Transnational Advocacy

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Each new form of political power... introduces its own particular way of partitioning space, its own particular administrative classification of discourses about space and about things and people in space. (Lefebvre 2009: 281)
Concept of agency & space

What is the nature of the (socio-political) space inhabited by the NGOs you study?

Who or what creates or shapes that space?
Diversity: actors, interests, agendas, geography, above or beyond state.

Challenge or reinforce existing structures of governance:

- staging post along road to global?
- space for resistance & contestation?
Uncover

‘social (spatial) practices’ that go to make up the transnational (Lefebvre, 2009: 18)

- physical borders
- cognitive borders
- constantly redefined by interaction
What is a transnational network?

Numerous examples: vary in membership, scope, organisational capabilities & remit

- Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform & Rural Development (ANGOC); Pan Pacific & South East Asia Women’s Association (PPSEAWA);
- East African Communities’ Organisation for Management of Lake Victoria Resources (ECOVIC); Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI) in Northern & Eastern Africa

(Armstrong et al. Civil Society and International Governance)
Attempt to address spatiality

Keck & Sikkink - ‘advocacy networks are helping to transform the practice of national sovereignty’ (1999: 89)

Globalisation & legitimacy (Scholte 2010).

Scalar classification
Breaking down scales

Transnational-as-global or transnational-as-agglomerated-local fail to capture the multiple processes inherent in the articulation & occupation of the space for transnational activism
Why?

- How actors represent themselves as ‘activists’ in
- (a) changing global arena(s)
- (b) challenging problematic assumptions about legitimacy & forms of governance represented by transnational alliances of individual actors & actor clusters
Assessment so far

- With Marston et al., represent transnational as site of ‘complex, connected, potential processes’ (2005: 426)
A question of geography?

Cumbers *et al.* remind us that some groups remain strongly ‘territorialized’ (2008: 183)

NcNevin calls for an assessment of the ‘multiple dimensions of belonging,’ including an understanding of the role of the state (2006: 136)
Problem of scales

- Bulkeley observes: ‘the very process of enrolling particular actors and networks into scalar constructions is part of the politics of scaling’ (2005: 884)
- Scalar representations of transnational offer opportunistic ‘intuitive fictions’ (Smith 2003: 35)
Alternatives

‘maps of grievance’:
This is a central engagement to be made if transnational alliances are to be seen as integral to the identities and character of alternative political movements, rather than merely as a means to the creation of bounded, exclusionary localisms (2003: 418)
McNevin emphasizes need to examine political belonging against background of the ‘spatial imaginaries’ of particular activists.

Particular actors can reconfigure discourse of belonging & transnational actors can both ‘undermine & reinscribe the territorial and citizenship boundaries against which they struggle’ (2006: 135 and 146)
‘shift from things in space to the actual production of space’ (2009: 37)

Pre-existing spaces & their usages will also influence the shape of the ‘new’ space, creating (in Lefebvre’s terms) a mille-feuille of interpenetrating actors & interests (2009: 56, 86)
‘Snapshot’

- 3 intersecting dimensions:
  - interactive practices
  - significance of place
  - discourse of collectivity
Interactive practices

- Mapped by examining ways in which groups are constituted: by personal connections, shared interests, or through the intervention of external influences (such as the United Nations).

- Marston *et al.* observe that we can only ‘talk about the existence of a given site only insofar as we can follow interactive practices through their localized connections’ (2005: 425).
Place

Cumbers *et al.*'s perception of place is an important strand in the establishment of new forms of collective experience. Spatial configurations can embed local & global in particular sites of struggle & resistance.
Many groups do not present themselves as transnational advocates *per se* & yet their actions may have cross-border ramifications.

Follows Laclau & Mouffe discursive constitution of collective identities:
- social reality never objectively given but based on discursive constitutions
- ‘efficacy attributed to discursive practices’ and to ‘performativity’ (Collinge 2005: 194)
Examples from East Asia

- Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC)
- 1979 following consultation leading up to the World Conference on Agrarian Reform & Rural Development (WCARRD, Rome)
ANGOC

- 20 national & regional NGO networks from 9 Asian states
- Enable poor rural communities in Asia to find a voice, control their own natural resources & ensure sustainable existence (www.angoc.ngo.ph)
Organisation

- Formal board of directors
- Regular general assemblies
- Via conferences & training courses, exchange of knowledge & information & production of reports/pamphlets
- Communication by e-mail only recently begun
- New project to utilize Internet
Thus…

- Cascade of interlocking groups, not simply created on the basis of a shared issue area or geography
- Accommodates universal discourse of agrarian reform not bounded by particular institutions or exclusive discursive frames
State

- Continued focus on state, esp. Manila
ANGOC does not refer to itself as a ‘transnational’ organisation.

Classifies itself as ‘regional association of national & institutional NGO networks’ with a broad ‘Asian’ membership.

Frame of ‘region’ is loose.

Cognitive borders against WCARRD principles from which it derived & recognises physical national & regional borders.
Far too early for conclusions

- Space demarcated as ‘transnational’ is an ongoing process created as a result of interconnecting experiences.
- Need to be careful about issues related to civil society *per se*, to legitimacy & accountability & to unshackle ourselves from the yoke of vertical spatialities.
3 dimensions (interactive processes, place, discourse): different everyday experiences at work
No formula for membership
Different expectations & interests
Tapped into different networks both at home & across their national borders already
Cannot be assumed to have an equitable role in global governance
Does not deny relevance of (reconceptualised) scales, but agrees that we need to wrestle with how exactly they are being constructed & by whom
They do not seek to define a transnational space *per se*, then, but rather seek multiple forms of opportunistic self-identification.
Transnational needs to be charted according to the particular experiences that constitute it.

Activists do not aim to enter a space of contestation so much as a space of engagement with a range of other actors.

In other words, engagement is the space...
2 important points

Can the transnational offer a productive means of access and the (re)creation of the space for activism?

- one of several vehicles used to reach particular goals and offers a new way for sharing and creating experiences among geographically disparate actors from a range of interest types
First, we need to be wary of rendering whole and coherent such disparate actions.
Second, this is not to deny the immanent possibilities for the realization of the transnational and a growing importance of it as a cognitive and physical space in global governance structures, so long, again, as we think carefully about the premises upon which we build our arguments.
In essence, then, the aim is principally to act as a corrective against deterministic approaches of the transnational, and to focus on how interactive practices, place and discourse shape both activist and the space she inhabits in an ongoing way.