

UC Santa Barbara

Journal of Transnational American Studies

Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4xp9v8q9>

Journal

Journal of Transnational American Studies, 12(2)

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Publication Date

2021

DOI

10.5070/T812255975

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Introduction: The Progress of Transnational American Studies Collaboration

ALFRED HORNUNG

When Shelley Fisher Fishkin launched the Transnational American Studies idea as president of the ASA in Atlanta in 2004, it was welcomed and embraced especially by international members of the Association and enhanced the cooperation with their American colleagues and exchange partners. Seventeen years after the start of Shelley's idea and its fruitful pursuit since 2009 in the *Journal of Transnational American Studies* we know that the field of American Studies has changed substantially by putting the transnational rather than the national at the center of investigations. One of the motivations for this new transnational direction of American Studies was the growing contribution of non-American Americanists worldwide to the American research agenda and the recognition of their fields of expertise in a changed research environment in which collaboration would be most promising for gaining new insights.

This new issue of *The Journal of Transnational American Studies* is a very effective demonstration of transnational collaboration and its progress. No doubt, Shelley Fisher Fishkin's long-time occupation with the worldwide acceptance of Mark Twain and his work has inspired her move from the national to the transnational, reflected in her acclaimed publications and collaboration with non-American Twain scholars. In her lead article in *The Routledge Companion to Transnational American Studies*, she relates the history of her "Collaboration in Transnational American Studies" from 2005 on.¹ The Special Forum on "[Global Huck: Mapping the Cultural Work of Translations of Mark Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn](#)" in this issue, coedited with colleagues from four different countries, Tsuyoshi Ishihara from Japan, Ronald Jenn from France, Holger Kersten from Germany, and Selina Lai-Henderson from China, together with contributions from scholars in nine world regions on four continents, is a major statement on the progress of collaboration in Transnational American Studies. The focus of these articles on Mark Twain's major novel and its

translation (histories) in Iran, France, the Arab world, Germany, Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, Brazil, Spain, India, and Taiwan not only extends the analytic frame of reference from the United States to other national and cultural locations and time frames but also has to cope with different registers in translating vernacular language and navigating the exigencies of politically correct speech. The emergence of Hannibal, Missouri, and the Mississippi River in different locations and different political as well as cultural climates presents new issues for interpretation, extending Twain's message about racism and the North–South dichotomy to the rest of the world. Over and above relevant issues of the novel, the articles contribute greatly to the ever-increasing importance of translation studies and the relevance of languages other than English in world literature.

Different disciplinary registers apply to the selection of chapters in the [Forward](#) section which its editor, **Jennifer A. Reimer**, prefaces with timely considerations of the transnational persistence of the Coronavirus and thoughts about the holiday mood at the turn of the year. She also invites readers to follow her four authors into interpretations of American literature, legal proceedings of human trafficking between Peru and the US, and the constitution of the archipelagic United States. The chapter from [Timo Müller](#)'s monograph on the African American sonnet is based on the transnational presence of Black writers and critics in Europe, the Soviet Union, and Africa as part of their political affiliation and emancipatory search for multiethnic acceptance. [Silvia Schultermandl](#), in turn, focuses on women writers' similar transnational connections, such as her example of Catharine Maria Sedgwick, between the United States, the Caribbean, and England and the simultaneous aesthetic alliance in the formation of the transatlantic genre of the novel of manners. Issues of migration, gender, and servitude are the subject of [Annie Isabel Fukushima](#)'s analysis of human trafficking which reveal the race and class divisions between two Peruvian women, one nationalized as American citizen in the US, the other an Indigenous woman hired as caregiver of the Americanized woman's children. Reading the legal narratives of the court case between the allegedly unequal women shows the prejudices involved in arguments and decisions. As her fourth example, Jennifer selected [Brian Russell Roberts](#)'s "Archipelagic Thinking and the Borderwaters: A US-Eccentric Vision," which forms the introduction to his new book, *Borderwaters: Amid the Archipelagic States of America* (Duke UP, 2021). Together with his introduction as the editor of the Reprise section, this chapter represents nothing less than a revolutionary decentering of national borders and continental borderlines. Shifting the continental United States from a landmass to sea borders, he redraws the boundaries of conventional American geography and aligns the nation in an archipelagic concatenation without privileging the US's position. Brian's search for "methods of decontinentalizing the future, reading archipelagic futures against the continental grain" (p. 42) involves a shift in perspective from the center to an "eccentric" position.

The interrelation of space and time, national location, and the historical period of its perception that are implicitly contained in the contributions to "Global Huck,"

are the subject of Brian Russell Roberts's introduction as editor of the [Reprise](#) section to explain the criteria for his selection of four earlier publications. The title of his magisterial introduction, amounting to an article of its own, expresses his move to the connecting bodies in the sea and his search for "methods of decontinentalizing the future": "[On Temporal Transnationalisms: The Exonational, the Decolonial Cosmogenic, the Unexceptional Human Fossil, and the Non-Earthbound.](#)" Following up on his research on *Borderwaters: Amid the Archipelagic States of America*, he examines the influence of temporal concepts of Transnational American Studies on future national affiliations, geopolitical categories, and environmental humanities. Both Wai Chee Dimock's concept of "deep time" as "temporal transnationalism across millennia" and Paul Crutzen's concept of the Anthropocene as "spatial transnationalism across borders and continents" transcend national formations and take us backward and forward in time. The selection of the four reprinted publications in *Reprise* is meant to stress a temporal transnationalism, which lends itself to project our investigations into unknown areas, including outer space. They are directed to findings in [Mark McGurl's](#) new cultural geology, in [Brandi Nālani McDougall's](#) analysis of contemporary Hawaiian literature, in poems by [Toyo Suyemoto](#) about Japanese American imprisonment, and in [Timothy James Dimacali and John Raymond Bumanglag's](#) graphic short story "Skygypsies." No doubt, new forms of fruitful collaborations open up with a vision of a transnational future outside of the familiar domains.

The collaborative effort of the Special Forum "[Global Huck](#)" also includes the collaboration of our new section editor Pia Wiegink (University of Bonn) with guest editors and contributors as well as with the copy editor. Vanessa Evans, PhD candidate at York University in Toronto, bore the main burden of copyediting and demonstrated her expertise with nine articles with different language and writing systems. We welcome her to the *JTAS* community and appreciate her commitment to our editorial work. Four Special Forum proposals have been accepted and are being prepared for publication by guest editors in the US, China, Germany, and Austria:

- The Molecular Intimacies of Empire, Hsuan L. Hsu and David Vázquez
- Teaching and Theorizing Transnational American Studies Around the Globe, Yuan Shu and Selina Lai-Henderson
- Diagnosing Migrant Experience: Medical Humanities and Transnational American Studies, Mita Banerjee and Davina Höll
- Archipelagic Spaces and (Im)mobilities, Gabriele Pizarz-Ramirez, Alexandra Ganser, Steffen Wöll, and Barbara Gföllner

We would also like to acknowledge outstanding achievements in Transnational American Studies, such as Brian Russell Roberts's work, which figures prominently in this issue, as well as the winner of this year's Shelley Fisher Fishkin Prize. The impact of Brian's innovative research and publications has been recognized worldwide, and we are happy to report that the International Association of Inter-American Studies has given the Best Article in Inter-American Studies Award for the 2018–2021 competition

to his 2020 *JTAS* article “Borderwaters: Archipelagic Geometries between Indonesia and the United States.” We congratulate Brian on receiving this prestigious award.

We would also like to acknowledge the recipients of the Shelley Fisher Fishkin Prize for the years of 2020 and 2021. This prize which the International Committee of the ASA created in honor of Shelley’s worldwide achievements—so prominent in this issue again—for International Scholarship in Transnational American Studies, is usually awarded at the annual convention. Since the last two ASA conventions in Baltimore and Puerto Rico could not take place in person due to the Coronavirus, the International Committee decided to honor the awardees of 2020 and 2021 in an online ceremony which took place on October 8, 2021. Keith Feldman, chairman of the committee, congratulated the 2021 awardee, Dr. Padraig Kirwan, Senior Lecturer, Goldsmiths, University of London, for his essay “Recognition, Resilience, and Relief: The Meaning of Gift.” Padraig Kirwan’s essay on the transatlantic bonds forged by a gift made by the Choctaw nation to the Irish during the potato famine is part of the volume *Famine Pots: The Choctaw Irish Gift Exchange 1847–Present*, edited by LeAnne Howe and Padraig Kirwan (Michigan State University Press, 2020). We look forward to including an excerpt from his work in an upcoming issue. Keith Feldman also used the ceremony to officially congratulate the previous year’s winner, Christopher B. Patterson, Assistant Professor at the Social Institute of the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. Thanks to Dr. Patterson we could reprint the chapter “Pluralism, Transition, and the Anglophone” from his book *Transitive Cultures: Anglo-phone Literature of the Transpacific* (Rutgers UP, 2018) in the previous issue of *JTAS*.

A final instance of collaboration is the newly established shoptalk in which members of the *JTAS* editorial team get together to share their research and give advice to young talents in Transnational American Studies. The first of these career talks took place on December 7, 2021, organized in the second editorial home of the Obama Institute for Transnational American Studies, in which Vanessa Evans (York University in Toronto), Sabine Kim (Johannes Gutenberg University and Glasgow), Selina Lai-Henderson (Duke Kunshan University in Shanghai), and Aiko Takeuchi-Demirci (Koç University in Istanbul) participated. The coordination of four different time zones on three continents in China, Turkey, the UK, and Canada again documented that *JTAS* never sleeps. Selina presented her new project on W. E. B. Du Bois in China and his meeting with Mao Zedong, Aiko took up her research on the birth control movement and spoke on age and gender, Sabine presented her new project on waste and wealth with reference to Indigenous dispossession, and Vanessa described her dissertation project on transindigenous literature and social justice. All of them also shared their experience of participating in the editorial work of *JTAS* as professional advice for the careers of graduate and postgraduate students logged into the event. We plan to continue these presentations and collaborations with other members of the editorial team.

Last but not least, I would like to thank all contributors to this very rich and fertile issue, the guest editors, the managing editorial team, and the members of the

editorial board for their valuable input and for making *JTAS* an indispensable forum for the worldwide dissemination and collaboration of Transnational American Studies scholars.

Notes

- ¹ Shelley Fisher Fishkin, "Collaboration in Transnational American Studies," in *The Routledge Companion to Transnational American Studies*, edited by Nina Morgan, Alfred Hornung, and Takayuki Tatsumi (New York: Routledge, 2019), 9–27.