustain national boundaries because they profit from their honed ability to cross them. Aida Hozic's thought-provoking paper presented to the conference 'Transnationalism in the Balkans', reviewed in this issue by Denisa Kostovicova and Natalija Basic, demonstrated how the merchants of nineteenth-century south-eastern Europe, exploiting the twin frontiers of the Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman Empire, generated lucrative opportunities for legal and illegal trade. Their control over the geographic space and the strong ethnic familial ties enabled trade to flourish for those who understood cultural difference and trade opportunities. It is fascinating to reflect on parallels of this experience that have resurfaced in and

6 David Held and Anthony McGrew, *The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the Globalization Debate, 2nd edn* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2003), 39–41.

7 Thelan, 'The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History', *Journal of American History*, 86, 3 (1999), 968.

8 Callaghy, Kassimir and Latham offer the following typology of border crossings in modern African history: (i) networks reaching around the world (production ties etc.); (ii) international arenas of discourse (human rights, development); (iii) systems of rule (sometimes violent and exploitative) over enclaves of territory involving state and private militias; (iv) direct intervention by external military. They argue that some transboundary formations are instances of 'intervention', while others are perceived to be the natural outgrowths of regular socio-economic and political interaction. See Thomas Callaghy, Ronald Kassimir and Robert Latham, eds., *Intervention and Transnationalism in Africa: Global–Local Networks of Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 7–9. Recent studies also argue that the scholars engaged in this research must develop a greater sensitivity to their own border crossings when conducting research, paying attention to how they were trained, their language and the positions that create embedded categories in their work – a kind of reflexive inter- or multi-disciplinarity. See Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, 'Vergleich, Transfer, Verflechtung. Der Ansatz der *histoire croisée* und die Herausforderung des Transnationalen', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 28, 4, (2002), 607–36, or 'Penser l'histoire croisée: entre empirie et réflexivité', *Annales. Historie, sciences sociales*, 58, 1, 7–36.

around the town of Novi Pazar in the area (*sandjak*) of Sandzak that straddles the border between Serbia and Montenegro that was once the *sandjak* of Novibazar.

This theme issue challenges a tendency in the literature to date to present transnationalist encounters as consistently progressive and co-operative in character.[9] Pioneering work in charting the development and character of these 'networks' – a feature implied in the word 'network' itself – can result in a teleological history of globalisation in which modern societies grow increasingly enmeshed.[10] The story of repulsion, rather than attraction, is so far an underplayed aspect of the history of transnational networks, which feature here in the essays by Holger Nehring, Andrew Webster, Martin Horn and Alexander De Grand.

Transnationalism and institutions

It is perhaps because cultural historians approach the notion of 'power' differently from their international counterparts that there is a tendency to conflate, or a reluctance to distinguish effectively between, trans-, inter- and supranational relations.[11] But it is important to differentiate carefully between these different elements if we are properly to understand the development of the international architecture of the modern world. There has been criticism in some quarters that recent transnationalist studies have become too absorbed in studying international organisations, particularly non-governmental organisations. But the fact is that these institutions hitherto have been subject to little study by historians, and archival research has drawn out their complex relationship to national and supranational power with a subtlety and depth that has eluded the writing of some international political scientists on the subject. Not only are historians obviously less present-minded in their preoccupations, but empirical research is helping to answer the question which has dogged attempts to assess the role of international organisations in the modern world – how do international organisations actually work?[12] The answer to this question is not just important for historians, but also for international relations scholars who theorise about the role and efficacy of international institutions in an effort to influence international policy of the future. This new writing on the history of non-governmental and international governmental organisations should

9 See Kiran Klaus Patel, 'Überlegungen zu einer transnationalen Geschichte', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft,* 52, 7 (2004), 628–630, 632.

10 Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997) underlined how far US internationalism in the inter-war period survived into the post-war years, but is also rather teleological in tone.

11 Pierre-Yves Saunier offers some good reasons why such an exercise should be resisted: see his 'Circulations, connexions et espaces transnationaux', *Genèses*, 57 (2004), 110–26. The essay also offers a very helpful overview of recent writings on cultural and social 'transnational phenomena'.

12 Barbara Koremenos, Charles Lipson and Duncan Snidal, 'The Rational Design of International Institutions', *International Organization*, 55, 4 (autumn 2001), 761. This is a point also made by Susan Strange in 'Why do International Organizations Never Die?', in Bob Reinalda and Bertjan Verbeek, eds., *Autonomous Policy Making by International Organizations* (London: Routledge, 1998), 214–16. For an overview of the theoretical literature see Lisa Martin and Beth Simmons, 'Theories and Empirical Studies of International Relations', *International Organization*, 52, 4 (1998), 729–57.

also inform and reshape the long-running argument between those who present international organisations as autonomous actors in world politics, and those who regard these institutions primarily as instruments of nation-states which comprise, at best, an epiphenomena of nation-states' international relations.[13]

The focus on international organisations in a number of essays can be explained by the original understanding of 'transnationalism', best articulated in the still important study by Nye and Keohane, who used the term to describe 'contracts, coalitions and interactions across state boundaries' that were not directly controlled by the central policy organs of government.[14] In all cases, at least one of the members of a transnational relationship represents a non-governmental organisation in an encounter that spans three or more countries. It is worth noting that this definition means that at least one of the actors can be a governmental agency. The articles by Andrew Webster and Patricia Clavin and Jens-Wilhem Wessels, focusing on, respectively, communities of disarmament and economic advisors generated by the League of Nations, draw out the danger of over-simplifying the place of such organisations in international relations, and of underestimating their contribution to intra-European relations. There can be a tendency to label any given governmental or non-governmental institution as a particular pillar within the architecture of international relations, be it inter-, supra- or transnational. Accounts of international and regional organisations take great pains to show how distinct institutions operate on a particular level: the development of a single trading area under the auspices of the European Economic Community falls under the heading 'international' (i.e. inter-governmental relations); the European Court of Justice is designated a 'supranational' institution, while the European Union's educational programmes come under the heading of 'transnationalist' initiatives. But the articles on the history of the League of Nations' economic and disarmament work demonstrate the problems of regarding international and non-governmental organisations as closed categories. The ease with which individuals moved from representing governments to international organisations to non-governmental organisations poses one particular challenge. More importantly, as Clavin and Wessels show, within even one distinct branch of the League's operations, the practices of internationalism, transnationalism and multinationalism coexisted. At every level of its operations in disarmament, economics, finance and welfare, the League was formally inter-governmental in control, highly multinational in the range of personnel it employed and, as these

13 Michael N. Barnett and Martha Finnemore, 'The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations', *International Organization*, 53, 4 (autumn 1999), 699–732; Clive Archer, *International Organizations*, 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 2003), 68–73; Bertjan Verbeek, 'International Organizations: The Ugly Duckling of International Relations Theory?', in Reinalda and Verbeek, *Autonomous Policy Making,* 16; see also their new edited collection, *Decision Making within International Organisations* (London: Routledge, 2004).

14 Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, eds., *Transnational Relations and World Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), xi. Indeed, Samuel Huntington went so far as to contend that all Transnational Organisations are controlled by the nation-state. Samuel P. Huntingdon, *Transnational Organizations in World Politics*, *World Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Apr. 1973) 361.

paper demonstrates, both *inter*-national and transnational in its operations.[15] The distinctions between inter-, trans- and multi-nationalism and multiculturalism are important when it comes to the appreciation of organisations like the League of Nations and their work and efficacy as international organisations.

These authors demonstrate that the key to explaining the means by which the ideas of specialists came to be accepted by decision-makers lies in the dynamic relationship between intergovernmental and transnational operations. In this respect, the study of transnationalism enables us to connect directly developments in the international system, notably the rise and dissemination of a huge variety of 'technical' expertise outside the direct control of national government, to the development of international relations.[16] The two articles on the League also draw out how difficult it is to generalise about the relationship between the role of transnational and inter-governmental connections within a single institution for, while the League's economic activity drew in a very large number of advisors who did not directly represent national governments, the issue of disarmament was kept very tightly under state control. National security was at issue, and armaments, unlike money or goods, were kept closely monitored by nation-states; without an international police force or an extensive 'independent' academic community working on the problems of international peace, the League had no non-national 'experts' on armaments from which to draw counsel. Nonetheless, as Webster demonstrates, within the meeting rooms of the League, some national representatives, such as the indomitable Briton Lord Cecil, searched for more creative solutions to the disarmament dilemma and refused simply to parrot his government's line.

Taken together, the articles in this volume suggest that institutions do matter. Clavin, Wessels and Webster are not alone in finding that the structure and culture of an organisation provides an imperative and momentum for change. The finding reflects recent work on institutional economics, which emphasises that the success of particular industrial districts is more dependent on the governance structures set up to help businesses to work together than on any invisible mechanism of co-operation based on social characteristics.[17] This conclusion is echoed in studies of 'globalisation' which have informed and encouraged the study of transnationalism. Those who argue that during the course of the twentieth century culture has become increasingly global (the advocates of the 'world-polity' approach), also contend that this enveloping frame is generated and operated via a 'top down', rather than bottom up, approach.[18]

15 Huntington, 'Transnational Organizations', 334–5.

16 Evangelista's work draws out the central role played by transnational actors in encouraging agreements on arms during the cold war and, crucially from the perspective of this theme issue, that European peace advocates frequently had a greater impact on Soviet policies than on US ones. See Matthew Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

17 See, e.g., Francesca Carnevali, '"Crooks, Thieves and Receivers": Transaction Costs in 19th-century Industrial Birmingham', *Economic History* Review, 57, 3, 533–50.

18 John Boli and George M. Thomas, eds., *Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organisations since 1875* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).5.

Considering epistemic communities

A number of essays in this volume also raise questions about the cohesion of expert communities. Why is it that some networks 'hang together' when others fall apart, and how far can the values which these communities share be transplanted into or replicated in more anonymous mass societies? These questions are especially pertinent because a number of authors in this volume, in common with a large number of other students of transnationalism, have been influenced by Peter Haas's seminal definition that an epistemic community is a distinctive one. Its members by definition share an episteme with one another that they do not necessarily share with other groups or individuals.[19] The choice of the word 'community' in the title of this issue, as opposed to 'network' or 'class', is deliberate.[20] It is taken here as something different from the ethnically defined transnational societies that were the focus of the wide-ranging Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) project on diasporic communities.[21] The term suggests both a community of interest, a commonality of character, as well as a group of individuals sharing the same locality or organisation. It speaks to a multiplicity of attachments and a period of time spent by individuals in association with others. I did consider substituting the word 'elites' for 'communities', as this is mostly what the essays are concerned with, but decided to stick with 'community' because it carries an implication of inclusion rather than that of exclusion conveyed by the word 'elite'. The 'elite' groups of businessmen, economists and military men, and the leaders of peace protests and political parties considered here did connect to wider groups – employees, students, soldiers and voters. Transnationalism is about exploring connections (whether they attract or repel), and using the word 'elite' in this context could carry the implication that one group of national and international society is separated from its wider membership. This may be the case, but designating these groups as 'elite' seems to close off the issue from further consideration when it is more useful to open up questions regarding the use of the word 'community' in transnational studies.

The timescale addressed by the volume is also significant. Whatever the League's claim to addressing the immediate challenges before the world, its greater contribution perhaps lay in generating epistemic communities that developed a

19 Such a community shares four common features: a shared set of normative and principled beliefs, which provide a value-based rationale for the social action of community members; shared casual beliefs; shared notions of validity; and common policy enterprise. Haas also noted that the process by which the ideas of specialists are accepted and acted upon by decision makers is poorly specified. See Peter Haas, 'Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Co-ordination', *International Organization*, 46, I(winter 1992), 27 and 33.

20 For a thought-provoking analysis of transnational and business communities operating as a transnational class, see Kees van der Pijl, *Transnational Classes and International Relations* (London: Routledge, 1998), 31–63.

21 The relationship between the title of this volume and that of the ESRC project on Transnational Communities is accidental; however, the work of this large-scale project is relevant to all concerned with transnationalism and migration. See its website http://transcomm.ox.ac.uk. For an example of its published outcomes see Paul Kennedy and Victor Roudometof, eds., *Communities Across Borders. New Immigrants and Transnational Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2002).

particular expertise and worldview, as in the case of disarmament and of economics and finance. It helped to formulate a common policy enterprise which shaped the reconstruction of Europe after the Second World War. Indeed, freed from the established periodisation that all too frequently shapes national historiographies and the history of European diplomatic relations in the twentieth century, transnational history allows us to consider the processes by which change is facilitated on a different timescale. This is reflected in the deliberate decision of this theme issue to address the middle of the twentieth century in European history.

Technical expertise obviously plays a central role in creating and defining knowledge-based networks. The focus of this and a number of other essays is to understand the process by which these networks are generated and their expertise disseminated. It is also interesting to consider why the advice of some epistemic communities is heeded and others ignored, and why exposure to new ideas and cultures can result in positions becoming more entrenched rather than enriched.[22] De Grand's article on the experience of Italian socialists in exile in France demonstrates an individual's resistance to change as new barriers are erected in place of old ones. His piece demonstrates the value of drawing on exile studies in considering how far transnational encounters break down borders. A number of articles also draw out some of the ways in which the history of Europe after 1945 was shaped by the inter-war and the war years. The history of Europe after the Second World War, particularly its international history, is all too often presented as if the world began in 1945. International and regional co-operation is described as failing in the 1930s, a failure that led to economic depression and to world war but as having succeeded, albeit in the fractured world of the cold war, in the years after 1945. Marked by conflict of all kinds, however, the years from 1920 to 1970 serve as testimony to the increasing uniformity between countries' goals and their cultural prescriptions. The challenge for the international world order in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is that societies are much more likely to struggle and to compete with one another than in earlier periods when they had different goals and relied on different resources. Accord and discord must be understood together, not least because to understand co-operation it is necessary to appreciate its opposite. Co-operation is best understood in a historical context.[23] Frequently the roots of agreement lie in an earlier history of disagreement.[24] This theme issue seeks to underline some of the ways in which inter- and extra-European relations were shaped profoundly by the personal connections and the ideas forged in the two-fold crises of economic

22 The work of political scientists to date has demonstrated that the domestic structure of the nation-state is central to determining the degree to which a transnational community can make an impact on policy. See Thomas Risse-Kappen, 'Ideas Do Not Float Freely: Transnational Coalitions, Domestic Structures and the End of the Cold War', *International Organization* 48, 2, 1994, 185–214.

23 By contrast, the classic prisoner's dilemma of international relations theory presents negotiated agreement versus no agreement as clear alternatives.

24 James K. Sebenius, 'Challenging Conventional Explanations of International Cooperation. Negotiation Analysis and the Case of Epistemic Communities, in Peter M. Haas, ed., *Knowledge, Power, and International Policy Coordination* (Columbia, Sc: South Carolina University Press, 1997), 323–66.

depression and world war that characterised the inter-war period. Part of the intention is to challenge the typical characterisation of inter-war Europe as a period when the forces of nationalism drowned out those of internationalism. The 1920s and 1930s, for example, witnessed an extension of economic, financial, business and political connections that survived beyond the Second World War.

The year 1970, the end point of the theme issue, is seen to mark the start of a decade in which transnationalism entered a new phase. The number of non-governmental organisations increased substantially. New global movements also emerged: concern over the environment, a preoccupation with human rights and the breakthrough of the strategic arms limitation agreements (SALT) in the field of international disarmament in 1972, the same year in which international terrorism gained a new prominence at the Munich Olympic Games. Iriye, among others, has argued that the world suddenly became aware that transnational forces were infringing an international system that hitherto seemed defined by nation-states. Some historians, however, have asked whether a breakthrough in European transnational connections came earlier, notably with the rise of the welfare state in the 1950s.[25] Certainly, from a European perspective, it is also possible to see by 1970 the decline of some transnational networks in favour of others, notably the end of European empires and the switch from extra-European migration to inter-European migration, a change partly fostered by the rise of the European Economic Community.

The nation and transnationalism

While arguing that it is important to consider the nation in transnationalism, these essays also demonstrate how far transnationalism enables history to break free from the nationally determined timescales that dominate the historiographical landscape. Not only does this afford the opportunity to address a different, and frequently larger, chronological range, it also provides the opportunity to compare the development of concepts or expertise by more than a direct, often asymmetrical, comparison between nation-states. The articles in this special issue do not just open up the question of how the work of 'eggheads' or 'policy wonks,' as experts are sometimes affectionately described, connects to the work of government and to the broader public. They also explore how eggheads representing different national cultures and traditions relate to one another.[26]

25 A. Iriye, 'Transnational History', *Contemporary European History*, 13, 2 (2004), 219; Bruce Mazlish, 'An Introduction to Global History', in Bruce Mazlish and Ralph Buultjens, eds., *Conceptualizing Global History* (Boulder, Co: West View), 1–24; Pierre-Yves Saunier, 'Taking Up the Bet on Connections: a Municipal Contribution', *Contemporary European History*, 11, 4, (Nov. 2002), 519. See also Boli and Thomas, *Constucting World Culture*.

26 A theoretical framework for the evolution of policy engendered by epistemic communities is offered by Haas: policy innovation, diffusion, selection and persistence. Haas, 'Conclusion: epistemic communities, world order, and the creation of a reflective research program', in *idem, Knowledge, Power*, 376–87. Ikenberry advances a series of propositions, historical and theoretical, that explain how and why experts are able to forge innovative national and international policies: the experts identified a set of normative and technical positions that were embraced by their leaders; these views were a 'sensible' and 'progressive' distillation of contemporary thought anchored in a common professional

The essays also highlight that more work remains to be done on the way in which we label multiple national identities in transnationalism. For a start, organisations, particularly economic or financial ones, are usually rendered 'multinational', whereas societies or communities are now described as 'multicultural'. There are important differences between the two terms that require our attention. Multinationalism and multiculturalism surface in all the articles in this collection. When it comes to appraising the work of institutions which claim to be 'multinational', one concern is to ask how far personnel are able to adopt positions independent from those of their originating nation-state. How far do regional or local identities, as opposed to national ones, intersect with individuals' national identity when they work for an international institution? Is there anything more to this absorption than, as scholars of international relations would have it, a preoccupation with expanding his or her section's resources for the ultimate advantage of their nation-state? How far can we identify men and women who are dedicated to strengthening the international institution and to shaping international policy above or beyond the call of their nation?[27] International banking provides a clear example of this issue. The essay by Martin Horn explores the continued importance of multinational banks to the financial and diplomatic history of the inter-war economy. J.P. Morgan and Co. was a multinational company comprising J.P. Morgan & Co. in New York, Drexel & Co. in Philadelphia, Morgan Grenfell in London, Morgan & Cie in Paris and agency representation in Italy. Beyond this formal multinational structure, the bank sustained and remodelled its relationship to a transnational community of European financiers, businessmen and government officials that, taken together, offered unparalleled expertise in European finance. This was a transnational community that, while working across borders, at the same time profited from the existence of national frontiers. Financial gain lay precisely in exploiting different national circumstances.

This theme issue does not rigorously enforce the numerical bar that studies of transnationalism should be concerned with three or more countries.[28] This is partly because many of the essays published on transnationalism in the last ten years describe bilateral phenomena, but, more importantly, reflects that while a particular transnationalist community may be located primarily in two countries, the bilateral communities examined invariably form part of wider phenomena. This is illustrated in Holger Nehring's fascinating account of British and West

organisation; policy specialists came to form a loose 'alliance'; ideas of experts created conditions for policy coalitions within government; this was supported by a long-term evolution of mainstream public views; and larger structural and historical settings created a particular 'balance of power' that favoured agreement. See G. John Ikenberry, 'A World Economy Restored: Expert Consensus and the Anglo-American Postwar Settlement', *International Organization*, 46, 1 (1992), 291–3. For a treatment of the changing power base and its impact on interest groups see also Inderjeet Parmar, *Special Interests, the State and the Anglo-American Alliance, 1939–1945* (London: Frank Cass, 1995).

27 Verbeek, 'International Organizations', 22; Archer, *International Organizations*, 71–2. The first studies offered a forceful realist critique. See, e.g., Hadewych Hazelzet, 'The Decision-Making Approach to International Organizations. Cox and Jacobson's anatomic lesson revisited', in Reinalda and Verbeek, *Autonomous Policy Making by International Organizations*, 27–41.

28 Huntington, 'Transnational Organisations in World Politics', 336.

German anti-nuclear protests of the 1950s and 1960s, the strongest anti-nuclear protest movements in Europe, each of which sought to present itself as a united movement fighting the shared, global scourge of nuclear weapons. The movement's careful choice of a rhetoric of social and political unity was an intensely political act and demonstrates the need for historians to question whether, just because a movement claims solidarity with other apparently like organisations with an explicit international goal, commonality is achieved. As Nehring shows, the public face of Anglo-German co-operation and unity was far from the private reality. His essay draws out the national and international limits to claims that the organisations had forged a transnational milieu of protesters and habits of protesting. Here transnational connections play a central role in shaping both national and transnational history.

The impact of national and international politics is also highlighted by Conan Fischer's essay on the connections forged between German and French industry, a further example of how a bilateral transnational movement sought to locate itself in a broader political and economic network. The article raises the important issue of space. In the same way that certain social areas facilitate transnational exchange (the field of technical or academic expertise, for example), so, too, does particular geographic space. The Franco-German borderlands, with their rich multicultural identity, are not just areas rich, as Fischer shows, in transnational connections. They also serve as sites, both real and symbolic, where nationalism is defined. It begs the question what areas of Europe other than Alsace and Lorraine might be designated to be of special transnational interest.

This subject in turn touches on one of the central paradoxes of transnationalist studies: that transnational ties can dissolve some national barriers while simultaneously strengthening or creating others. In the same way that Alan Milward identified European integration as a force which rescued the nation-state, transnational communities more generally can be conceived as strengthening rather than weakening the power of states and the influence of particular interest groups within them.[29] Indeed, the existence of one not only implies but requires the existence of the other. The dissemination of expertise and assistance through transnational networks, notably those preoccupied with generating economic stability and development, were driven and sustained by the resolve to build viable and strong nations, within and beyond Europe. In the years after 1945, this determination was given new force by the cold war and what was seen as the dangerous global scourge of communism or US-dominated capitalism, depending on which side of the Iron Curtain one stood. In some senses, therefore, transnationalist forces can work against globalisation.[30]

29 Alan Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State,* 2nd edn, (London: Routledge, 2000). Haas, by contrast, argues that there are 'artificial boundaries' between international and domestic politics; see Haas, 'Conclusion: epistemic communities, world order, and the creation of a reflective research program', in idem, *Knowledge, Power*, 367.

30 This is an especially sensitive topic among economists and historians of the developing world. It is argued by many that the pressures to establish institutions and pursue economic policies favoured by the developed world, and the global institutions which it dominates, may harm, rather than help, the developing world. See Ha-Joon Chang, *Kicking Away the Ladder – Development Strategy in Historical*

Unpicking the great variety of transnational threads that weave nations together, or keep them apart, helps to draw out the nation as a 'bounded historical entity imbricated in structures and processes that connect' it to regions and potentially every part of the world.[31] This is a comparatively new recognition for social and cultural historians, but economic historians have long been aware that the modern political economy does not always recognise the same borders as those of the nation-state. On the whole historians have been slow to take up the methodology of the 'historical political economy' for an understanding of the varied connections between international, regional and national policy, despite the potential this approach offers to consider the connections that it identifies from the level of the very small, local producer, through and across the frontiers of the nation-state, to international institutions and movements.[32] At the same time studies of the political economy tend to be dominated by a determination to judge economic efficacy. Efficacy becomes a judgement based on efficiency (the capacity of an economic system to produce, to maximise output and to satisfy demands). As Fischer, Horn, and Clavin and Wessels remind us, economics can reshape societies at the most local level. But it is important to judge the impact of transnational economic networks on more than the efficacy of the economics, for as notions of efficacy shift, these judgements become suspect. After all, economic efficacy itself is a construct. These studies also highlight the battle that historians continue to face when it comes to tracing the material impact of ideas on policy. More than fifty years on debate still rages, for example, about the importance of Keynesian-style economics or the ideas of the *Soziale Markwirtschaft* in fuelling the economic miracles of post-war Europe.

The international political economy also emphases the importance of regional connections, be they forged within a particular trading bloc, empire or other social or political grouping. The contribution of transnationalism to the rise of regional organisations and identities in the twentieth century is a little-studied phenomenon at present. This is astonishing, given the importance of regional identities and organizations in modern history and that it is so easy to demonstrate the limits of transnationalist communities when they are harnessed to prove the emergence of a common world culture. It is hoped this theme issue will be a modest contribution to what is likely to be the considerable growth of transnational regional studies in future years.

Perspective (London: Anthem Press, 2002). One of the questions addressed in recent migration history is why, as clusters of immigrants become more strongly established in nation-states, they more assiduously seek to cultivate the literature and culture traditions of their homelands. See Veit Bader, 'The Cultural Conditions of Transnational Citizenship', *Political Theory*, 25, 6 (Dec. 1977), 771–813.

31 Thomas Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002, 11.

32 Charles Maier, *In Search of Stability. Explorations in Historical Political Economy* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 1–27; Susan Strange, *States and Markets. An Introduction to the International Political Economy* (London: Pinter, 1988).

Towards a definition?

It may seem rather odd that it is only in the final part of an article entitled 'Defining Transnationalism' that I will attempt to offer a definition, but the intention of this theme issue is to explore the phenomenon, and during the course of the introduction some elements of a definition have already appeared. Definitions should offer clarity and precision, and a clearer definition of 'transnationalism' will help in our understanding of the evolution of the modern world. At the same time I have also sought to avoid providing the contributing authors with a definition of transnationalism that threatened to become an intellectual straitjacket, limiting their avenues of enquiry, and have not insisted that the word has a fixed or essential meaning that should be defended against a tide of cultural change or scientific progress. Indeed, some students of transnationalism argue that to offer such a definition is contrary to the character of the phenomenon, although this can leave newcomers to transnationalism wondering what it is, and whether there is anything distinctive about it.

There is a certainly a degree of woolliness in the current usage of transnationalism. The term's relationship to the nation-state is particularly problematic. It was first coined with reference to relations between nation-states and national groupings that did not automatically fall under the heading of traditional military encounters. Patel offers a useful summary of the etymology of 'transnationalism', which first surfaced as a term in a discussion of migration and identity in the United States in 1919, locating its use in a conscious effort to 'internationalise' American politics within the framework of the wider world. (His consideration of the self-conscious use of 'transnationalism' by writers in the 'Age of Normalcy' is echoed by Nehring's work on the global rhetoric of peace movements.) During subsequent decades, in books on Anglo-American economic relations in the inter-war period, and in the study of law in the 1950s, the still unfamiliar word was primarily employed to 'extending or having interests extending beyond national bounds or frontiers'. 'Transnationalism', therefore, took life inside nation-states and seemed to be used primarily as an alternative term for inter-state relations, or was adopted by multinational corporations that wanted to rebrand themselves as transnational corporations during the 1980s because 'multinational' had become a dirty word, associated with greed and inequality.[33]

A significant change came in the 1970s when 'transnationalism' first became an important topic of study in the social sciences, and it was recognised then, although it occasionally has been forgotten since, that the subject (if not the word), had an historical and theoretical pedigree that stretched back more than a century. Writing in 1976, Susan Strange noted that while the word 'transnationalism' was new, 'many of the notions put forward in the last few years by those interested in it are really only

33 Patel, 'Überlegungen'. Patel's four distinct meanings of the term are not entirely convincing. Rather he offers one meaning, but four distinct areas where the term has surfaced during the course of the twentieth century. See also *Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd edn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.) The rebranding of multinational into transnational corporations is confirmed in Hubert Bonin, ed., *Transnational Companies. 19th and 20th centuries* (Paris: Plage, 2002).

rediscoveries of truths very apparent to an older generation of writers in international history and international relations'.[34] It was in this decade that Nye and Keohane published their pioneering work, and the definition that a transnational relationship is one where at least one of the partners is a non-national actor is very useful.[35] But their view that a transnational relationship should embrace more than three states is better modified to allow the consideration of historical incidence of bilateral phenomena that offer some claim to universalism – capitalism, socialism and world peace for example.

Confusingly, since the 1980s, however, 'transnationalism' has become associated with the world of historians seeking to break free from dominant national paradigms. World historians, in particular, took 'transnationalism' in new directions.[36] Charting Uncle Sam's long and varied reach into other areas of the world was a particular growth industry in this transnational history writing, a phenomenon which tells us as much about the United States' preoccupation with itself as it does about transnationalism.[37] This theme issue, however, seeks to resist the pulling power of the United States, or at least to place it in the broader perspective of its relationship to other elements.

As the list of publications concerned with 'transnational' history has lengthened in recent years, so, too, has the definition of the term widened in ways that are not entirely helpful. At the same time, the boundaries of what is understood by 'trans-', 'multi-' and 'international' have become increasingly blurred. Transnationalism is in danger of becoming a catch-all concept, with almost as many meanings as there are instances of it. It is important that we begin to show a renewed sensitivity to definitions that clarify rather than obscure distinctions between the adjectives 'transnational', 'international' and 'multinational' in order to determine the connections between them, and the means by which they give structure to, and reshape, historical analysis of relations between and within European nations, and between Europe and the wider world. The absence of a clear definition has left transnationalism threatening to burst its banks and wash away the particular meaning it once had in our understanding of the architecture of the modern world.[38]

34 Susan Strange, 'Transnational Relations', *International Affairs*, 52, 3, (July 1976) 334.

35 Keohane and Nye, *Transnational Relations and World Politics*, xi.

36 For an overview of writing in cultural history, see Paul Giles, 'Virtual Americas: The Internationalization of American Studies and the Ideology of Exchange', *American Quarterly*, 50, 3, 523–47. While no one would now seriously argue, as Huntington did, that transnationalism in the twentieth century is predominately a US phenomenon, the links between the United States and the wider world have become among the most documented and traversed by historians. Samuel Huntington, 'Transnational Organizations in World Politics, *World Politics*, 25, 3 (April 1973), 342.

37 David Thelan, ed., 'The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History', *The Journal of American History*, 86, 3 (special issue), 1997; Bender, *Rethinking American History*; Michael J. Hogan, 'The "Next Big Thing": The Future of Diplomatic History in a Global Age', *Diplomatic History*, 28, 1 (Jan. 2004), 1–22.

38 While globalisation as a concept has its limitations, it is worth nothing that for most historians, globalisation and transnationalism travel hand in hand. Thomas Zeiler, however, defines globalisation as the organisation of production that seeks to maximise profit and that is financed by an increasingly unregulated system of exchanges in money, credit and equities. While he sees this an essential precursor

To bring 'transnationalism' back into focus it is helpful to relate it to its siblings – 'international relations', 'world history' and 'global history' – for it is in these fields of study that the term surfaces most consistently. 'International relations' remains the expression which is most widely and properly understood. It is conventionally taken to mean relations between states that, at least until the nineteenth century, were seen primarily to have encountered one another through the actions of their diplomats or military forces. The history of European international relations was thereby typified by the struggle for power, whether as an end, or the necessary means to an end. This field is represented by diplomatic history. But this state-centric view of early work in international relations and diplomatic history was never entirely adopted by, among others, economic historians whose work contributed to our understanding of the contingent, but usually underplayed, element of international history: the international environment. It has long been recognised that national policies, and therefore the character of inter-state relations both within Europe and beyond its frontiers, have been strongly influenced by a variety of forces, notably, advances in economic ideas and the role of geography, science and technology. This perspective is represented in the field of international history which seeks to privilege, or at least consider at length, the international environment over the inherently national character of diplomatic history. (Although diplomatic history, too, is profoundly shaped by power relations, it often takes the structures which shape the questions of international history as a given.)

Both diplomatic and international history have been characterised, sometimes unfairly, as adding little to our understanding of the varied connections between nation-states by focusing too much on questions of war and peace.[39] But both fields do more than represent the international history of nation-states as marbles bashing against one another in a bag. Take, for example, David Stevenson's work on the role of armaments production and military expertise in the coming of the First World War.[40] Here diplomatic, international, economic and cultural history are woven together in a persuasive and coherent whole.

The dynamic new field of world history stands somewhat apart from international history, for, while it has done much to shape our understanding of the interrelationship between local and regional developments and the wider context of the history of the world, it is not easy to establish connections between world history and national history because, by definition, nation-states do not play an important role in world history. World history draws on a variety of theoretical approaches – postmodernism, post-colonialism and world systems theory to name but a few. In theoretical terms, world historians are united in their rejection of an uncritical understanding of the nation as the basic unit of historical analysis, although they do not reject outright any

to transnationalism, it is hard to see how networks of international finance and exchange can develop without human agency organised in transnational communities. See Thomas W. Zeiler, 'Just Do It! Globalization for Diplomatic Historians', *Diplomatic History*, 25, 4, 529–52.

39 Patel, 'Überlegungen', 633.

40 David Stevenson, *Armaments and the Coming of War. Europe 1904–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1996).

engagement with the nation-state. Rather, they argue that world history should be seen as distinct from, though complementary to, national history for historiographical reasons.[41] World historians are keen to draw out transnational elements such as trading networks, international investment, immigration, slavery, disease and health care, rightly arguing that these developments are of interest in their own right as global historical developments. While they recognise that these trends are important components of national histories, the nation rarely appears as a category of analysis in world history. Rather the term 'transnational networks' in world history refers to ties and networks that appear to float free from the nation-state, the globe sewn together in a new patchwork design.

It is worth remembering that world history is not quite the same as global history, however. The focus of world history, and the scale on which it operates, are generally very different. Global historians are primarily interested to weave the history of humans and the planet on which they live into a single story. Global history, as *Maps of Time. An Introduction to Big History* impressively illustrates, engages with forces whose impact and geographic space cannot be easily related to what seems from the global history perspective to be the narrow geographic and chronological focus of national, international and world history.[42]

The challenge before historians interested in transnational phenomena, therefore, is whether, and how, to engage with the nation-state. The essays in this volume demonstrate that when it comes to economic, financial and political phenomena in European history the nation should not be ignored. Indeed, the work of cultural historians, who have opened up new space in international and regional history – by identifying creative, new routes by which various communities housed within and between national boundaries, encountered one another – demonstrates how difficult it is to abandon the nation-state. The essays in this theme issue demonstrate that transnationalism, which offers more a new 'research perspective' than a revolutionary methodology, has the potential to open new approaches to the writing of contemporary European history.[43]

Cultural history and transnationalism

The merits of a cultural approach to transnationalism were illustrated by Pierre-Yves Saunier's edited collection entitled 'Municipal Connections: Co-operation, Links and Transfers among European cities in the Twentieth Century'. These essays sought to draw out a 'series of linkages – formal and informal, permanent or ephemeral' which

41 These historiographical problems include the role of national history writing in nation building, for example. For an interactive discussion of the topic see http://pages.britishlibrary.net/world.history/what is world history.htm.

42 David Christian, *Maps of Time. An Introduction to Big History* (London: University of California Press, 2004).

43 The Royal Institute of International Affairs research programme was strangely preoccupied with finding an appropriate methodology with which to evaluate the phenomena. Its research project 'Transnational Relations as a factor in international affairs' began in 1973. Its findings were published in a special issue of *International Affairs*, 52, 3 (July 1976).

bound together municipalities that were far apart, be it by geographic distance within the same country or across national frontiers. The term 'municipal' was also broadly defined. It was not only taken to mean municipalities but also to denote 'municipal' as a field of research that embraced the populations, policies and administrative methods to be found in municipalities. For Saunier and his contributors, transnationalism provided the opportunity not just to draw out the character and variety of these connections, but also 'to discuss definitions or to compare concepts without simply comparing nations'. In practice, however, these authors found it difficult to extract the nation from the account of these transnational networks.[44] Whether compared or connected, the elements of this historical analysis still came in national-shaped bottles, the colour of the glass needing to be taken into account when viewing the contents.

Unlike history writing on the impact of technological or economic changes that have often been taken to form the environment in which inter-state relations take place, culture is seen by many now to lie at the heart of the development of the modern world. Technical progress, bureaucratisation, capitalism and the relationship between states and markets are recognised as 'embedded cultural models' that specify the 'nature of things' and the 'purposes of action'.[45] This approach facilitates an increased sensitivity to how the history of international relations shapes, and is shaped by, all members of society. Local history becomes global history or, as the new buzzword would have it, 'glo-cal' history. The individuals and organisations engaged in international relations cannot but reflect the culture of their nation-state, region or local community. These encounters tend to be seen as a reflection of domestic social conditions and ideologies, and foreign policy described as a cultural product of the country under examination.[46] Here cultural conceptions do more than orient action; they also constitute actors.

Cultural historians have sought to use this recognition to, in their term, 'de-centre' the focus of attention away from governments and diplomacy towards society and culture as autonomous spheres of historical interest. They, like the contributors to 'Municipal Connections', lay a particular emphasis on space. This is not just an obvious concern with urban space, but more importantly, as the essays in this issue draw out, the value of social relations and social space, in theory a very different

44 Saunier, 'Taking Up the Bet on Connections. 512–14.

45 Boli and Thomas, *Constructing World Culture,* 16–17.

46 Ron Robin's *Enclaves of America: The Rhetoric of American Political Architecture Abroad, 1900–1965* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,1992). Given the intense criticism that has been levied against diplomatic and international historians in some quarters, it is worth noting that Frank Costigliola wrote on this topic some twenty years ago, while Emily Rosenberg, also a former president of the Society of Historians of American Foreign Relations, is a pioneering exponent of this approach. See Frank Costigliola, *Awkward Dominion: American Political, Economic and Cultural Relations with Europe, 1919–1933* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984); Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890–1945* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982).

area from that occupied by the nation-state.[47] In practice, however, it is not so easy for historians to abandon the nation as, at the very least, a useful category. The point is illustrated in recent writing on the history of the cold war, which, while offering new insight into the cultural and social dimensions of a phenomenon long re-counted and explained solely by diplomatic historians, is still expressed on national terms.[48] There are, therefore, two challenges before social and cultural historians working largely within the setting of a nation-state: to connect these social and cultural developments to the international, political history of events like start of the cold war; and to be more aware and critical of the role of national and regional borders within their accounts. While culture has become an all-inclusive category replacing both the meaning of the term 'ideology' and frequently the term itself, the majority of historians who seek to examine the relationship between culture and international history explicitly, continue to study what might be termed 'traditional' cultural phenomena: the contribution of information agencies to foreign policy, images deployed in 'selling nations' and their foreign-policy goals and the representation and characterisation of royal visits.[49]

The value of transnationalism lies in its openness as an historical concept. Transnational history also allows us to reflect on, while at the same time going beyond, the confines of the nation. It sheds new, comparative light on the strengths and the fragilities of the nation-state and underlines the ways in which local history can be understood in relation to world history. With their focus on economic, political and financial history, the essays in this collection demonstrate the value of considering social networks and connections to a variety of private and public institutions at a local and international level in relation to the nation-state. The history of transnational communities is not just about how relationships are created, but how they are sustained and changed. These essays demonstrate that there is more to any long-lived transnational community than the completion of a particular project; they tease out some of the benefits and costs of these ties which, like all relationships, are dependent on power and respect and which change over time.[50] This theme issue demonstrates that the nation is a bounded element in transnational relationships, and that transnationalism provides a means to consider historical change in the *longue durée*, and on different timescale from those which dominate nationally determined historiographies.

It is better to think of a transnational community not as an enmeshed or bound network, but rather as a honeycomb, a structure which sustains and gives shapes

47 Ludger Pries (ed.), *New Transnational Social Spaces. International Migration and Transnational Companies in the Early Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2001); Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989).

48 Patrick Major and Rana Mitter, eds., *Across the Blocs: Cold War Cultural and Social History* (London: Frank Cass, 2004), 3.

49 Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht and Frank Schumacher, *Culture and International History* (Oxford: Berghan Books, 2003).

50 Andrea Galeotti and Miguel A. Meléndez-Jiménez, 'Exploitation and Cooperation in Networks', Tinbergen Institute Discussion Paper, T1 2004-076/1, Faculty of Economics, Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam and the Tinbergen Institute, 2–3.

to the identities of nation-states, institutions and particular social and geographic space. It contains hollowed-out spaces where institutions, individuals and ideas wither away to be replaced by new organizations, groups and innovations. For a transnational community to survive, its boundaries must remain open, porous, revisable and interactive. If they are not, then gradually one honeycomb of national, regional and international relations is replaced with another.[51] Charting the history of transnational communities, as these essays demonstrate, exposes hidden continuities and connections in time and space, as well as the gaps between them. The efforts to explore the history of particular transnational networks which follow seek to offer more than definitions. They provide an opportunity to assess the essential or defining importance of transnationalist communities as a fresh perspective on the history of the modern world, helping to shed light on the moments of transformation when new societies grow and mature within the context of the old.

Jens-Wilhelm Wessels

Jens died in a road accident on 29 March 2005 at 30 years of age. He was involved in commissioning a number of essays that appear in this theme issue, which is dedicated to his memory.

51 Honeycomb metaphor discussed at German History seminar given by Professor Mary Fulbrook in relation to the social history of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), Faculty of Modern History, Oxford, 13 Oct. 2004.