



Diaspora and Transnationalism Conceptual, Theoretical and Methodological Challenges

A joint conference of the IMISCOE network of excellence and the European University Institute, Florence.

Dates: 10-11 April 2008

Venue: sala Teatro, Badia Fiesolana, via dei Roccettini 9, San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)

Open to all EUI members. Please register with Eva.Breivik@eui.eu.

The conference theme

The terms transnationalism and diaspora have diffused widely over the past years. Diaspora is a very old concept, transnationalism is a relatively new one. We propose an IMISCOE theory workshop that explores the broad range of phenomena that are variously described under these rubrics with the aim of clarifying their conceptual uses, exploring their embeddedness in specific strands of social, political, cultural and historical theories, and discussing their methodological implications and possible operationalizations in various disciplines.

The concept of transnationalism is not obviously limited to migration-related phenomena, but refers to a wider class of actions, processes and institutions that cross the boundaries of states or national-communities. Its probably earliest use with reference to immigration is a famous essay by Randolph Bourne from 1916 in which he described America as a “transnational nation” composed of, and constantly changed through, immigration from diverse origins. In contemporary debates, the notion of transnationalism has been generally used instead to refer to migrants’ ongoing ties with source countries. Do we need to shift from a focus on transnational communities to transnational practices in order to avoid essentialized conceptions of migrant groups as inherently transnational? Can transnationalism in contexts of migration be defined more broadly as a triangular relation between migrants, source and destination countries? What is the relation between migrant agency, government policies and institutional arrangements of transnational citizenship? These are some of the questions we would like to raise and clarify with regard to transnationalism.

The term diaspora has achieved significance beyond the migratory realm, and in some discussions signals a broader postcolonial debate on overcoming Eurocentric approaches. For example, some authors have referred to it as a paradigm denoting the postcolonial condition (for example, *The Black Atlantic*). Yet, the question arises whether it is possible to discuss both ethnic and national categories, on the one hand, and more lateral ties – religious or issue-based movements, such as environmentalist and human rights movements – under the same umbrella. Some of the latter labels are used in the struggle to overcome ethnic and national divisions. In short, while in some contexts diaspora relates to parochial concerns of nation-

state formation or secession, in others diaspora figures as a symbol related to new forms of cosmopolitanism.

Both groups of mobile persons themselves, on the one hand, and international organisations and state authorities, on the other hand, have increasingly embraced the two terms. For example, some states experiencing significant rates of emigration, such as the Philippines or Vietnam, have stopped calling their citizens abroad “traitors” and celebrate them as “our heroes” abroad. Others, such as recent Mexican and Turkish governments, have even encouraged their citizens abroad to naturalize. And immigration states have started to actively support the “diaspora” to engage in development cooperation, tapping into the allegedly rich resources of financial remittances, human capital and ‘social remittances’ transferred, among other channels, through diaspora groups, such as religious communities and hometown associations. A new development agent is emerging; in addition to states, international organizations, development organisations and NGOs. An interesting question concerns the evolution of this new category of political actor. Overall, “diaspora” and “transnational communities” have come to achieve prominence in the migration-development nexus in particular, and in the emerging and budding field of inter- or transnational, sometimes even called global social policy.

The term “diaspora” has thus come a long way from its classical use for categories of persons forcefully dispersed from their homeland, having close symbolic or even social ties to the region of origin, and maintaining rather strong cultural boundaries vis-à-vis the “host” countries. Nowadays, it is often used in reference to groups who have migrated transnationally ranging from voluntary to forced exit, who engage in some kind of cross-border activities, and who maintain cultural practices somewhat distinct from so-called majority groups. This rather broad notion of the term diaspora covers almost all of those who are engaged in some kind of cross-border movement and activity. Some critics have noted that the term diaspora has emerged as a key term in political debates and is of great importance discursively but is of little value analytically.

Nonetheless, the discursive and semantic inflation of diaspora as well as transnationalism can be used productively to engage in central questions of social and political change. In order to avoid conceptual confusion and talking past each other across academic disciplines, three steps are required:

- (1) We need to study the history and evolution of the two concepts and attempt to clarify their uses for theoretical purposes across different disciplines
- (2) We need to compare how different social, cultural and political theories explain the formation of diasporas and the emergence of transnationalism and what weight these phenomena are given in broader theoretical accounts of change of contemporary society.
- (3) We need to develop methodological toolboxes and innovations for studying transnational phenomena empirically without falling into the traps of methodological nationalism or essentializing groupism.

These three tasks provide the general structure of the conference. The conference papers have been selected from 40 submissions to a call for papers.

Conference Programme

Thursday, 10.4.2008

9:00-9:15 Welcome address by Marco del Panta (EUI secretary general)

I. Conceptualizing Transnationalism and Diaspora

9:15-10:45 Concepts and Theories

Gabi Sheffer, Hebrew University of Jerusalem: *Reexamining Diasporism and Transnationalism*

Francesco Ragazzi, Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris: *The concept of 'diaspora' and the 'transnational social space'*

Michel Bruneau, Université de Bordeaux: *Diasporas, transnational spaces and communities*

Discussant: Philipp Ther, EUI, Florence

10:45-11:15 Coffee break

11:15-12:45 Concepts and Empirical Research

Agnieszka Weinar, University of Warsaw: *"Diaspora" as a political actor in the European comprehensive immigration policy*

Janine Dahinden, University of Neuchâtel: *"Diasporic" transnationalism and "transnationalism through mobility". An attempt to link different forms of transnationalism taking the example of cabaret dancers*

Karsten Paerregaard, University of Copenhagen: *The predicament of diaspora. Conceptual and analytical problems of studying Peru's migrant population*

Discussant: Giovanna Campani, University of Florence

12:45-14:00 Lunch

II. Transnational Spaces and Sectors

14:00-15:30 Transnational social systems

Thomas Faist, University of Bielefeld: *Transnationalization, Transnationality, and Changing Institutions: Towards a Political Sociology of Cross-Border Transactions*

Alfons Fermin, ERCOMER, Rotterdam: *Migrant transnationalism, migration systems and the continuation of Turkish-European migration*

Wei Shen, Ecole Supérieure des Sciences Commerciales d'Angers: *Transnational Student Migrants in Globalizing Cities*

Discussant: Martin Kohli, EUI, Florence

15:30-16:00 Coffee break

16:00-17:30 Sending countries and transnational flows

Russell King and Anastasia Christou, SCMR, Sussex: *Cultural Geographies of Diaspora, Migration and Transnationalism: Perspectives from the Study of Second-Generation 'Returnees'*

Lisa Åkesson, Göteborg University: *Remittances, social inequality and transnational family organization: A Cape Verdean case study*

Yasmine Ahmed, American University of Cairo: *Marriage Transnational Style: A Case Study from Egypt*

Discussant: Jean-Pierre Cassarino, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, Florence

Friday, 11.4.2008

III. Political Transnationalism

9:00-10:30 Transnational citizenship

Rainer Bauböck, EUI, Florence: *Transnational citizenship revisited*

Paolo Boccagni, University of Trento: *Private, public, or both? On the scope and impact of transnationalism in immigrants' everyday lives*

Margit Fauser, University of Bielefeld: *The Transnationalization of Local Citizenship. On the conceptual implications of the involvement of local citizenship in transnational social spaces*

Discussant: Marco Martiniello, CEDEM, Liège

10:30-10:45 Coffee Break

10:45-12:15 Kin-state transnationalism

Myra A. Waterbury, Ohio University: *Bridging the Divide: Towards a comparative framework for understanding kin-state and migrant sending-state diaspora politics*

Maria Koinova, Cornell University: *Could Diasporas be Agents of Democratization in Divided Societies?*

Margit Feischmidt, Hungarian Academy of Sciences: *Transnational Nationalism (in Transsylvania)*

Discussant: Ary Zolberg, New School University, New York

12:15-13:30 Lunch

IV. Methodologies

13:30-15:00 Multisited research

Valentina Mazzucato, University of Amsterdam: *Operationalizing simultaneity and networks in transnational research*

Gertrud Hüwelmeier, Humboldt University Berlin: *"Heaven is my home"- Transnational Vietnamese Pentecostal Networks*

Bülent Kaya and Gianni D'Amato, University of Neuchâtel: *Transnationalism in Action: Exploring Practices in Switzerland*

Discussant: Zoe Bray, EUI, Florence

15:00-15:30 Coffee break

15:30-17:00 Sociological Methods

Uwe Hunger and Kathrin Kissau, University of Münster: *The Internet as a means of studying transnationalism and Diaspora?*

Koen Jonkers, EUI, Florence: *Scientific Diasporas: international or transnational scientific cooperation? China and its scientific diaspora*

Laura Morales, University of Manchester, Eva Anduiza, Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona and Laia Jorba, Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona-Universidad de Murcia: *Transnational links and the political incorporation of migrants in Spain*

Discussant: Ettore Recchi, Florence University

17:00 – 17:30 Roundtable on Future Research Agendas:

Zoe Bray (EUI, Florence, tbc), Russell King (Sussex University, Brighton tbc), Myra Waterbury (Ohio University, tbc)