

Book Review

Grant Dawson, University of Nottingham, Ningbo

WAR AND INTERVENTION IN THE TRANSNATIONAL PUBLIC SPHERE: PROBLEM-SOLVING AND EUROPEAN IDENTITY FORMATION

Author: Cathleen Kantner

Abstract

The examination of European collective identity formation and the 'transnational' are the richest contributions of this book. It also presents an impressive long-term quantitative-qualitative research method. The discussion of intervention and war is less rewarding.

Keywords

Transnational, European identity, European integration, methodology

Cathleen Kantner's book examines the debate in European newspapers about post-Cold War international crises (wars and interventions), and compares it with that of the United States. She argues that the debates took place in a transnational political community and evolved into a process of collective sense-making that shaped transnational identity-formation in Europe. Kantner traces this process by reading newspaper articles for two kinds of identity discourse – pragmatic problem-solving and ethical self-understanding. Using a comparative, quantitative-qualitative research methodology, and employing computational-linguistic tools, Kantner and her project team analyse almost half a million articles published by 'quality' newspapers in six European states over sixteen years (1990-2006). The book's contribution extends beyond its innovative research methodology, due to its significant findings. Among the most significant is that a transnational European identity is emerging (1-3, 17).

Kantner's book will interest political communication scholars and those in other fields. For example, the book addresses a methodological weakness of constructivism, a leading theory of International Relations. Constructivism struggles to show how public convictions regarding the international change over time, and in comparative perspective, but Kantner shows that the technological and methodological hurdles can be overcome (5). Her work will also excite scholars interested in research methodology, transnational history and politics, European identity and integration, and European Union 'actorness'. Despite its sub-title, however, the book is not as strong discussing wars and interventions. For example, Kantner defines intervention as actions not motivated by national self-

interest, which is a problematic assertion since the self-interest of the intervening states is almost always involved at some level. In addition, she does not engage seriously with the key debates relating to intervention, such as those which revolve around authority and sovereignty. What discussion there is does not break new ground.

In terms of placement in the scholarly literature, Kantner's book takes the middle ground on debates that have been polarized. One example concerns the potential for collective sense-making. Most constructivists stress the piecemeal character of collective learning beyond the state. The book's continuous long-term design not only made peaks in the media debate on wars and intervention distinguishable, it also showed that debate-driven identity-formation processes emerged in Europe and that transnational mass political communication occurred within Europe and between Europe and the United States. (5, 147-48). A second example concerns political communication. Kantner is less strident than those working on global public spheres, who see potential for transnational democracy, and less sceptical than those who see little hope of transcending bounded national polities (149-50).

Kantner spends a lot of time explaining her theoretical framework, terms, and methodology before getting to the empirical research results in the second-last chapter. The introduction does a good job laying-out the design of the book, and the project on which the book is based. The project received major European funding and had about twenty-five researchers and student assistants involved at one point or another. Chapter two discusses the identity discourses that are tracked through the media database, and distinguishes between 'ordinary wars' and 'humanitarian military interventions'. Chapter three covers the methodological decisions and steps used to code and analyze the database. The empirical findings are, as mentioned, in chapter four, and chapter five sums-up and highlights the most surprising findings and larger significance of the book. One of the most surprising according to Kantner is that Europe is presented somewhat more as an ethical community than as a problem-solving community. This was not expected, for, with Jürgen Habermas, she believes that political communities most often resemble problem-solving communities, and that this is enough for political integration.

We see how this works in the discussion of European identity, which is among the richest and most interesting in the book. Kantner notes that most of the sample countries did not show a pronounced upwards trend in European identity expressions (the exception was France). However, expressions of shared identity were prominent and increased in frequency in articles referring somehow to Europe (153). Identity formation was not a steady process, but one of varying intensity that depended on the density of political interaction and interdependence on a given crisis. European identity expressions were highest on the most controversial and intensively debated crises, such as the Kosovo intervention of 1999 (153).

Kantner's understanding of the 'transnational' also merits attention. Scholars in a variety of disciplines are making use of this as yet vaguely-defined perspective. Kantner argues that the 'transnational' in transnational political communication should be seen as intertwined communication in national media (146). Transnational political communication emerges around transnational interdependent issues, which are debated at the same time using similar framing. However, the people involved do not have to express the same opinions. They do not have to be reading the same media articles, or speaking the same languages, for the political communication to be transnational (6, 10). For Kantner, transnationalism is a synchronous process of reaching shared interpretations on common problems, one that is leading to hybrid European-national forms of identity in Europe (17).

This transnational perspective potentially has broader applicability beyond Kantner's book. For example, surely there have been other instances of synchronously debated social ideas and forces forming transnational political communities. Perhaps even more diverse sets of actors than in Europe, having arrived at a common understanding through transnational political communication, developed shared interests and identities that enabled them to move forward on an international problem. In any case, though the book devotes too much space to theory and methodology, as compared to the empirical sections, and does not add to the literature on civil wars and interventions, it is still excellent value. War and intervention in the Transnational Public Sphere is well written and accessible to those outside its target European studies and political communications fields. Readers, especially those interested in European identity, transnationalism and innovative methodologies will find Kantner's book rewarding.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

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Author: Cathleen Kantner

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