

“New Geographies, New Pedagogies: Revitalizing Area Studies through Doctoral Research Training in Global Ethnography”

*TRANSNATIONALISM AND DIASPORA IN CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCACUS*

**Previous “New Geographies” Project – “Central Asia Palimpsest: Reemerging Identities and New Global Imprints”**

In 1999, the “Central Asia Palimpsest: Reemerging Identities and New Global Imprints” program began exploring current developments in Central Asia area studies. In particular, as the Soviet layer was stripped piecemeal from the geography of Central Asia, the program began to inquire into how area studies would be effected by the reemergence of long-submerged, local identities and how might these identities might be revised by transnational and globalizing pressures?

Through attention to area-based loci of issues, the “Palimpsest” program attempted to assess whether the array of area studies generally found in the Western academy sufficiently attends to the particularity of the new Central Asia. And using Central Asia as a model, the program considered ways in which area studies pedagogy can adapt to the supersession of regional considerations by transnational and globalizing forces.

**Activities funded under the “Palimpsest” program**

The “New Geographies” grant awarded in 1999 enabled the organization of a doctoral seminar in Spring, 2000, entitled “Rethinking Central Asia” and a workshop among various Berkeley area studies centers and departments, both of which explored programs that currently engage in scholarship pertaining to Central Asia and those that might bring a new trans-regional perspective to Central Asia pedagogy. In addition, in 2000-2001, several

visiting scholars were invited to take part in intensive exchanges with Berkeley scholars and with students in the doctoral seminar.

In April 2001, funding from the grant made possible an international symposium which brought together scholars from Central Asia and from U.S. and international area studies programs whose work bears directly on Central Asia, to join scholars who work in relatively recently developed modes (e.g. post-Soviet studies, diasporic identities, media and globalization) which address issues pertinent to the newly reconstituted Central Asia.

**New Program: “Transnationalism and Diaspora in Central Asia and the Caucasus”**

The previous proposal looked at newly independent Central Asia in the aftermath of the demise of the Soviet Union. It sought to recognize new or reemerging identities in the region and how this (re)emergence forged new ties within the region and to regions surrounding it.

The program seeks to go much further in examining how these newly found identities were and are being shaped. In particular, the program will explore the roles diaspora communities play in the (re)emergence of identities in Central Asia. How do they influence politics and policies concerning the region? Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, a number of linkages have been established between the newly independent states and diaspora ethnic groups.

These are groups whose loyalties may lie both in their countries of residence and in the countries that are considered the homeland of a distinct ethnocultural nation.

For example, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, millions of Russians were living on non-Russian territory. In order to maintain their social and economic positions in the new republics, they have been striving to play a significant part in Russian politics towards the region, as well as in local and inter-regional politics.

In particular, the Russian diaspora in Central Asia became instrumental in defining “Russia” as an ethnic homeland which transgressed political boundaries, which in turn legitimized Russia’s continued engagement with the internal and external affairs of the newly independent states.

Kazakhstan provides an example of a different transnational phenomenon. It was the only Soviet Central Asia State which had a majority Russian population. During the Post-Soviet transition, the new Kazakh government looked to Kazakh communities abroad, hoping to entice them to return to create a majority Kazakh state. Links were formed with Kazakh communities in China, Russia, Turkey and Iran, and policies were established to encourage return to an identified “homeland”.

In this context, the program on “Diasporas” will address the following issues, among others:

- What inter-regional and global diaspora communities exist with regard to Central Asia and the Caucasus?
- How are these groups affecting policies in their host nations with regard to their “home” regions?
- What impact do they have on policies within the home regions?
- Which diaspora groups have been successful in exerting political pressure and why? Which have been unsuccessful?
- What roles have diaspora communities played in regional ethnic conflicts?
- To what extent have new information technologies played a role in shaping policies and politics of, and toward, the region?

- How have diasporas necessitated new approaches to notions of “regions” and how might area studies be reconfigured by these internal and external pressures?

Specific activities to date supported by the current Ford Foundation grant include an international conference titled “Currents, Cross-Currents and Conflict: Transnationalism and Diaspora in Central Asia and the Caucasus” (March 16-17, 2002), as well as a number of visiting scholars and lecturers to UC Berkeley.

Program Supported by:

Department of Near Eastern Studies

Institute for Slavic, East European Studies, and Eurasian Studies

The Caucasus and Central Asia Program