

Governance and Democracy Across Borders

Victoria, B.C., Canada
October 25, 2012

Adrian Hartrick – Rapporteur
November 8, 2012

Executive Summary

On October 25, 2012, the [University of Victoria Center for Global studies](#) brought together a group of 38 scholars, activists, and students for a conference and workshop entitled “Governance and Democracy Across Borders.” The aim of the conference was to address the rapidly changing role and nature of borders, boundaries, and democracy in our world. Underpinning the conference was the assumption that the changes in the world in terms of borders and governance, as they relate to technology, resource scarcity, political revolutions, and political ideas are challenging our traditional paradigms, boundaries and perceptions of these issues.

The conference was comprised of three panel discussions and a keynote presentation by [Dr. Hamid Dabashi](#), Hagop Kevorkian professor of Iranian studies and comparative literature from [Columbia University](#). The titles of the three panel discussions were: “Borderless World-or is it?: Social Media and Web 2.0/3.0”; “Ecological Borders or Interdependent Earth?”; and “Borders and Boundary Crossing: The Dynamics of Borderlands/Border Crossing and Transnational Governance.” Dr. Dabashi’s Keynote While the subjects discussed in these presentations covered a wide range of topics related to governance and democracy across borders, they converged on three key points:

1. The significance, relevance, and use of traditional borders and boundaries, both physical and imagined, are in serious need of reconsideration and reconceptualization.
- 2.

epistemological boundaries concerning world politics, and therefore “we are at the ground zero of history.”

Reviewing the three panel discussions and the keynote presentation the report will describe how the three key converging points of the conference were discussed in relation to each presentation.

“Borderless World-or is it?: Social Media and Web 2.0/3.0”

This discussion focused on the issues of internet privacy and cross border law enforcement in cyberspace. [Dr. Colin Bennett](#), from the [Political Science department](#) of the [University of Victoria](#) began the discussion by outlining the fact that the issue of privacy, which he argued is a common held value across all cultures and a basic foundation of democracy, is now being redefined and challenged by the expansion of cyberspace. The issue, he argued, is that the internet has created a new space, outside of the traditional boundaries and confines of world governance. Elaborating on this issue PhD candidate Chris Parsons explained how as the internet has moved from the relatively simple Web 1.0. to Web 2.0 (and now Web 3.0), major transnational privacy issues have sprung up especially around the issues of internet cookies and user-generated data. Big data companies like Google, and social media companies like Facebook are able to legally gather information about users regardless of where they are in the world. Therefore, laws surrounding information, privacy, and borders are circumvented by a new medium for which laws and governments are not prepared.

Given these developments Dr. Bennett concluded that the issue of privacy is now an economic issue, as internet gathered information has become a major marketing tool for companies and is now a highly valued commodity. Also, and more fundamentally, the issue of internet privacy has become a sovereignty issue and is challenging the notion of traditional transnational borders and boundaries as governments and companies are able to gather unprecedented levels of information on citizens of any country and use that information for a variety of purposes.

Picking up on inadequate governance and law enforcement implications, PhD candidate Adam Molnar emphasized that legal institutions and governments are severely behind the development of technology. While the internet has provided new opportunities for effective law enforcement, it also poses new challenges. As Dr. Bennett pointed out, states are much older than the internet, and are now having to adapt to a new medium that is challenging their traditional organs of power. Molnar described how social media has give

poses legal dilemmas about how such information can be used in the law enforcement context. Furthermore, collecting information is one thing, but analyzing and using it is an even greater issue. It is also an issue in which there is no clear legal protocol or jurisdictional definition both nationally (in Canada) and internationally. In summary Molnar emphasized the tripartite struggle between users who are sensitive about the use of their information, law enforcement agencies who either want or to restrict the use of this information, and social media companies who control the information and are

In a similar vein, [Oliver Brandes](#), Co-Director of the [POLIS Project on Ecological Governance](#), declared that managing water resources at the watershed (the water source) level, rather than within given state borders, is the only sustainable solution to transnational water resource management.

Panel members agreed that the solution to ecological governance problems require a reconceptualization of how these issues are dealt with in a trans-boundary sense. Cooperation and regional solutions, rather than individual state solutions are mandatory. Steve Lonergan made the point that the old adage “whisky is for drinking, water is for fighting” is a largely “Hollywood” idea which is generally untrue; there has actually been much more cooperation than fighting over water in history. The emphasis on

region. In this sense, the idea of an “Islamist winter” is reductionist and draws a false geography about the events taking place. Saying that the events are inherently inter-related because of cultural and geographical similarities does not tell the whole story.

Dr. Hamid Dabashi replied to these ideas by stating that we must dispose of our “linear” and traditional ways of categorizing these events. He argued that while the “Arab Spring” was happening in the Middle East, there were similar movements in Sub-Saharan Africa, which went unnoticed because they were not classified as “Arab.” He emphasized that at the same time the Middle East revolutions were happening, the occupy movement was gathering steam in North America, the Quebec student protests were happening, and the economic protests in Greece and Spain were occurring. Therefore, we must dispose of the East/West, Middle East/Europe binary when we draw intellectual borders around these phenomena. These events are happening at the same time in parallel, not in a linear one-after-the-other succession.

Inadequate Governance and Democratic Transition

When examining the progress made in democratic transitions in the past thirty years, the panel concluded that inadequate and failing governance was a consistent problem. [Dr. Michelle Bonner](#), a Latin American studies specialist from the University of Victoria’s Political Science department discussed how more people have been killed in Brazil in police related violence in the post-dictatorship period than during the dictatorship period. She noted that across Latin America, despotic dictatorships have been replaced by corrupt neo-liberal regimes, which have had free, fair, and competitive elections, but still reinforce and exacerbate problems of corruption, inequality and violence. Along with this, neo-liberal spending policies have lead to underfunded judiciaries, which have lead to increased vigilantism when dealing with crime and thus increased criminality and lawlessness. So-called democratic governments have exploited the fear of crime to justify heavy-handed police measures and trample basic citizenship rights. Furthermore, Dr. Bonner pointed out that the concept of the citizen in many post-dictatorial Latin American societies has become based on the idea of the citizen as a consumer. That is, your value as a citizen is based on your ability to spend money in the economy; if you cannot afford to spend you have no value and thus no rights.

[Dr. Oliver Schmidke](#), the [Centre for Global Studies](#) interim director and European studies specialist from the University of Victoria’s Political Science department, also discussed how post-communist governments in Central and Eastern Europe have been far from adequate in the transition to democracy and that we must dispel the notion that the changes in Europe were overnight successes. He discussed how in many ways they were not

even full revolutions; much of the communist elite maintained positions of power and readily adapted to “govern” in the post-communist era. Also, the changes in many of these countries have brought with them increased inequality and deep-rooted corruption. Dr. Schmidke fundamentally argued that elections don’t make democracy, and that the transitions in Europe were not

1(ed)4(p)Mm 0.002 Tw -1(9 -h12 90 0Bows i4(os)390 0gc T84 -1.2 Tds(t)-2(r)3(o10(E87(os)e
.5(l)1

Ultimately Bunton, Dabashi, Bonner, and Schmidke all argued, in their own ways, that we must not think of revolution as a short and absolute event. As this comparative discussion presented, revolutions are ongoing, continuous, and open-ended.

Keynote Presentation: Dr Hamid Dabashi: “...and the Pursuit of Public Happiness: Thinking with Hannah Arendt on the Arab Revolutions.”

The conclusion of the “Borders and Boundaries” panel, that revolutions are long lasting and continuous, set the stage for [Dr. Hamid Dabashi's](#) keynote speech. Dr. Dabashi's speech tied together many of the issues discussed throughout the day, including perceptions of boundaries, revolutions, and democracy. Using Hannah Arendt's work *On Revolution* as his theoretical backing, and the Egyptian revolution as his example he expanded on his “ground-zero” idea and explained how our very preconceptions about revolution, democracy, and boundaries (both real and imagined) are being challenged by the changes taking place in the world.

Before delving into the Arab revolutions, Dr. Dabashi, in a similar vein to Dr. Bunton, called into question the words “Arab” and “Revolution.” He asserted that although it is necessary to name the phenomenon, and there are some important relationships between the various revolutions in the Arab world, we must be careful when using them. This is because the words “Arab”, and “Muslim” cover an extremely diverse spectrum of people, “from the fat Kuwaiti Sheikh watching his cholesterol in a French restaurant, to the Algerian bus boy washing his dishes in the same restaurant.” Furthermore, as he mentioned earlier in the day, by using the term “Arab” we are discounting other social movements and changes taking place elsewhere in the world that are equally important. Additionally, the word “Revolution” implies the complete dismantling of a regime in order to bring about change. Dabashi argued that we must be careful with this word because it does not necessarily describe every event that is taking place. He asserted that the 2009 Green Movement in Iran was not a revolution (nor is Iran an Arab country), but instead a civil rights movement whose key demands were basic civil liberties and political rights, not the complete dismantling of the Iranian regime.

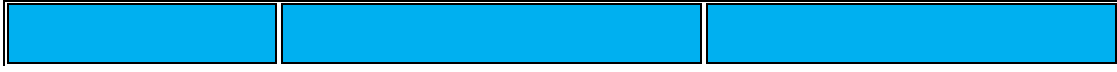
Egyptian Revolution and which are necessary for us to reconceptualize revolutions in general. The first was the cosmopol, or the collective consciousness of the people. The second was Kamp, which is the complete opposite of cosmopol; the idea of the “naked man.” The third is the idea of Tahrir Square (the physical focal point of the Egyptian revolution), which is the public domain in which people practice their political freedom and rediscover the cosmopol. Dabashi explained that it is the strategy of a police state to control its people by defusing the cosmopol and driving barriers between citizens. In this context, Tahrir then becomes the public sphere where citizens rediscover their collective consciousness, or cosmopol. According to Dabashi, it is this unifying, energizing factor of the cosmopol which is the essence of a revolution. Dabashi applied th-4(p-8(u)n4(pr)-5(ha)-8(s)-1(rm)-1(4(s)

Responses to Dr. Dabashi's Presentation

In response to Dabashi's conclusions, [Dr. Andrew Wender](#), from the University of Victoria's Political Science and History Departments agreed with Dr. Dabashi and elaborated on some points. Essentially he agreed that

Abbott, Clint	Centre for Global Studies	cabbott@uvic.ca
Anastasiou, Michaelangelo	Pacific and Asian Studies	anastasiouma@gmail.com
Baavand, Kaveh	Student, Department of Political Science & History	baavand@hotmail.com

Baltutis, Jesse
 Researcher & Water Policy and
 Governance Project Coordinator,
 POLIS Project on Ecological
 Governance, Water Sustainability(G)1(c)



Lonergan, Steve

Professor Emeritus, Department of
Geography