

## **Exploring Transnational Studies Inaugural Conference Synopsis**

April 24, 2009  
Center for the Humanities at Tufts  
48 Professors Row  
9:00am - 6:30pm

**9:00am -10:20am:  
Interzones**

### **Professor Benjamin L. Carp (History), Tufts University Global Perspectives on the Boston Tea Party**

Benjamin Carp's presentation considered global frameworks in which to study the Boston Tea Party. His paper examined the causes and effects of the events in Boston in 1773, as well as inter-linkages and feedback loops among the Tea Party and related historical developments. In addition to Britain and its colonies, the paper journeyed from South Asia to East Asia to the Native American frontier and to the Caribbean. The presentation considered the connection between events in the America and the great Bengal Famine; the relationship between rising tea consumption, the concomitant demand for sugar, and concurrent debates about slavery; as well as the ways that the Tea Party became a global symbol for resistance. The paper also sketched the concentric rings in which a historical event may be studied, from the 'local' to the 'global.'

### **Lindsay Schakenbach (History Dept Graduate Student), Tufts University Foreign Policy by Whom? United States Citizens, the Press, and the Leander Expedition (1805-1810)**

Lindsay Schakenbach discussed the rise of the American presence in Latin America and the role of civilian movements in instigating Pan-Americanism, which prefigured eventual movements by the US state. Segments of the American public, in the early nineteenth century, engaged in foreign policy avant-la-lettre, argued Schakenbach. She considered the Leander expedition of 1806 in Venezuela, when Americans responded to requests for support from the leader of an anti-Spanish agitation, Francisco de Miranda. Light was shed on the ways in which idealism, economic interest and territorial motives on the part of civilian and state actors combined to create a notion of Greater America overseen by the USA in advance of the Monroe Doctrine.

### **Richard So (Comparative Literature), Fellow at Williams College Fragments of the Trans-Pacific Cultural Front: Agnes Smedley and Ding Ling, 1932-1937**

Richard So discussed the global public sphere that connected China and America in the 1930s, particularly in terms of the international campaign for the release of Leftist writer, Ding Ling, from imprisonment by the Kuomintang. Richard So discussed attempts by

American leftists, especially Agnes Smedley and Roger Baldwin, to organize protest movements on a global scale. He argued that aesthetics, especially artistic and literary realism, played an important role in mobilizing a global public sphere. On the other hand, he also considered the ways an indigenous human rights discourse was rising in China, articulated by individuals such as Madame Sun Yat Sen. As opposed to a dissemination of Western modes to the East, Richard So argued for a more complex interweaving between American and Chinese political discourses on social justice.

**10:30am - 11:50am:  
Transgressions**

**Ning Ma (Assistant Professor of Chinese, Dept. of German, Russian and Asian Languages and Literatures), Tufts University  
The Chinese Talent-Beauty Novel: A Secret Origin of "World Literature"**

A little discussed aspect of Goethe's groundbreaking notion of "World Literature" is that it was in fact inspired by a "strong resemblance" he observed between the works of Samuel Richardson and a few Chinese "talent-beauty" novels then translated into European languages. Ning Ma explored this curious cross-cultural convergence by arguing that the "resemblance" in question can be specified as a similar emphasis on the virtue of female chastity, which represents in both cases a significant cultural trend to separate one's moral and social selves by recognizing private life and individual consciousness as the foundation of the former. Further, these parallel shifts can be attributed to a comparable historical crisis confronting China and Europe at the time--- that is, the disintegration or weakening of traditional cultural values and social relationships in the face of a rapidly rising monetary economy. These analogous literary and sociological patterns constitute a secret "origin" of the notion of "World Literature," which concerns not just the birth of a concept, but the contour of a world-historical moment shared by what seem to be the most widely separated cultural spheres.

**Lecturer Cindy Zhongxin Sun (Sociology), Tufts University  
"An Open Definition of Gender": Redefining Urban Chinese Women's Identity Via the Global Workplace**

Cindy Zhongxin Sun sought to understand the complexity of Chinese women's gender identity in the global workplace in contemporary China. Based on data collected via in-depth interviews, participant observation and focus group discussions, she explored the relationship between gender identity of female white-collar worker and their working experiences in foreign companies in China by focusing on urban Chinese women who are experiencing their first childbirth while working in Shanghai. Different forces, from company culture, to popular culture and the women's own experiences combined to define these women's gender identity. Cindy Zhongxin Sun's analyses also showed that young educated women in urban China have been a privileged group in relation to other groups of women in China, while they redefine their gender identity based on their own life experiences. Sun concluded by discussing the class and regional implications of these findings for urban Chinese women.

**1:00pm - 2:20pm:  
Tectonics**

**Lecturer Noit Banai (Visual and Critical Studies), Tufts University School of the Museum of Fine Arts  
From Jerusalem of Gold to the Global Village: Contemporary Art Practice and Globalization**

Noit Banai considered how the ideal of "Jerusalem of Gold" in fact obscures the "internal transnationalism" of the social fabric of Jerusalem society. Her paper analyzed exhibits at the first Israeli Biennial for Contemporary Art, held in Jerusalem in 2007, and their political import. Noit Banai argued that the acceptance of the internal heterogeneity of Israeli society in a city such as Jerusalem has been slowed because of the emphasis placed on a certain notion of nation-state normativity. Contemporary Art in the Biennial space thematizes the shifting character of identity in an age of refugees, post-colonial migration and increased trans-ethnic mixing. This space provides a challenge to more statist ways of thinking about Israel's population, Noit argues. The role of contemporary art in Israel in furthering a new politics of transnationalism received focused discussion.

**Tyler Ostergaard (Art History Dept Graduate Student), Tufts University  
Shifting Iconography in Armenian Architecture: The Ideological and Transnational Significance of Gagkasen and Zvart'nots**

Tyler Ostergaard's paper considered how architecture within a twelfth-century imperial Armenian city of Ani referenced religious buildings from outlying regions. In particular, he considered the way the Gagkasen church cited the Zvart'nots church of the 7th century. Ostergaard argued that the Armenian state utilized a kind of early transnationalism in order to make claims about its imperial status, and to recall a former age of independence. Churches in the imperial center of Ani cited distant architectural forms, but also sought to "transfer the holiness" from these distant climes on to the metropolitan center. The Bagartid dynasty used transnationalism to make reference to an earlier 7th-century era of cultural autonomy and grandeur. Ostergaard's paper threw light on how states can themselves adopt transnational politics for their own ends.

**Warrick Moses (Music Dept Graduate Student), Tufts University  
Construction and Negotiation of Identity in Cape Town Hip-Hop**

Warrick Moses presented on the hybridization of language and artistic forms in Capetown Hip Hop, but also on the way that Hip Hop lyrics articulated an opposition to ethnic hierarchies within black African society. Instead, Capetown Hip Hop, as evidenced by the group BBK, imagines "blackness" as a bridging identity that encompasses all the groups that exist on the margins or outside of white settler society. As opposed to a transmission of Hip Hop from America to Africa, Warrick Moses instead sees a "recircling" of artistic forms taking place, since some Hip Hop styles trace their genealogy back to Africa.

**2:30pm - 3:50pm:**  
**Ecumenes**

**Sarah Waheed (History Dept Graduate Student), Tufts University**  
**Pan-Islam as Cosmopolitanism? Transnational Muslim Thought and Leopold Weiss-Muhammad Asad**

Sarah Waheed considered the lessons of studying the life of Leopold Weiss, aka Muhammad Asad. Weiss, born into a Jewish family in Lvov, went on to convert to Islam, but also to assimilate into a particular community of Muslims in the tribal regions of the Hijaz. He then went on to engage deeply in scholarly debates about Islamic Law while in South Asia, first in Hyderabad, and eventually in Lahore. Arabia became a place of personal refashioning, meanwhile South Asia became the environment for learned discourse about Islam, where he was close friends with Mohammad Iqbal and became a major figure amongst Muslim modernist thinkers. He eventually moved to New York, protesting the increasingly religious turn of the Pakistani intelligentsia under the leadership of Maulana Maududi. Understanding why Leopold Weiss does not fit into any standard narrative of twentieth century Muslim intellectuals, and gauging the significance of his life, was the focus of Sarah Waheed's paper. She compared Muhammad Asad with Malcolm X, and considered narratives of pilgrimage to the Hijaz and of conversion to Islam in the context of twentieth-century global mobility

**Jacob Crane (English Dept Graduate Student), Tufts University**  
**Leaving the (Black) Atlantic: the Construction of Diasporic Identity in Amitav Ghosh's Sea of Poppies**

Jacob Crane's paper focused on Amitav Ghosh's Sea of Poppies. It considered the ways the Transatlantic crossing and the Crossing of the 'black waters' of the Indian Ocean were woven into a single interconnected narrative in Ghosh's book, particularly in the figure of Zachary. Problematizing the notion of diaspora as the "teleology of return," Jacob instead focused on the idea of "remaking of identity in exile", and discussed how this is articulated in Ghosh's novel. At the meeting of the Black Atlantic and the 'black waters', argued Crane, a new way of thinking about identities-in-transit, and about the intersection between roots and routes, becomes possible.

**John Mathew (History Dept Graduate Student), Harvard University**  
**Pan-Islam, Transnational Counter-Insurgency and the Inter-National Paradigm**

Johan Mathew presented his paper on how British imperial surveillance and counter-insurgency operations attempted to control and channel what they believed to be a dangerous "Pan-Islamic" threat in the early twentieth century. Surprisingly, the British engaged in a project of channeling Pan-Islamic radicalism, which they represented as amorphous and extremely threatening, into the framework of nationalist movements, which the British found more familiar and manageable. While the British believed the Germans were most responsible for supporting an "amorphous" global cloud of Pan-

Islamic radicalism during the Great War, they grew increasingly worried after the war that the Bolsheviks or the former Ottoman Committee of Union and Progress had taken up this role anew. Johan discussed various precautions and measures taken by the British, including the setting up of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Eastern Unrest in 1922, the coordination of global intelligence gathering and the dissemination of propaganda, in order to survey and discipline the "Pan-Islamic" threat. He closed with an open question as to what extent these imperial efforts were responsible for birthing the post-colonial inter-national order.

**5:00pm - 6:30pm:**

**Keynote**

(Lecture to be held in Cabot 205, Fletcher School)

**Smitha Radhakrishnan, Wellesley College**

**Producing Appropriate Difference: Gender, Caste, and the Question of Diversity in Indian High-Tech**

The Keynote lecture was delivered by Professor Smitha Radhakrishnan. Her sociological field study focused on the business practices of Infosys, the most successful Indian Hi-Tech firm that is reimagining and refashioning India as a global, cutting-edge player in global economic, social, and cultural circles. The ways in which the firm seeks to produce "appropriate difference", and to manufacture a kind of "global Indian" identity that is at once inoffensive to Western tastes, while also remaining true to what is perceived as normative Indian national culture, formed a major focus her study. Radhakrishnan argued that various "cultural globalization" frameworks that emphasize a local/global divide are less useful than a diasporic or transnational approach that is able to envision multiple scales of cultural production between the 'local' and the 'global' that interact to render new discourses and practices. The notion of the "global Indian" cannot be accredited to mere Americanization, nor is it a practice of "multiculturalism" or of insulating local Indian identities against the West, or against the effects of global travel or commerce. Companies such as Infosys are promulgating a more functional and pragmatic discourse, specific to the current period in which Indian businesses are rising to unprecedented international power and prestige. No longer needing to negotiate the unquestioned cultural and economic hegemony of Western corporate culture, Indian business leaders are increasingly performing their cultural distinctiveness as an asset, but doing this in a way that is nonetheless conducive to acceptance, respect and renown on the global corporate scene. An important upshot of the emergent discourse of "appropriate difference" in global Indian corporate culture is that it depoliticizes differences that constitute Indianness, naturalizing and upholding some cultural constructs (eg. gender divides) while burying or eliding others (e.g., caste, religion). Overall, it rewards middle-class, upper-caste cultural capital in India.

**Organizers:**

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