The New Transnationalism and Comparative Politics


In the back jacket blurb to Barnett and Finnemore’s *Rules for the World*, Thomas Weiss writes, “realists beware,” noting that “states matter, but so do their creations, international organizations.” He might have extended this caution to comparativists as well, since both comparative politics and international relations scholars are increasingly challenged to respond to the rising significance of transnational activities by state, non-state and sub-national actors constituting new spheres of cross-border governance. The four works discussed in this review advance current understandings of transnational politics and go well beyond the insight that the ‘global’ and the ‘local’ can no longer be neatly separated. Each presents an ambitious research agenda that crosses the boundary between international relations and comparative politics, a sharper theoretical vision, and new tools of analysis.
This review makes two core arguments about the relevance of the new transnationalism to comparative politics. First, it claims that a contemporary analysis of what used to be called ‘domestic’ or ‘international’ politics must include a systematic recognition of transnational influences. Core areas of comparative inquiry, including the study of regime change and policy formation need to take into account the increasing relevance of diffusion processes and transnational mobilization. Second, comparativists have a great opportunity to apply their characteristic methods and theories to the study of transnational actors and emerging spheres of governance. By bringing distinctive analytical strengths honed in the analysis of domestic institutions to bear on a new set of institutions and processes at the transnational level, comparativists can make significant contributions to the study of world politics.

The review begins with a brief summary of how each book crosses the divide between international and comparative politics. It then presents a summary of what is new and distinct about the ‘new transnationalism.’ The core section of the review discusses in depth five major claims of the transnationalist literature developed in the books under review. Finally, the review concludes with consideration of how the insights of this literature may be integrated into comparative politics research.

Spanning boundaries

The new transnationalism seeks to revise understandings of world politics in ways that blur the boundaries between international relations and comparative politics. James Rosenau’s *Distant Proximities* presents the most radical version of this perspective by proclaiming a world moving beyond globalization into a period of dialectical fragmentation and integration, which he captures in the neologism ‘fragmegration.’ Rosenau contrasts ‘globalizing’ forces such as free
market capitalism and English as a lingua franca with ‘localizing’ trends such as nationalism, terrorism, religious fundamentalism, mass migrations, prejudice, environmental challenges, and resource scarcities (p. 15). Rosenau suggests that organizations and people are divided today into multiple global, local, and private worlds. These worlds are constructed as individuals and organizations seek to cope with the ‘fragmegrative’ tendencies of contemporary life. While ‘globals’ embrace new technologies and opportunities to promote their goals and change their living conditions, ‘locals’ are oriented towards ‘proximate horizons’ and exhibit a kind of ‘rootedness’ (p. 87). Finally, Rosenau’s ‘private worlds’ are populated by those disconnected from local and global trends altogether. Rosenau spends about half of his book explaining the various characteristics and sub-groups within ‘global,’ ‘local,’ and ‘private’ worlds. Rosenau’s contention is that peoples’ experience of globalization is mediated by their choices about the worlds in which they live, choices that are made in part because of economic interests, but in part because of individuals’ and organizations’ history, outlook, and prior experiences.

Sidney Tarrow’s *The New Transnational Activism* develops a transnational approach to social movement research, a subject heretofore studied primarily at the national level. Tarrow suggests that processes of ‘complex internationalism,’ including the increasing influence of international organizations, create new opportunities for transnational collective action. International organizations and their meetings create forums for protest, while the increasing reach of transnational organizations into EU societies afford new opportunities to pursue domestic policy change. Tarrow distinguishes the politics of complex internationalism from economic globalization and identifies six distinct mechanisms linking local and transnational activism. He shows that mechanisms such as ‘global framing’ and ‘scale shift’ help to understand such diverse transnational episodes as human rights mobilization in Africa, Spanish
fishermen’s protests against EU policies, and anti-globalization protests at WTO and IMF meetings. Tarrow’s core argument holds that activists strongly ‘rooted’ in their domestic society are more likely to accomplish their goals than cosmopolitans detached from their local base. While the growth of international society provides a growing number of transnational opportunities of cooperation, the local and national levels remain the decisive battle grounds for political change. Again, in this perspective, the transnational and national levels of governance are inextricably linked.

Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore’s *Rules for the World* focuses on the nature of international organizations and emphasizes their relative independence from states. The authors reject simplified visions of intergovernmental organizations as creatures of states or promoters of the common good. Barnett and Finnemore effectively use case studies of the International Monetary Fund, the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and the UN Secretariat to show how intergovernmental organizations exercise authority in global governance while being vulnerable to pathologies typical for bureaucracies. The authors’ claim that “[w]e can better understand what IOs do if we better understand what IOs are” (p. 9, emphasis in the original) not only establishes international organizations as actors in their own right, but introduces organizational theory and the comparative institutionalist tool kit to the study of governance beyond the nation state. In this way, Barnett and Finnemore bring comparative politics analysis to bear on the politics of international organizations. For Barnett and Finnemore, intergovernmental organizations are primarily bureaucracies with their own distinct interests, culture, and logics of appropriate action. Their power derives from three sources of authority: delegation by states, expertise based on knowledge, and moral standing based on their non-violent and universal mandates. But as bureaucracies driven by different sources of authority
and a desire to survive and expand, intergovernmental organizations are vulnerable to significant pathological behavior. In their case study on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees the authors demonstrate how the protection of refugees and a mandated repatriation policy became dysfunctional over time and ultimately led to fundamental violations of human rights. The case study on the UN Secretariat and its dismal reaction to the Rwandan genocide shows how bureaucracies undermine feelings of personal responsibility and breed inaction. Barnett and Finnemore conclude their book by discussing the meaning of ‘global bureaucratization’ for democratic accountability.

Lastly, Anne-Marie Slaughter’s *A New World Order* links domestic and international politics by showing how governments themselves disaggregate into horizontal networks of trans-governmental relations to manage the challenges of globalization. Slaughter’s central dilemma is the gap between a growing need for global governance and the lack of democratic institutions to address this demand. Slaughter rejects both the traditional view of a world run by sovereign states and the vision of a ‘global civil society’ increasingly taking over governance functions from states. Instead, Slaughter sees global governance driven by the disaggregation of the state into increasingly autonomous units of judges, regulators, and parliamentarians working across borders with their counterparts on solving specific problems created by interdependence. Slaughter provides in her case studies remarkable evidence of the cooperation among judicial authorities and growing vertical integration between domestic, regional, and international courts. While those examples strengthen Slaughter’s empirical case, the larger purpose of the book is to contribute to the development of appropriate accountability mechanisms for the new era of complex global governance beyond the nation state. Like Tarrow, Slaughter favors the domestic ‘rootedness’ of state institutions working together in horizontal networks over the creation of
supranational governance driven by less accountable intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. Such trans-governmental networks are more likely to be democratically legitimate if they are driven by established rules of transparency and inclusiveness.

All four works self-consciously seek to develop a new transnational politics research agenda that spans the fields of international relations and comparative politics. In this review, we place these works in the context of this emerging transnational perspective. We do this by identifying five major themes of the new transnationalism that are developed by the works under review. We preface this discussion with an analysis of the rise of the new transnationalism and conclude with a discussion of how this literature seeks to redirect research agendas in comparative politics and international relations. We emphasize the contribution of this transnationalist literature to comparative politics and also suggest how comparative politics scholarship may contribute to it.

**What is new about the ‘new transnationalism’?**

What is really new about the ‘new transnationalism’? The idea of challenging the separation of domestic and international politics is not new, but has garnered renewed attention recently within both comparative politics and international relations.¹ Some research traditions within both fields have for a long time studied cross-border interactions of non-state actors, in particular the International Political Economy (IPE) scholarship in the liberal and Marxist traditions.² The democratization literature is another area where international factors are increasingly recognized as significant influences.³ What is new about the new transnationalism is that it moves beyond prior attempts to raise awareness about ‘external’ or ‘internal’ factors in each field and instead proposes a seamlessly integrated research agenda that fully spans
comparative politics and international relations. It studies the regular interactions between state and non-state actors across national boundaries aimed at shaping political and social outcomes at home, abroad, and in an emerging global sphere of governance.

The first generation of the new transnationalism emerged during the 1970s to challenge the rigidity and state-centrism of the (neo-)realist mainstream. Keohane and Nye’s *Transnational Relations and World Politics* proposed a fundamentally different perspective on world affairs by introducing non-state actors and transnational relations as autonomous agents and forces on a global scale. While this transnational agenda initially failed to gain much ground within the academic discipline, it invigorated other, more modest challengers who questioned the strict separation of domestic and international politics. During the 1980s, the study of domestic sources of foreign policy and international politics steadily gained ground and Gourevitch’s ‘second image reversed’ imagined how international factors can also affect the domestic realm. Feminist and neo-Marxist analyses similarly emphasized the role of domestic gender and class configurations as crucial to understanding global politics.

While foreign policy scholars have questioned the unitary and rational actor model of state behavior, the liberal challenge to realism emerged through the application of economic theories to account for the puzzle of “cooperation under anarchy.” The ‘neo’-debates of the 1980s dominated much of the mainstream in the field of international relations and focused on the possibilities and limits of peaceful state cooperation as well as the extent of autonomy of international institutions. As liberal institutionalists put forward a more optimistic view of international cooperation based on trade and the democratic peace thesis, the major proponents developed a distinct domestically driven perspective on world affairs. Together with foreign policy scholarship, this literature accomplished two major goals in focusing on processes below
and above the state. First, it opened up the domestic realm to those interested in international outcomes. Second, it established the idea of intergovernmental organizations as playing a more autonomous role in global affairs.

Despite these accomplishments, neoliberal institutionalists and foreign policy scholars did not question the essential separation between the domestic and the international realm as well as the unique role of the state as final arbiter between both spheres. Challenges to the realist mainstream did not fundamentally undermine the division of labor between comparativists and international relations scholars. Comparativists remained primarily responsible for understanding domestic politics, while international relations scholars would occasionally appropriate their language to explain variations in external state behavior. As challengers to neorealism focused on domestic sources of international outcomes and the autonomy of international institutions, the state largely remained the focal point of decision-making and values attribution.

The transnationalist project re-emerged during the early 1990s driven by a number of younger international relations scholars with a determination to study actors and processes straddling the domestic/international divide.\(^\text{11}\) This second generation differed in two crucial respects from earlier efforts to challenge the state-centrism of mainstream international relations scholarship. First, the new generation of scholars did not claim that the state necessarily loses power and influence to non-state actors. The relevance of transnational relations and actors does not depend on showing how the nation state withered away, nor is it reduced to how these actors affected state behavior.\(^\text{12}\) Second, the emergence of constructivism allowed students of transnational activism to better understand the role of normatively driven behavior and make claims about its significance beyond the realm of material capabilities. Scholars have identified a diverse set of new collective actors emerging on a global and transnational scale, including
‘epistemic communities,’ ‘transnational advocacy networks,’ and ‘transnational social movements.’

While the new transnationalism has often developed in close alliance with constructivism, the two exist independently of each other. Except for Barnett and Finnemore, none of the other transnationalist works discussed here explicitly adopt or advance a constructivist agenda. Instead, each of these works provides a different perspective on how to conceptualize a political world where borders become increasingly meaningless and a growing number of actors project their activities into the domestic realm of other nations.

**Lessons from the new transnationalism**

We frame our discussion of the four books under review by suggesting five interconnected lessons to be drawn from these works which contribute in different ways to the advancement of the new transnationalism as an integrated research agenda.

First, these works leave the globalization debate behind by exploring how collective actors and institutions develop unique responses to trends that span the internal/external divide. Each book rejects the idea of one global, unifying trend obliterating local differences and instead explores the emergence of new political and regulatory dimensions of global governance.

Second, the books introduce a host of transnational non-state actors, which compete and cooperate with nation states in developing policies across international, national, and local levels of governance. ‘Rooted cosmopolitans’ (Tarrow), various types of ‘globals’ (Rosenau), ‘intergovernmental bureaucracies’ (Barnett and Finnemore), and ‘transgovernmental networks’ (Slaughter) represent new forms of collective agency driven by professional expertise, principled activism, and interests that defy national boundaries.
Third, the state and its component parts have increasingly developed non-traditional, transnational ties beyond the diplomatic realm. As a result, members of new judicial and regulatory networks no longer solely act as representatives of their state, but develop additional and sometimes competing allegiances as a result of the membership in new transgovernmental networks.

Fourth, spheres of governance authority are being redefined, shifting agenda-setting and decision-making away from strictly hierarchical and territorial governance towards more networked forms of interaction. Issues and problems previously defined as national or local are becoming transnational in scope.

Fifth, these works move beyond the material/ideational divide in understanding social and political change. The new transnationalism analyzes how principled mandates of intergovernmental and non-governmental actors regularly interact with more traditional interests driven by concerns for security and economic wealth.

Our discussion is organized along these five main issues. We will elaborate in each section how the four books move beyond viewing globalization as a homogenizing trend, develop tools to analyze intergovernmental and transnational agency, reevaluate the role of the state, explore new spheres of contested authority, and provide methodological guidelines to the study of the new transnationalism

**Beyond globalization**

In different ways, these four works move beyond viewing globalization as a purely structural and economic process, which imposes itself uniformly on the domestic realm. The authors suggest instead a more complex picture of transnational agency and contestation, which
emerge around new sites of political and social regulation such as the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, or the International Criminal Court. Tarrow explores how economic globalization is accompanied by what he calls ‘complex internationalism,’ a governance structure emerging among states, non-state actors, and international institutions (p. 25). Tarrow rejects reducing international institutions to ‘agents of global capitalism’ (p. 26) and explores how these organizations have become sites of new political contestation and coalition building. Barnett and Finnemore concentrate on showing how intergovernmental organizations acquire and use legitimacy beyond the delegated power from member states, by carving out new agendas and expanding mandates into new areas. Slaughter focuses attention on the ‘globalization paradox’ that is expressed in a conflict between an increased need for effective governance on supranational level and the impossibility of establishing democratic institutions on a global scale (p. 8). Finally, Rosenau elaborates the effects of simultaneous fragmentation and integration on a global scale. We begin this discussion by showing how the authors bring politics into definitions of globalization and then proceed to consider several normative claims they make about the possibilities that globalization creates for transnational actors. We will focus primarily on how Tarrow and Rosenau seek to redefine globalization in order to emphasize its political aspects.

In *Distant Proximities. Dynamics beyond Globalization*, Rosenau claims that globalization is part of an even larger and more complex process he calls ‘fragmegration’ that has political as well as economic and other implications. For Rosenau, the world is growing “farther together and closer apart,” driven by a dialectical process of universalizing and fragmenting forces. Sources of fragmegration include the advance of microelectronic technologies, a global skill revolution, increased mobility, and the globalization of national economies. Rosenau contends that jointly these ‘fragmegrative’ trends provoke a variety of
conflicting individual and collective responses that depend on the local circumstances of individual and group experience. Rosenau’s work adds a political element to discussions of globalization by including political as well as economic trends in his definition and by arguing that responses of groups and individuals to the challenges of ‘fragmegration’ arise from political and social, as well as economic sources. These responses are expressed at all levels of governance.

Tarrow’s work shares many of Rosenau’s interests and intuitions, including a desire to augment abstract notions of globalization to include political trends and agency. Unlike Rosenau, Tarrow accepts common economic and technological definitions of ‘globalization.’ However, he argues that a companion process of ‘complex internationalism’ has received much less scholarly attention. Complex internationalism denotes a political process whereby state and non-state actors use the growing complexity of global governance as an opportunity structure to mobilize and build coalitions beyond the nation state. An example for this complex internationalism is the coalition against agricultural subsidies maintained by the United States and European nations. The WTO and its negotiation process served as the opportunity structure enabling this coalition to form between developing nations, transnational NGOs such as OXFAM, and free trade advocates.

Tarrow’s core empirical chapters identify six strategies or processes of mobilization and coalition building, each of which is primarily local, transitional, or global. *Global framing* and *internalization* denote efforts by domestic activists to appropriate external resources for local causes. *Diffusion* and *scale shift* focuses on how global strategies and organizational forms spread from one locality to another. *Externalization* and *international coalition formation* explore how local activists take their grievances directly to international institutions (p. 32).
Global framing occurs when domestic activists mobilize international symbols to frame domestic conflicts. For instance, domestic activists may use universal human rights norms to undermine the legitimacy of a repressive government. Governments may also apply this technique. The recent appeal of the Ugandan government to the International Criminal Court to prosecute rebel leaders in the Northern part of the country represents a case of a government’s successful use of global framing to fight an essentially domestic conflict.\textsuperscript{14} By identifying different mechanisms of transnational activism, Tarrow pushes beyond the simple claim that domestic activists can strengthen their causes by taking it to a global level. What matters is not that activists go global, but how they do so. While processes of global framing and diffusion build temporary bridges across borders, Tarrow claims that externalization and transnational coalition building have the greatest potential to create lasting transnational activism. This focus on mechanisms helps to understand why transnational coalitions with strong domestic bases and diverse membership such as the landmines campaign, the debt relief network, the Coalition for the International Criminal Court, or the global campaign against domestic violence against women have become success stories in the literature on transnational activism.\textsuperscript{15}

Besides adding political content to discussions of globalization, both Rosenau and Tarrow also add skepticism to the often normatively charged transnationalist literature. Neither of them presumes an identity of interests between local and transnational activists. Both also discuss the shortcomings of many transnational campaigns. Rosenau’s admiring description of Transparency International’s global campaign against corruption ends with the cautionary note that “it is one thing to raise awareness of and sentiment against corruption, but quite another to reduce the practice of corruption” (p. 365). For Tarrow, transnational activism does not necessarily produce a public good, but frequently leads to unintended and undesirable results. He
draws on Clifford Bob’s work tracing the effects of international support for the Mexican
Zapatista and the Nigerian Ogoni Movement\textsuperscript{16} to show that local causes frequently do not
receive adequate outside attention or are harmed by it. The lesson here is that the same type of
transnational intervention may have very different domestic results, which are best understood
based on a solid comparative research design.

These works contribute to the new transnationalism by emphasizing the extent to which
globalization and its associated trends are political as well as economic. Globalization, the rise
of ‘complex internationalism,’ and ‘fragmegration,’ create opportunities for political
mobilization and empower institutions that span national boundaries. These books also
contribute to normative debates over the impact of transnational politics. None of the books
under review serenade transnational civil society, but instead inject some realism, if not
skepticism, into the analysis of its impact. Still, one weakness in these works is a tendency to
extrapolate primarily from the European and Anglo-Saxon experience. The transnational
processes under investigation originate primarily in the developed world and these works rarely
discuss regional variations in Africa, Asia, or Latin America. While this partly reflects the
quantitative dominance of transnational activism emanating from Northern regions, it also results
in a bias privileging a particular view of economic globalization and transnational activism.
What requires explanation is not only the existence and effects of transnational networks
reaching out from developed democracies, but also the absence or weakness of such networks
among developing nations. The next section discusses how more complex views of globalization
also introduce new perspectives on the agents populating the global realm.
Global bureaucracies, transnational networks, and rooted cosmopolitans

One of the key aspects of the new transnationalism is the analysis of a set of global actors that have seldom figured highly in comparative political analysis. These include transnational activist networks, epistemic communities, and international governmental and non-governmental organizations. Each of the works under review contributes to the analysis of such actors. Barnett and Finnemore’s *Rules for the World* highlights the central role of intergovernmental organizations as bureaucracies in global governance. Slaughter’s *A New World Order* investigates the emergence of transnational networks among regulators, judges, and legislators. Rosenau and Tarrow focus on the individual and collective responses to the opportunities and challenges of global markets and mobilization. In each of these four works, a diverse set of actors bypass the state as the primary gatekeeper of physical borders and intermediary between internal and external worlds.¹⁷ Comparative scholarship has yet to fully employ its characteristic tools of analysis to these new agents and institutions of global politics.

Rosenau’s individuals are defined by their specific place in and attitude towards the competing trends of global integration and fragmentation. He contends that one’s experience of globalization is mediated by the world in which one lives, in part because of economic interests, but also because of preexisting normative commitments by individuals and organizations confronted with global fragmentation and integration. Rosenau distinguishes local from global worlds and finds that individuals within each both affirm and resist globalization trends. ‘Affirmative globals’ are those who have left any local connections behind, care about distant events, and develop mostly elite-driven polices in favor of globalizing trends. In contrast, ‘affirmative locals’ will be more passive in accepting (rather than shaping) globalizing trends, but will maintain a focus on their local lives and interests.
Tarrow takes the idea of individual responses to globalization a step further and explores how those incentives create a specific form of agents, which he refers to as ‘rooted cosmopolitans.’ Unlike Rosenau, Tarrow does not believe that pure ‘globals’ or ‘cosmopolitans’ exist, nor does he divide individuals into global and local worlds. Instead, Tarrow consistently emphasizes the local roots of the new transnationalism. Rooted cosmopolitans are defined as “individuals and groups who mobilize domestic and international resources and opportunities to advance claims on behalf of external actors, against external opponents, or in favor of goals they hold in common with transnational allies” (p. 29). This stratum of actors includes transnational NGO activists, business executives, and officers of international institutions as well as national civil servants with regular transnational contacts. While Rosenau and Tarrow emphasize the primacy of local conditions, Tarrow pushes to develop more testable hypotheses about the collective prospects of transnational activism and the role of international institutions in enabling or limiting effective mobilization. For example, Tarrow claims that transnational collective action is most likely to produce sustainable results if it takes the form of a long-term and highly involved ‘campaign coalition’ (p. 167) rather than less (event-based) or more (federated) institutionalized forms of collaboration. Using the example of the landmines campaign, Tarrow argues that transnational activists need to focus on a clearly defined policy issue, be flexible in exploiting venues, and be open to tactical alliances with outsiders. While the adoption of the anti-landmines treaty seems to support this claim, we still lack systematic comparative studies linking the specific form of a campaign to its failure or success.

Barnett and Finnemore argue that international organizations cannot be reduced to preferences of states or “passive collections of rules or structures through which others act” (p. 156). Building their case on Max Weber’s analysis of bureaucracies and subsequent sociology of
organizations research, they describe how intergovernmental organizations pursue their own functions and interests and develop autonomous sources of legitimacy and power. This helps to explain, for instance, why international organizations (like states) rarely die and usually expand in size and mandate beyond their original constitutional purposes. They are bureaucracies for better and for worse.

Grounding their argument in organizational theory, Barnett and Finnemore argue that international organizations exploit several different sources of legitimacy by developing agendas and projects that are dedicated to achieving important social purposes in a rational legal manner. Rather than being agents of states, international organizations enhance their independent authority by developing specialized expertise in a given issue area and by claiming a moral high ground beyond the particularistic interests of their member states. For example, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is authoritative not just because states have entrusted it with certain tasks, but because it has acquired expertise in dealing with many refugee situations and has cultivated a self-image of protecting the most vulnerable. Here Barnett and Finnemore critique previous theories’ assumptions that the power of international organizations is primarily rooted in either coercive resources or information. Instead, they emphasize their ability to shape agendas and set conceptual frameworks, indicators, and knowledge paradigms which, in turn, guide the actions of states and non-governmental actors.

Barnett and Finnemore develop their argument through three case studies that show how the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the United Nations (UN) have evolved as bureaucracies in ways that were not foreseen by their initial constitutions. In each case, international bureaucracies show tendencies of imposed or desired mission creep along with the autonomous self-definition of the goals and
success criteria. In the case of the IMF, the authors explore the evolution of the IMF’s analytical frameworks and how this organization has become increasingly involved in the minutiae of state economic policy making. In the case of the UNHCR, the organization quickly expanded its mandate beyond Europe by transforming itself from a purely coordinating body into a humanitarian assistance agency with the authority to define what constitutes a refugee and how the international community ought to deal with refugee situations. Over time, UNHCR not only became the primary global authority on refugee issues, but also shifted its mission from resettlement to repatriation as the primary goal of activities. The new bureaucratic culture now adopted repatriation as the default, even if this new standard operating procedure was inappropriate to the specific local conditions or needs of refugees. In the end, the ‘right’ to return home became part of a pathological pattern which frequently compromised the original mandate of protecting refugees in the name of a new standard operating procedure (p. 94). In the case of the Rwandan genocide in 1994, Barnett and Finnemore show how bureaucratic rules of impartiality and consent within the UN Secretariat contributed to a failure to act and “generated indifference to such crises” (p. 155).

While Barnett and Finnemore discuss the primary alternative explanation of changing state interests affecting the mandate of international organizations, they remain curiously disinterested in the role of transnational non-governmental organizations. The mobilization of Tarrow’s ‘rooted cosmopolitans’ has not only affected the World Bank and the IMF, but it has also shaped how UNHCR has evolved and defined its mandate. Barnett and Finnemore’s story of how UNHCR has come to reluctantly embrace repatriation as the goal of refugee work reflects primarily on issues of bureaucratic politics and state pressures, while underestimating the external mobilization by non-governmental organizations and activists.
The four books emphasize the significant and autonomous role of intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental networks, and transnational activists. Each of these entities should be of interest to comparativists for two primary reasons. First, they have become powerful agents shaping the social environment of states as well as reaching into the domestic realm of national societies. Second, they are themselves significant and still largely unexplored research subjects for the application of comparative methods and theories. Taking international institutions and transnational networks seriously will allow comparativists to expand the reach of their work beyond the confines of the nation state and domestic societies. In the next section, we will discuss how the state itself has disaggregated and become part of the new transnationalism.

The transgovernmental state

The new transnationalist perspective challenges the persistent state-centrism of international relations scholarship as well as parts of the comparative politics literature. This state centrism stretches from the once dominant realist paradigm to some of the main representatives of the now well-established constructivist scholarship.\(^{18}\) However, in contrast to proponents of a ‘global civil society,’\(^{19}\) the works discussed here avoid ‘withering of the state’ arguments. They also stay clear of the frequently heard normative bias which proclaims that all non-state activities “pluralize power and problematize violence.”\(^{20}\) Instead of taking sides in this debate, the four books chart a less certain, but ultimately more rewarding, middle ground.

All four authors converge on a new concept of the state as a disaggregated, transnational entity, but only Anne-Marie Slaughter’s *New World Order* insists on defending a powerful role of the (democratic) state in the future. According to Slaughter, state entities such as the judiciary, the legislature, or governmental bureaucracies react to globalization by developing horizontal
trans-governmental networks to their equivalent units in other nations. While Slaughter views those ties as necessary adaptations that do not reduce the power of states, other authors suggest that increasingly autonomous networks of intergovernmental or non-governmental entities have already undermined the nation state.

For comparative politics, the practice of unpacking the state is nothing new. But Slaughter goes a step further by reassembling the units as parts of new transgovernmental networks that increasingly inter-penetrate all aspects of state interest formation and behavior. Slaughter calls for “reconceiving the responsibilities of all national officials as including both a national and a transgovernmental component” (p. 231). Increasingly, Slaughter contends, transnational governmental networks regulate and coordinate state behavior with counterparts in other states and other transnational and international actors. Viewing states as fundamentally inter-connected in complex webs of interdependence presents a radical critique of the traditional comparative politics paradigm but also offers new opportunities for an expanded reach of a new kind of comparative research.

Slaughter provides a sweeping examination of transgovernmental networks among regulators, judges, and legislators, although most of her examples (like Tarrow’s) reflect a European bias in analyzing regional and transnational integration. Drawing on her previous work on how transgovernmental networks among judges have increased the power of the European Court of Justice, she presents substantial new evidence of transgovernmental networks in securities regulation, banking regulation, and constitutional justice. The emergence and growing significance of the more informal G-7 and G-8 summits or the World Economic Forum in Davos confirm Slaughter’s claim that state actors increasingly rely on networks rather than on traditional means of inter-state diplomacy.
In her discussion of growing transnational networks among legislatures (chapter 3), Slaughter is also intensely aware of the fluidity between transgovernmental and non-governmental networking. Slaughter distinguishes between horizontal (among states) and vertical (those established by a supranational authority) networks as well as between information networks, enforcement networks, and harmonization networks. What makes those networks relevant is not their mere existence and expansion, but the quality of the exchanges within them. Slaughter argues that legislative networks have tended to lag behind other transgovernmental efforts primarily because they have mainly brought together individual parliamentarians sharing similar ideas, but not necessarily created close ties among the parliamentary institutions themselves (p. 130).

The transgovernmental state offers new challenges and opportunities for comparative research. At a minimum, those transgovernmental ties provide judges and legislators with potential resources not recognized by a purely domestic perspective. The executive loses its exclusive privilege to level external versus internal demands (or vice versa). More importantly, those transgovernmental ties may modify loyalties and open up the state to the influence of external interests who find it easier to access the networks among government agencies than the separate agencies themselves. New transnational spheres of authority may become the long-term result of the transgovernmental state.

Creating and contesting new spheres of authority

A fourth common theme of the four books reviewed is the exploration of contested spheres of authority that have emerged beyond the nation state. Rosenau argues that global governance is increasingly fragmenting into distinct, non-territorial spheres of authority such as
trade, health, and environment, where multiplicities of different actors seek to regulate and rule. For instance, in the sphere of global struggle against the most deadly diseases, the *Global Fund to fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, Malaria* emerged in 2001 as a new site of global governance where public and private sector organizations participate in the distribution of aid through country-specific mechanisms. As a result, clearly bounded territorial authority is declining, while the scope and shape of authority within these new spheres remains fluid and contested. Rather than offering a single solution to this quandary, Rosenau argues that results are complex and demand a research agenda in international and comparative politics on “how authority evolves, persists, or erodes in global affairs.”

The erosion of territorial authority is likely to result in increasingly contested and overlapping spheres of control. Rosenau’s solution is the formulation of new, de-territorialized social contracts. Those contracts are likely to be characterized by organizational devolution and decentralization, open membership, humanitarian protections, information sharing, responsiveness to various environments, egalitarianism, and accountability. While the contours of such new social contracts are only slowly emerging, other authors provide more concrete answers to the problems of increasingly contested and dispersed authority.

Barnett and Finnemore identify ‘undemocratic liberalism’ as a possible result of global institutions promoting progressive values without strengthening their own accountability and transparency (chapter 6). While the strength of bureaucracies may be their efficiency and rationality in delivering services (substantive or output legitimacy), their long-term viability requires addressing questions of procedural or input legitimacy. Barnett and Finnemore fear that Max Weber’s ‘iron cage’ may be reproduced on the global level, where impersonal rules and standard operating procedures harm the individuals they are supposed to protect.
Tarrow and Slaughter provide two competing answers to Barnett and Finnemore’s legitimacy issue. While Tarrow suggests that non-governmental organizations and networks can play a watchdog role in global affairs, Slaughter prefers a state-based solution to possible deficits in governance, control, and legitimacy. Slaughter is most worried about a possible tyranny of “experts and enthusiasts” (p. 224), a term expressing her more skeptical view of Tarrow’s ‘rooted cosmopolitans.’

For Slaughter, the issue is one of control and her prescription for keeping self-appointed global activists and institutions in check is to re-assert the power of democratically elected governments and their appointed bureaucracies. Slaughter envisions a ‘new world order’ based on the existing nation state system. She rejects the idea that globalization will necessarily empower non-governmental forms of governance and prefers to supplement the existing, territorially defined social contracts with efficient forms of transgovernmental cooperation. For Slaughter, transgovernmental networks ensure that collective decision-making does not fall victim to international technocrats, but reflects basic principles of democratic accountability. Slaughter’s principles aimed at transforming the ‘new’ into a ‘just’ world order (chapter 6) include the establishment of domestic norms such as global deliberative equality (openness), subsidiarity, legitimate difference, and mechanisms of checks and balances in the global realm.

Slaughter’s vision works best among states of equal power or with cooperative intentions, hence the primary focus on European integration. But her view ignores that equality is the exception, not the rule in global relations. It also seems to misinterpret the experience of rising inequality within many developed democracies, which all feature checks and balances as well as other formal measures to foster accountability and transparency. If those mechanisms have a mixed record in creating more domestic equality, scholars should be skeptical of their ability to
effectively address the much greater economic and social differences on a global scale. Such an elite-driven view clashes with those (including Tarrow and Rosenau) who see the new transnationalism as a potential platform to advance the interests and aspirations of the oppressed and the less well to do. Here, transnationalism offers opportunities of emancipation from domestic repression and allows non-state activists to play a global watchdog role akin to a vibrant domestic civil society.21

The four books share a sense of conflict and contestation within emerging spheres of transnational authority and global governance. While Slaughter and Barnett and Finnemore offer programmatic responses intended to improve technocratic management of global issues, Tarrow offers a bottom-up perspective of how collective action is a crucial ingredient of creating accountability and transparency in the global realm. As emerging forms of global governance include critical normative and ethical dimensions, these works bring to comparative politics a new sensibility about the types of political conflicts and opportunities emerging in a transnational political space.

**Re-imagining ideas, interests, and institutions**

The new transnationalist literature makes two methodological contributions to the debate on norms, ideas, mechanisms, and processes in international politics. First, while all four books emphasize the power of ideas in driving political outcomes, these works move beyond the rationalist-constructivist divide that has dominated international relations discourse in recent years and chart a pragmatic middle-ground between ideational and interest-based analysis. Second, these works shift away from static variable analysis to a focus on the specific processes and mechanisms that connect ideas, interests, and institutions across national boundaries.
Ideas are central to Barnett and Finnemore, who argue that the power of international organizations cannot be understood without reference to their control of knowledge and exercise of moral authority. Bureaucratic power is reflected in the “ability to transform information into knowledge, that is, to construct information in ways that give it meaning” (p. 29). As Barnett and Finnemore show in their case studies, refugees or genocide do not just simply exist; they are being created or ignored by an interplay of bureaucratic procedures, material interests, and humanitarian norms. Such practices based on diverse sources of authority give intergovernmental organizations extraordinary power in shaping the social environment of states, defining the meaning of terms such as ‘security’, ‘conditionality’, and ‘human rights’, and diffusing norms and ideas on a global scale.

Ideas play also a powerful role in Slaughter’s trans-governmental networks, because the future of global governance will be more about the competition of ideas than material capabilities. As Slaughter envisions a transformation from hierarchy (government) to networks (governance), she argues that hard power will become less effective, while claims based on reasoned argumentation and shared ideas will become more compelling in circles of professional networks even when put forward by weaker participants (p. 206). Since those networks are based on basic shared ideas of appropriate conduct, the participants are more likely to listen and accept rules of fairness as well as a better argument. However, Slaughter does not pretend that hierarchy, self-interest, and brute force will disappear in a future of transgovernmental networks. Instead, by accepting that ‘logics of appropriateness’ and ‘communicative action’ will become more prevalent in world politics, Slaughter shares some of the basic premises of the other authors, while maintaining a more realist approach.
A different methodological claim drives Tarrow’s efforts to elaborate on the mechanisms and processes underlying the new transnationalism. Drawing on his previous collaborative effort, *Dynamics of Contention*, Tarrow illustrates how mechanisms of ‘scale shift’ and ‘global framing’ are crucial to our understanding of social and political change. In discussing Keck and Sikkink’s ‘boomerang pattern,’ Tarrow calls for a more complex understanding of how domestic claims are being externalized and later projected back into the domestic realm. In breaking down those processes into their distinct mechanisms, he suggests to study similar mechanisms across seemingly ‘incomparable’ events such as street protests, advocacy campaigns, and other collective actions.

In conclusion, the new transnationalism emphasizes the role of ideas in politics, but needs to be carefully distinguished from constructivism. The new transnationalist scholarship focuses attention on transnational actors and trends, but does not dictate a constructivist theoretical approach. Indeed, it invites the application of a diverse range of methodologies and theories that are often combined to explain the empirical puzzles it raises.

**Applying comparative methods to the global realm**

The new transnationalism challenges the separation of domestic and international politics in ways that have the potential to reshape comparative politics research. Transnationalists not only describe the significance of non-state actors and international institutions but also re-conceptualize the state as a transnational entity. International institutions and non-governmental organizations have proven their ability to set global agendas on issues including debt relief, landmines, the International Criminal Court, and women’s rights. In many cases, government officials have become part of new transnational elites. Such developments have challenged the
exclusive claim of states to represent a given territory and population in international politics. Within the nation state, the domestic authority of governments increasingly competes with the sustained claims of external actors to promote objectives such as democratic governance, human rights, or environmental protection. Understanding the intentional and unintentional results of these interventions requires a comparative perspective still only sparsely present in the transnationalist literature.

Comparative politics scholars have three options in responding to the challenges of transnational politics. First, they can choose to ignore this literature and question the long-term significance of transnational relations for domestic change. In reaction to the globalization literature, some scholars have downplayed the impact of external processes and assumed the continued autonomy of state power. Much of this response may be based on the premise that comparative politics lives and dies with the autonomous nation state. Thus, comparativists may feel bound to point out that domestic politics matters. A second response to the new transnationalist literature would be to recognize these influences in a more passive way and include them into our research as ‘intervening variables’ and non-permanent ‘external shocks.’ While this opens up the field to recognizing global politics as a significant force, it still shies away from embracing the potential of merging comparative politics and international relations.

A third response would be to view the insights of the new transnationalism as a major opportunity for comparative politics. Thus, the greatest gain for comparative politics and international relations scholars alike would be a full integration of insights from the study of transnational politics. This means that international factors would not be treated any longer as ‘external’ to more traditional domestic and institutional explanations, but rather as co-determining forces operating at a complementary level of governance. Such a move would
enable a more accurate account of politics in many areas and also allow comparativists to expand their reach into the global realm. Comparative politics tools could be applied easily to the study of a new set of institutions, such as transnational networks and international organizations and their interactions with domestic politics.

Comparative politics has much to offer the new transnationalist literature as well. We conclude the review by discussing two areas where comparative politics methods and theories are particularly relevant in advancing the new transnationalism: understanding the role of transnational actors in influencing domestic politics and exploring the ‘domestic politics’ of international institutions and non-state actors.

While international relations scholars have made the domestic effects of international institutions a central concern of their research, this scholarship frequently lacks the empirical richness of comparative approaches. Typically, studies merely claim certain domestic effects or focus on the formal adoption of diffusing policies without necessarily investigating more complex questions of implementation and compliance. However, scholars have diagnosed a significant gap between the formal ratification of international treaties and a continued norm-violating behavior of governments. Comparative politics scholarship can help to explain variations in the impact of transnational actors, institutions, and norms, drawing on far more sophisticated analysis of national and local politics.

Some of this work has already begun. One powerful example of joint efforts between international relations and comparative politics scholars is the study of local responses to transnational efforts promoting human rights and democracy. The democratization literature increasingly recognizes the role of transnational factors in shaping transition and consolidation processes. In Europe, human rights and democracy have become criteria for accession to the
European Union, while members themselves are subject to increasing supranational influences and transnational elite networking. The literature on multilevel governance in Europe similarly has emphasized the ways that governance transcends national and local boundaries. While the European context is unique for its level of supranational governance and extent of transnational networks, other regions also show signs of the increasing role of regional and global institutions in promoting norms of supranational and democratic governance. Advancing knowledge in this area would not be possible without the contributions of comparative politics.

Comparative politics research has also contributed to the study of norms and ideas by tracing their role in shaping in such unlikely areas as economic policy. Comparative politics scholars have also drawn on insights from sociological institutionalism and the new transnationalism to develop a growing literature on policy diffusion, which traces the transnational spread of similar policies among widely disparate countries. Comparativists have an edge in these debates because they have focused on the domestic realm as the primary area of contestation about regime change. Research should particularly focus on the mechanisms which connect transnational and domestic actors.

The second area where comparative politics research can push forward the agenda of the new transnationalism is in studies of the ‘domestic politics’ of transnational organizations themselves. Transnational governmental and non-governmental organizations remain ‘black boxes’ in much of the new transnationalist scholarship. While scholars have studied the power of norms, the effectiveness of non-governmental tactics and strategies, and causes for the success of transnational actor agendas, they have yet to fully explore the internal make-up of transnational actors. Barnett and Finnemore’s study offers significant insights into the preference and identity formation of non state actors; it defies the still dominant logic of
portraying them as unitary and principled. Just as comparative politics scholars have unpacked the black box of the state, they also have an edge in doing the same for international governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Some contributions along these lines have already been made. One thriving area of comparative research is the policy network literature, which has long documented the relevance of horizontal networks within nominally hierarchical structures. While these scholars rarely look beyond the nation state, they take seriously that “[m]odern governance is characterized by decision systems in which territorial and functional differentiation disaggregate effective problem-solving capacity into a collection of sub-systems of actors…” including state and non-state actors. The idea of ‘advocacy coalitions’ initially emerged within the policy network literature and has only later been adopted by international relations scholars interested in describing transnational activism.

Bringing the new transnationalism and the policy networks literature closer together suggests more comparative designs investigating networks across states and issue areas. While networks are still largely used as a metaphor in the transnationalist literature, future research may compare the quantity of networks and the quality of internal exchanges. Mapping those networks provides an important basis for understanding variation across issue areas and regions. Comparative scholarship will be crucial to disaggregating those collective actors in order to explain variation in their preferences, actions and external effects.

The world described in the new literature on transnational actors and politics offers ample opportunities for comparativists to extend their tools to the global realm. While states remain a powerful source of collective agency, intergovernmental and transnational non-governmental organizations add significant variance to the questions of who governs and what rules of
governance prevail. It may be the time for comparative politics to embrace and incorporate the insights of the new transnationalism and continue the transformation of the field into a science of comparative global and transnational politics at multiple levels of governance.

Notes


21 Keck and Sikkink, "Activists Beyond Borders."

22 See also Jennifer Mitzen, "Reading Habermas in Anarchy: Multilateral Diplomacy and Global Public Spheres," *American Political Science Review*, 99 (2005), 401-419.


26 Keck and Sikkink, “Activists Beyond Borders.”


38 For a similar call to disaggregate non-state actors, see Kate O'Neill, Jörg Balsiger, and Stacy D. VanDeveer, "Actors, Norms, and Impact: Recent International Cooperation Theory and the

