The transparency syndrome in global change: A sociological concept paper

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Introduction: the focus on transparency

This paper presents a sociological framework for the analysis of a contemporary phenomenon of particular importance in global as well as local change. It is the rapid spread of "transparency," i.e. of expectations for centers of power to disclose information about themselves and their actions to citizens, clients, or customers, in fact to publics at large. In many cultures such disclosure is radically new and contested. It can trigger changes of institutional practices and relationships. Transparency is a global phenomenon of the information technology era: it is nearly worldwide in scope and, increasingly, serves as a legitimating strategy for transnational and global centers of power. It is also a local phenomenon – it affects local politics, business practices, or environmental risks. Under certain conditions, it is likely to bring about cultural and political change of great magnitude.

The approach taken in this paper is deliberately wide in scope and cuts across the major dimensions of global change in order to create a coherent framework for a comprehensive knowledge synthesis on the transparency phenomenon. While there is already an important and growing research literature on transparency, this conceptual framework defines the multiple domains of the field and suggests hypotheses in urgent need of further work. Our own ongoing and continuing study of transparency has at its core a program of expert interviews conducted in the European Union, China, Japan, and the United States.

While transparency has a history going back to the Protestant reformation movements and the democratic revolutions of the 18th century, its current ascendancy is much broader in scope than its earlier manifestations and its spread is faster by far. Many more publications about transparency have appeared in the last decade than in all previous decades.[1] The global financial crises of the recent past have focused the attention of international organizations like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank on the need for good governance and political as well as financial transparency.[2] The efforts to curb bribery and international crime, especially the strategies to fight money laundering have further increased the current interest in disclosure as public policy.[3] The European Union is currently making a comprehensive effort to improve European governance. Transparency is a key, pervasive element in this strategy.[4]

Transparency is a counter-value to secrecy, although these competing values often have to co-exist. It limits concealment. It is also necessarily inclusive in social scope, while secrecy is exclusive. Classical sociology has considered secrecy and loyalty as a necessary element in the construction of social actors capable of pursuing calculated strategies both in cooperation and conflict. The seminal statement on this theme is Georg Simmel's work on "Knowledge, Truth, and Falsehood in Human Relations."[5] It begins with the simple statement "Obviously, all relations which people have to one another are based on their knowing something about one another. The merchant knows that his correspondent wants to buy at the lowest possible price, and to sell at the highest possible price. The teacher knows that he can tax the student with a certain kind and amount of learning ... Without such knowledge, evidently, these and many other kinds of interaction could not take place at all."[6] On that beginning Simmel builds his subtle and complex argument on the necessity of discretion and secrecy for social life. He examines how the patterns of "knowledge, truth and falsehood" in social interactions (i.e. information norms in action) shape the very core of social structures and of solidarities. Indeed, he sees the conceptions

of personal rights and of property as embedded in these patterns. We follow Simmel in the conviction that changes in norms for information disclosure among actors, especially among power centers and between them and their publics, are likely to have significant consequences. The transparency phenomenon is in need of sociological attention.

Conceptions of globalization

Before we turn to the specific focus on transparency, however, we need to place the analysis into the context of our current understanding of global change. There is a very large literature with a bewilderingly colorful array of perspectives on "globalization." The term is used in a great variety of ways, often simply referring to only the economic dimension of global interdependence, and frequently charged with strong feelings about its positive or negative consequences. By contrast, the concept "globalization" as we use it, refers to the expansion of the human population and activity across the planet. It is a process that has deep historical roots over thousands of years. This history has recently been the subject of several scholarly works. Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel*, Robert P. Clark's *Global Life Systems: Population, Food and Disease in the Process of Globalization* and Robert Wright's *Nonzero: The Logic of Human Destiny* together present a new perspective on the history of globalization.[7] It was an initially slow process of migration, extending human activity from region to region and ultimately across the globe. A significant acceleration began about five hundred years ago with European explorations and expansionism. Globalization has since moved through several stages and epochs.[8] Transition eras between historical epochs have been especially turbulent. This was certainly true of the Industrial Revolution and the epoch of modernity. The end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries saw the arrival of a new constellation: the Global Era. Martin Albrow has discussed the nature of this epochal shift well in his book *The Global Age: State and Society Beyond Modernity*.[9]

However, the most thorough, balanced, and empirically grounded assessment of the state of knowledge about the current phase of globalization is the cooperative work of four scholars, David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt, and Jonathan Perraton in their book *Global Transformations*.[10] They are careful to distance themselves from the "hyperglobalist" thesis that traditional nation states become impossible in the global era, as well as from the "millennium" thesis that current economic globalization is nothing historically new. Instead they build on the "transformationalist" thesis. It is the "conviction that, at the dawn of a new millennium, globalization is a central driving force behind the rapid social, political and economic changes that are reshaping modern societies and world order ... Transformational accounts emphasize globalization as a long-term historical process which is inscribed with contradictions and which is significantly shaped by conjunctural factors."[11] They create and use a carefully defined analytical framework for their comparative study of globalization. It emphasizes an understanding that global change consists of a set of multiple processes and emerging structures that intersect in complex and not predetermined ways. The focus of this concept paper is on one of the complex processes not explicitly addressed by Held, McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton: Transparency.

In the conclusion of their work, Held et al. arrive at several normative challenges for "civilizing and democratizing globalization" with which we strongly agree. The study of transparency can contribute to the factual basis for such thinking about the need to "civilize" the tumult of global change.[12] There is now a growing awareness of the fact that the planet Earth is the unique and only habitat of all humanity. This fact in itself has important ethical implications, although there is much debate about just exactly what this means.[13]

Domains of globalization and transparency

There are several different currents in globalization with a direct effect on the transparency phenomenon. It is useful to identify them here.[14] They range from political, military, economic and technological to environmental and finally to historical globalization. We begin with **political globalization**, i.e. the extension of politics beyond national and even regional boundaries to deal with global issues that often are simultaneously matters of significant local concerns. Nation states have, almost without exception, become enmeshed with transnational and often global networks that are essential for their state functions. We can thus speak of the internationalization of normal state functions such as even the collection of taxes or the protection of public health and the environment. They now require the establishment of well-regulated cooperative networks among states. There are many other state functions, such as the protection of property rights that are being internationalized. The global fight against international crime is a further example of requiring the internationalization of a state function that goes far beyond the occasional ad hoc cooperation of police forces.

Many local issues are closely connected to global concerns and global actors. Scholars have invented a number of artificial terms for the resulting phenomena: Roland Robertson spoke of "glocalization" and James N. Rosenau created the term "fragmegration" for the paradox that certain issues require global integration as well as political fragmentation at the same time.[15] We are not especially fond of such terms, even though they point to important new phenomena. The fact is that globalization is now in a phase in which a domain of global politics has appeared as a reality not only for states and their governments, but for communities, many corporations, civic organizations and for individuals. This means that the demands for publicly accessible information (and the supply!) are rising

A major part of transnational political globalization concerns the **legitimacy of transnational and supranational authorities.** Most people probably believe that the European Union is the only political entity that has legally defined supranational powers over its member states. It is true that it has these powers, and it is also true that today there is a vigorous debate in the European Union about the nature of a future European Constitution. It is an interesting fact that, while there are certainly important disagreements as to the content of such a constitution, there is now a European consensus that a Constitution is needed. However, there are other global institutions with specialized and limited powers that wield de facto supranational authority. In many cases they were established as a result of or support by American foreign policy initiatives. For example, the World Trade Organization (WTO) was established in 1994 as a permanent institution with real powers to oversee trade agreements, enforce rules, and settle disputes. The World Bank was not designed as a supranational, but an international authority, but, in fact, it certainly wields such power over developing countries that seek to borrow from it. Transparency is what these agencies asked of others for some time. Recently, as a result of criticism, it has emerged as a favored strategy of such institutions and authorities to build their legitimacy. International organizations have learned much about the needs for disclosure among each other, with states, and civil society. As a consequence transparency is an essential, if contested ingredient in this domain.

There is a fact of **military globalization**, i.e. the emergence of a global set of competing and conflicting, but interconnected structures in military affairs. It involves, among other things,

the global arms industry, the trade in weapons, and massive efforts at surveillance and intelligence gathering. Military globalization has affected transparency as well as secrecy in at times paradoxical ways. While secrecy is inevitably a hallmark of this domain, it has also spawned efforts at transparency, for example in the context of disarmament treaties that require international or mutual surveillance. Certainly, military interests have played a major role in the advance of information and surveillance technology. Both the Internet and the emerging satellite information technologies had military origins, and continue to be of great military as well of civilian significance.

An unfortunate development related to military globalization is the **globalization of terror.** Terrorism itself is not a new phenomenon in world history. However, the spread of military technology, the use of dangerous, but routine devices such as airplanes, cars and trucks for terror attacks, the technical empowerment of dangerous individuals to wreak havoc, have created a new and dangerous global threat. The "War against Terrorism" today inevitably blurs the lines between inter-state warfare and global surveillance and transnational police actions. Grievances of injured identity, of religious aspirations for hurting unbelievers, irredentist claims for disputed lands, resentments against oppression fuel terrorist energies in, unfortunately, many parts of the world.

Economic globalization includes trade, global finance, and corporate networks. It has undoubtedly caused some of the most visible structural changes in global relations through the opening of markets, the rise of global corporations, the relocation of entire industries, and the major efforts to create global frameworks for regulations of markets, financial transactions, and property rights and so on. This domain is a major driver of the transparency phenomenon. Economic transparency appears as a necessary basis for transactions across great geographic and cultural distances and for the regulation of the global financial system. As a consequence many international institutions such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the WTO, the World Bank and many others have pursued (limited) transparency strategies – especially in recent years in response to financial crises and legitimacy challenges.

The **globalization of information technology** is a striking phenomenon of pervasive impact on localities, organizations, individuals, and on virtually all kinds of professional activities and industrial work. The development of information technology is certainly one of the most important drivers of globalization as such. It is also responsible for the technical basis making information accessible and for reducing the costs of communications worldwide dramatically. The development of satellite-based surveillance and mapping technologies can bring about an entirely new set of challenges to what activities can be kept secret not only from government surveillance efforts, but from private inquiries as well. Attention to **environmental globalization** has grown as concerns with environmental risks have increasingly reached global dimensions. It is a highly charged political issue especially concerning the distribution of the burdens of costs among the world's nations.

Finally there are dimensions of **global dynamics affecting cultures and cultural identities**. We will discuss these in the context of historical transparency, i.e. the struggles about dealing with painful historical truths, such as war crimes, racial suppression, and genocide. These transnational and in some cases global debates on historical truth claims impinge on cultural identities and the moral stigma or the pride of nations. International critique of not only past deeds, but of national memories occurs today in a global public arena. Voluntary disclosure of past national crimes, and the adoption of factual, if painful historical accounts are the most demanding level of transparency in global change.

The role of great powers in globalization

Globalization is sometimes discussed as if it were a universal, directional process occurring by its own, anonymous dynamics. In fact, the policies of the great powers had – both in success and failure – much to do with the events of recent globalization.

● The Cold War ended with **the collapse of the Soviet Union** in the context of already rapidly unfolding globalization. As David Lockwood has shown in his book *The Destruction of the Soviet Union: A Study in Globalization*[16] the Soviet strategy of a strong, secretive, authoritarian state committed to central planning was no match for the challenges of global change.

● By contrast, **the United States** pursued an **ambivalent strategy.** Global economic integration, the original efforts toward European integration that resulted in the European Union, the creation of the World Bank and many other international institutions, and the spread of pressures for transparency have been supported by policies of the United States. The fight against international crime, the "War on Drugs," the legal prohibition of corporate bribery all are efforts that received the support of U.S. foreign policy.

In fact, globalization, including its transparency aspect, has been strongly influenced by American policies, strategic interests, military actions, technologies, and cultural influences. Nevertheless, there remains a strong commitment to national sovereignty in American politics and a tendency to act unilaterally rather than in concert with international alliances. This has surfaced in American opposition to the creation of the International Criminal Court, the ban on land mines, and in unilateral American decisions on many issues. There continues to be a great deal of ambivalence in America toward global integration and governance. Repeatedly American priority for its own national interest and sovereignty is expressed in its foreign policy. As a consequence of this ambivalence, in many parts of the world the transparency efforts of international organizations are believed to have been inspired by American imperialism.

Part of this American ambivalence derives from its history as a continental country that avoided (where possible) "foreign entanglements." Part of it may be the legacy of the Cold War. It undoubtedly strengthened the emphasis on the role of the military, on unilateral action in international affairs, and on a deep concern with the maintenance of sovereignty. This latter trait is most clearly represented by the role of the Congress (especially the Senate) in U.S. foreign policy. Fear of loss of unlimited sovereignty is deeply engrained in the Senate. At the same time, U.S. interests aim to extend democracy, the rule of law and of human rights. Further, the United States is the home of many highly active and successful organizations committed to the extension of democracy, the rule of law worldwide, the creation of global civil society and global governance. It is and remains a leader of globalization, including transparency, in spite of its ambivalence. In fact, we will encounter the concept "ambivalence" in several other domains related to the transparency phenomenon.

● **The emergence of the European Union** as an economic, political and cultural force in the world scene is a historically very recent phenomenon. The spectacular success of the integration of Europe in the second half of the 20th century, after the disasters of two World Wars in the first half, may become a source for new departures in transnational and supranational governance in other world regions. The EU is certainly a magnet of considerable power in the context of a larger Europe, with growing interests in global affairs. The value shift in the EU toward cultural diversity, transparency and cosmopolitanism, even though it remains limited by hesitation and ambivalence, is certainly a remarkable historical

development with major significance for the transparency phenomenon.

Transparency: The right to know and the duty to disclose

We now turn to the idea of "transparency" itself. It is part of the ideal of the open society and democracy. It is also one component of value systems that contain legitimate counter-values. The demand for information freedom, epitomized by the current movement toward comprehensive transparency, has a long and troubled history, often advanced by scandals. Today it bursts upon a world in global transformations, the information era and contested culture conflicts between secrecy and openness, but tilting toward information freedom. It is an era of the global spread of rights: human rights, women's rights, consumer rights, civil rights and the corresponding duties. All this occurs in the context of worldwide communication. We first turn to a brief sketch of the history of transparency, followed by a discussion of what transparency is today.

A brief glimpse of the history of transparency

The source of the values of transparency in world history may well be the Protestant reformations and their rebellions against the corruption of the Church hierarchy. Protestantism certainly was, in part, an anti-corruption drive – taking the theological center stage of its era. It also altered the ideas of the relationship between the individual and God in the direction of individual, direct responsibility. However that may have been, the modern ideas of transparency, and of the syndrome of values surrounding it, are a product of the enlightenment and of the democratic revolutions of the 18th century.

John Markoff has pointed out how the demand to make state archives publicly accessible arose in the course of the French Revolution.[17] The American constitution included the provision for a national census the results of which would be publicly available. It also required the President to report on the "State of the Union" to Congress. Clearly, the framers of the constitution were aware of the need for credible public information. At the time, the idea of public accessibility of census results or of state (or princely) archives was a radical innovation. Census results in most feudal regimes were treated as state secrets.

The Bill of Rights, enacted in 1791, is a truly remarkable document embodying the values of an open society, providing protection of citizens under law from arbitrariness by government or the judiciary. Maybe the most important part of the Bill of Rights is the First Amendment, requiring Congress not to make any law respecting the establishment of religion or limiting the freedom of speech.[18] Today the freedom of the press has become a global value and concern, often in bitter conflicts with arbitrary or totalitarian regimes. The World Press Freedom Committee has been at work for more than two decades as a global watchdog for the media, fighting for a free press everywhere.[19]

The institutionalization of requirements for government accountability appears to have progressed most rapidly in the Scandinavian countries. Sweden has a history of access to government information going back to the 18th century. It was the first to create the office of the ombudsman in the year 1809. This institution clearly is an instrument of transparency. After Sweden took the lead, it was adopted in other Scandinavian countries and then, after the 1960s, in many other countries. New Zealand acted in 1962, Britain in 1967, Israel in 1971, Portugal in 1976, the Netherlands in 1981 and Spain in 1981. Several states in the United States have established this office.[20] By 1998 the office of ombudsman had been cre-

ated in 90 countries around the world, most of them late in the 20th century.[21] Today there are 111 countries with the office of the ombudsman.[22] There is an active International Ombudsman Institute with global reach at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada providing coordination and assistance to this rising, new global profession.

Another domain of transparency is the purposeful creation of knowledge about public affairs by government-sponsored investigations. In a notable essay on "Social Knowledge and Public Policy" Robert K. Merton examined the role of commissions charged with inquiring into social conditions and problems. He began with the Royal Commissions of Inquiry in Britain and quoted Karl Marx's tribute to them: "The social statistics of Germany and the rest of Continental Western Europe are, by comparison with those of England, wretchedly compiled. But they raise the veil just enough to let us catch a glimpse of the Medusa behind it. We should be appalled at the state of things at home, if, as in England, our governments and parliaments appointed periodically commissions of inquiry into economic conditions; if these commissions were armed with the same plenary powers to get at the truth; if it was possible to find for this purpose men as competent, as free from partisanship and respect of persons as are the English factory inspectors, her medical reporters on public health, her commissioners of inquiry into the exploitation of women and children, into housing and food." (Quoted from Karl Marx, *Capital*).[23]

The concern with access to public information has increased in intensity in recent years. In 1966 the United States created the Freedom of Information Act, sponsored by Congressman John Emerson Moss of California. This law has played a major role in assuring openness in the American Government. The anti-corruption organization Transparency International was founded in the 1990s [24] and rapidly became an effective part of global civil society as a single-issue non-governmental organization.[25] It now has activities in over 100 countries worldwide.[26] Transparency International created the Corruption Perceptions Index, rating the perceived level of corruption in 90 countries. Obviously, "TI," as they call themselves, is a very young, but also very effective organization.

In fact, most of the major innovations in transparency norms occurred very recently. Transparency is a relatively new force, but one with a distinguished history linking it to the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the Democratic Revolutions, and thus to the evolution of the ideas of freedom, of human rights and most recently the idea of the right to know. It does have very distinctive cultural origins.

What is the transparency phenomenon today?

How is transparency defined? It has appeared in many distinct domains of social life and scholars often treated it as if it were limited to, say, the domain of finance, or anti-bribery efforts, or the disclosure terms of arms control treaties. A much more comprehensive view of transparency has recently emerged in political science. Ann Florini defined it in this way: "Just what is transparency? Put simply, transparency is the opposite of secrecy. Secrecy means deliberately hiding your actions; transparency means deliberately revealing them. This element of volition makes the growing acceptance of transparency much more than a resigned surrender to the technologically facilitated intrusiveness of the Information Age. Transparency is a choice, encouraged by changing attitudes about what constitutes appropriate behavior ... Transparency and secrecy are not either/or conditions. As ideals, they represent two ends of a continuum. What we are seeing now is a rapidly evolving shift of consensus among observers and actors worldwide about where states and corporations should

be on that continuum."[27]   This definition is significant in its emphasis on volition and on the cultural change involved in shifting standards of behavior.

Finel and Lord give us a broad definition for political transparency: "In our view, transparency in the political realm is a condition in which information about governmental preferences, intentions, and capabilities is made available either to the public or other outsiders. It is a condition of openness that is enhanced by any mechanism that leads to public disclosure of information, such as a free press, open government hearings, the Internet, and reporting requirements in international regimes."[28]   The emphasis on institutional mechanisms for openness appropriately broadens the concept further and embeds it in a systemic context.

James N. Rosenau adds an important dimension. As early as 1990 he saw a "nascent norm" in the increasing importance of scientific proof in knowledge claims.[29]   More recently, Rosenau wrote: "... the provision of evidence and proof goes to the heart of the transparency issue. The more effectively it can be provided, the greater will be the transparency of diplomatic claims and, thus, the greater will be the power of knowledge as a source of statecraft."[30]

Transparency and the sociology of knowledge

Transparency, of course, is not just about distributing any kind of information. It is information about action by centers of power, provided by such centers. Interested members of publics may, and indeed often do, contest the truth claims attached to such information. In fact, since transparency information matters in relation to action, there are strong incentives for affected parties to practice skepticism. Questions may well be asked about the relevance, accuracy, and indeed veracity of the truth claims made. One senior official of the European Union said to us in an interview: "The impression of transparency is that it is a straight ray of light. But: it can be simulated by a thousand mirrors ..." There are complex issues at stake. The sociology of knowledge becomes important here.[31]

A sociological definition of transparency needs to include the fact that the information communicated (disclosed) by centers of power presents a claim of credibility, of truthfulness. It further needs to acknowledge the complex, systemic processes involved in the interpretations and assessments that publics will affix to this information. There is a supply and demand side in this process: the supplied statements (disclosed data and statements of fact) may or may not meet the demand of various publics. The "truth claims" made about the disclosures may or may not convince critics and their criteria for judgment vary widely.

For example, the belief in a conspiracy to assassinate President Kennedy continues to survive in some circles in spite of the published government account to the contrary. Government assurance of the safety of fluoridation of drinking water is still distrusted by some. The science of global climate change was discounted by the Bush administration in its plan for an energy policy, creating skepticism in wide circles of the American public. In this case the issue was presented to the National Academy of Science for what we can call an "information audit," with some change in policy following that action.

In brief, transparency is about knowledge and at least potential proof. However, what publics (or parts of publics) accept as knowledge in a political context is not necessarily always what science would define as such. Even scientifically unfounded skepticism in judging information that may be resting on "revealed faith" or other firmly held but objectively erroneous convictions, is subjectively experienced as a quest for knowledge. We can now say: Transparency is a system of interaction between supply and demand for the disclosure of credible information from centers of power to interested actors and publics. What is accepted as credible depends on culturally established epistemic criteria for judging truth claims. There are some indications that scientific proof is actually rising in the rank order of these epistemic criteria.

Credible information is taken by most people to constitute knowledge, i.e. information that is trustworthy enough to take risky action on the basis of it. We repeat: people will scrutinize "truth claims" or claims for credibility in terms of their own frames of reference which may diverge greatly from the rationality and empiricism of scientific inquiry. This is one element in the idea of informational ambivalence surrounding transparency.

There is a need to investigate what the social and cultural conditions are that depress or improve the quality of transparency information disclosed and the quality of the public assessment of it. Some guidelines for such an effort can be created by drawing on the existing sociology of knowledge applications, and especially on the work of Donald T. Campbell. He tried to lay the groundwork "for a sociology of scientific validity," i.e. for the sociological study of the question: What are the social arrangements in the internal system of science that are likely to improve the validity of scientific research? Validity was Campbell's major concern. He agreed that scientific knowledge was, as a matter of course, a social construction. But social knowledge constructions may in fact be valid. Certainly they are not necessarily invalid for being the product of a social process. In Campbell's view the internal social system of science is a very special system. Its norms differ from the general human tendency to join with people who share one's own beliefs. This tendency reinforces the shared convictions of a community of believers and stifles dissent and critique. By sharp contrast, the internal social system of science is different. It is governed by norms of shared but competitive, disputatious, and skeptical inquiry. Its incentive structure actually rewards competition in inquiry, rather than conformity. The focused, disciplined quarrel of "truth seekers" occurs within the boundary of a scientific community that persists in the pursuit of focused inquiries. It is important that there be competition, but also that there be a sustained, shared focus among the "quarreling inquirers." [32]

Campbell's interest went beyond the sociology of scientific validity in his concept of the "experimenting society." It was for him a special version of the idea of a learning society, capable of improvement.[33] As we address the important issues of the quality of transparency for assessment and public debate, we also need to ask questions that go far beyond the sociology of science. Here we need to raise the question: what are the social arrangements in the publics at large that determine the quality of transparency information and of its assessments by various interested parties, i.e. the quality of public discourse?

This, indeed, is an agenda that builds on Rosenau's important observation about the rising role of evidence and proof as being at the heart of transparency. It also means that the quality, and that is the validity, reliability and relevance of the information can be assessed. It seems reasonable to state the hypothesis that in a society committed to freedom of speech, competitive critique in contentious assessment of disclosed information may improve the quality of that information (knowledge), and may improve the quality of the public assessment of it. By contrast, monopolistic control over the flow of information will have the opposite effect.

Examining the core of the transparency phenomenon from the perspective of the sociology of knowledge has led us to the beginning of a comprehensive and systemic framework, viewing the interaction of information supply and demand as a pro-

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cess involving contests about relevance and credibility. It draws our attention to the arenas of such contests, typically in the political realm. Another important aspect needs to be integrated into this picture: the roles of multiple actors and especially that of mediating structures in knowledge flows.[34] Expert panels, commissions of inquiry, interest groups and their lobbies, non-governmental organizations in civil society play significant roles in assessing information quality and relevance and can act as "translators." Further, they can act in the role of providing skeptical surveillance of the actions of centers of power. There are at times occasions for formal information "audits," as in the previously mentioned case of the appeal by the President of the United States to the National Academy of Science to provide an assessment of the state of scientific knowledge about global warming and climate change.[35]

Undoubtedly, the single most important factor in these matters is a free and competitive press and other media. A landmark in this domain in America's history with transparency was the famous case of the Pentagon Papers. Anthony Lewis devoted a column to the event for the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the day, June 13, 1971, on which *The New York Times* decided to publish the secret official history of the Vietnam War. He wrote: "Despite all the gains for democracy in the world, in many countries anyone who wants to publish truths unwelcome to the government risks suppression and criminal punishment. If Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon had had their way, that would be so in the United States, too." He described the "extraordinary legal struggle" to suppress the publication. It ended with the decision of the Supreme Court that the First Amendment and other legal doctrines protected the right to publish even secret documents. Lewis concluded his column with this statement: "Every generation has to relearn the lesson of the Pentagon Paper case. William B. Macomber, deputy under secretary of state at the time, testified for the government, saying that diplomatic disclosures might have 'irreparably damaged the chance of free government to endure.' But years later he said: 'Even though ... nothing is more important to me than the security of the United States, the First Amendment is, in another way, the security of the United States. You can't save something and take the heart out of it.' "[36]

What drives transparency?

Pressures for transparency can be observed in many domains of society in which the bases of trust are changing. "Trust at a distance" and especially across cultures often requires mechanisms other than personal acquaintance and the ties of personal or group loyalties. These factors play a strong role in the politics of "accountability" of governments to their constituents. Election campaigns have been fought on these issues. They are also important in government-to-government relations and in the relationships of international organizations with governments (and each other).[37]

Markets cannot function without at least some level of transparency. A pension fund manager, say, in Denmark, should want to know a great deal about the accounting practices and the disclosure rules under which firms in Hong Kong are operating if he is considering doing business there. It seems a reasonable hypothesis that the demand for transparency will increase the greater the cultural distance ("otherness") of the partners in financial transactions. This generates demands for standards or norms. For example, international organizations like the World Bank or the World Trade Organization encourage certain standards of transparency in financial matters. In this domain the pressures for transparency have begun to function through a worldwide network.

Consumer protection is a field of growing importance for

transparency and legislation requiring it. Labeling products to inform consumers of their actual content has become a nearly universal (even though frequently resisted) expectation. Environmental and other risks are another fertile field for transparency pressures.

The sociology of the professions has established a considerable body of knowledge about the nature of power relations in professional practice. The transparency syndrome is clearly visible in such phenomena as "informed consent" in medical practice and especially in research on human subjects.[38] There are efforts in all professions, involving the problem of creating client understanding for professional responsibilities, practices, and their limitations. The professions of accounting, management consulting, and law are all debating their rules to establish new bases of trust by means of transparency measures. Professional codes of ethics often emphasize the need for the disclosure of information. One may think of the changes in the medical profession toward transparency from the rule of concealing bad news from patients (as, for example, in previous times by keeping a diagnosis of cancer from the patient).

These trends are amplified by the political and legal burdens that can arise from disputes about risks and the liabilities for actual disasters. Recent events in the European Union about the responsibilities of governments, farmers and their organizations, veterinarians, scientists and still others for the spread of "mad cow disease" provide one set of examples. The calamitous experience of biotechnology firms with genetically modified plants, creating a deep crisis in public trust especially in Europe, is another. In both these instances the actors involved emphasize in retrospect the need for transparency that might have averted the breakdown of trust.[39]

Transparency in public matters involves a quasi-market of demand-supply interactions in knowledge about these affairs. We use the term "quasi-market" because there is no standard currency for these demand-supply interactions, the analogy for which would be a generally shared frame of reference with uniform epistemic criteria. Nevertheless, there are multiple incentives to participate in this quasi-market both for demand and supply of information. For example, transparency demands may be made:
• by publics (including media) and by other actors for accountability of governments and for providing opportunities for critique;
• by governments that international organizations and other governments be understandable to them and that decisions be made including their concerns;
• by consumers that risks associated with products be clearly and truthfully stated;
• by investors that the financial statements they receive are clear, reliably truthful and complete;
• by employees to understand and trust the leadership of their organization;
• by consumers, media for transparency of corporate behavior with regard to environment, product quality and risk, labor relations and other matters of standards of behavior.

On the supply side of transparency information, there are also incentives, for example:
• for governments to provide information themselves before it is distributed by hostile sources in contexts a government cannot control;
• for international organizations to pre-empt criticism and establish legitimacy;
• for business corporations to cultivate goodwill, enhance their reputation of responsibility and to forestall costly liability litigation;
• for investors to avoid mistakes and contests and litigation about their interactions;

- for leadership to increase their organization's flexibility, efficiency and possibly visibility.

However, there are also disincentives for the supply side of transparency. For example:
- the need for secrecy to protect national or corporate interests;
- the fear that transparency may lead to misunderstandings because of the complexity of the information;
- worry about the timing for the release of information that might cause, for example, a market panic;
- concerns about scientific uncertainty or ambiguity in the interpretation of data;
- the political preference for protecting privileged positions in society;
- vested interests in corruption and/or organized crime.

Some of these reservations about supplying transparency information may be legitimate in the view of governments and other centers of power and even their publics. Others are obviously suspect from the point of view of open, democratic societies. In open societies the quasi-market in transparency information operates in the "court of public opinion," subject to multiple sources of critique and of efforts to convince. However, it does require normative regulation by a constitutionally based legal framework. It must guarantee the freedom of speech, and define the rights for access to government and other information sources of public relevance. It must include legal sanctions for the protection of human rights.

There are several requirements for such a quasi-market to function in open societies. They include:
- effective functioning of the rule of law;
- the existence of competitive politics;
- a free, competitive press and other news media;
- the availability of competence, for example in "information audits" by such bodies as academies of science, commissions of inquiry, epistemic communities such as professions or technical and scientific expert networks, of which at least some are of international reach;
- awareness of debates and opinions in international arenas;
- a reasonably high level of education in the public.

Nevertheless, centers of power and especially governments retain great advantages. They can shift the focus of public debates, exercising normal government functions of agenda setting. They can use various techniques to protect their information, such as releasing a flood of irrelevant information, claiming the need for secrecy and many more.

In closed or even semi-closed states there cannot be such a quasi-market in transparency information at all. What is found there is something akin to a quasi black market of information in the form of rumors circumventing official propaganda. This, of course, is also a cause of the vulnerability of such states in the global information era.

Technological transparency and the shrinking realm of social opacity

A very different set of factors increasing the scope of transparency derives from technological innovations that make information available and accessible that previously did not exist or could be hidden. For example, satellite surveillance and mapping technologies create knowledge about activities on the surface of the Earth that now has become widely available even to private persons. These technologies and other surveillance devices were originally developed for military purposes, but their uses have expanded enormously. They produce changes of wide ranging consequences. Information gathering about the activities of governments, organizations, or even individuals has become vastly easier, threatening both secrecy and privacy.[40] One consequence is that surveillance

is no longer available just to governments.

In the normal functioning of advanced industrial states many transactions of daily routine are recorded. This is true of purchases and sales, of credit records, medical records, of academic attainments, driving violations, criminal records and many other things. There is a concern with the role of privacy in these matters, but the simple fact is that much more detailed information about all sorts of activity does exist today than even in the recent past.

What is known most likely can be communicated and broadcast, maybe even worldwide. The Internet is, of course, the primary factor in this development. The spread of computer networks and the ease of communication they bring about transform the general information environment drastically. Television and the worldwide reach of news broadcasting by CNN, the BBC and a few other networks bring knowledge of economic and political conditions to audiences just about anywhere. This is one of the main factors in the decrease of isolation from the external world in even remote communities. Simple isolation used to be a powerful force in maintaining power structures and loyalty ties in many cultures. It is no longer nearly as effective as it once was.

The growth of transparency norms also is likely to expand the domains about which information exists. That is, it shrinks the domain of social opacity. Transparency, of course, requires substantial infrastructures and information systems that gear into the routine transactions I mentioned above. They store such information as land values, ownership, and transfers of property, income data and tax records, health data, information on water quality and multiple other domains of potential public concern. Where these infrastructures do not exist – and that is the case in many developing countries – the realm of potential transparency is bounded by the realm of social opacity.

This is not a trivial matter since maintaining social opacity may be in the substantial material interests of privileged classes. Note that opacity is different from secrecy: the latter conceals existing information. The former refers to the effective absence of certain information (data) about social reality. For example, in societies that do not have registers for land ownership (real estate), this is a domain of social opacity. So is the domain for environmental information where such data are simply not collected. Social opacity is one of the practical limits of transparency.

There is one other such limit of transparency. It is not similar to social opacity at all. It is scientific and technological complexity and its interface with public policy and public understanding. Many science-based technological ventures have encountered grave difficulties with the challenge to build trust in the public. Nuclear energy is one example. Bioengineering may be another. Overconfidence in the manageability of all risks involved in these technologies by their protagonists led them into several public relations disasters. Science in itself can generate trust in knowledge, but it is not necessarily on a firm footing in all the risk factors involved. Building trust does require that understandings be created that address the interests and fears of stakeholders and the general public. The achievement of effective transparency in such highly technical controversies itself requires social scientific attention. Transparency norms in this domain are in formation, but this process has only just begun.[41]

The transparency syndrome

The transparency syndrome is a constellation of values. They are: transparency, secrecy, privacy, accountability, fiduciary responsibility, the rights of persons both natural and juridical, and property. These are inter-linked and often conflicting val-

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ues. We name this complex the "transparency syndrome" rather than, say, the "secrecy syndrome" because in today's cultural changes transparency is clearly in the ascendancy while secrecy, though it dominates vast institutions, is on the defensive. The boundaries among these values and their articulation and their configuration are at least partially transformed by the social and cultural changes that accompany the institutionalization of widespread transparency norms within a country and among countries. The value syndrome can be described in terms of the boundaries between, say, transparency and secrecy, by the sharpness of the articulation of these boundaries in public norms or laws, and by the relative prominence of the different value elements in the configuration of the syndrome. The structure and dynamics of the transparency syndrome can be analyzed with the help of three concepts: the notion of values and counter-values in dialectic interdependence, the idea of informational ambivalence and the concept of organized infrastructures for these values.

The transparency syndrome thus consists of inter-linked and often conflicting values. Their delineation and relations to each other, the drawing of boundaries among them are matters of disputes, conflicts, legislative debates, and judicial action. The concept of informational ambivalence refers to the tension people and communities experience, as they have to attempt the reconciliation of these values with each other in their actions about information, its flow or limitation or denial. It is a concept derived from Robert K. Merton's seminal idea of "sociological ambivalence."[42] He defined the core of this concept in this way: "In its most extended sense, sociological ambivalence refers to incompatible normative expectations incorporated in a single role of a single social status ..."[43] In an analogy, we see informational ambivalence as arising from tensions among the values and norms of the transparency syndrome.

Where value-related information is in demand, and where transparent interactions become institutionalized, social structures and norms of some kind will develop, sustaining these interactions. These are the infrastructure of the transparency syndrome. The congeries of these structures, their norms and their cultures, and the interests and incentives of the people working in them or affected by them constitute an important part of the dynamics of the syndrome. For example, when the government of Greece established the office of the Greek Ombudsman and defined its legal obligations, rights, privileges, staff and budget it did create a new force in the transparency syndrome of Greece. Similarly, when the European Union's preparation for the Euro Currency compelled the European Central Bank, the European Commission, and the central banks of the member states to introduce new transparency standards for banking systems, there occurred changes in the transparency syndrome of most member states.

The cluster of values in the transparency syndrome needs discussion and some explication. The most obvious counter-value to transparency is secrecy. Secrecy requires social boundaries and an ethic of loyalty. Its social structural embodiment is the secret society, or in governments, the "secret service" and the "intelligence establishment." Secrecy is likely to require hierarchies. Governments throughout history and continuing today love secrecy and the walls to information flows it requires. There are reasons for that: for example, complex negotiations typically have at least a secret "phase" to them. Negotiating parties often live in separate cultural domains with differences in interests and they may consider each other with suspicion. Bridging the gaps between the domains requires the skill of transcending these cultural boundaries. Making a message understandable to one side of a dispute may cause another party, receiving the same statement, to give it an unin-

tended hostile meaning. Strategic secrecy can be a crucial element in power relations. Secrecy is also risky.

As Daniel Patrick Moynihan has shown, it can protect agencies from public knowledge of their government and, in corporate errors, cause public distrust and create a climate for the formation of paranoid conspiracy ideologies. According to Moynihan, government secrecy during the Cold War in America caused great harm to the United States. Nevertheless, some valued role for secrecy remains – as Moynihan himself maintains. It is, therefore, certain that recurrent efforts will be made to limit, subvert, or distort transparency information.[44] Even in very open societies like the United States, secrecy remains a major institutional factor in life.

While secrecy, though valued and defended in some regards, is not considered an unambiguous virtue in most modern democracies, privacy is widely considered a right and indeed, a virtue. Information about private lives, about medical and personal financial records or about personal correspondence is deemed worthy of special protection. The expansion of information and surveillance technology transforms the challenges to privacy into formidable technical, political, economic and legal tasks. Privacy concerns have certainly entered the political arena almost everywhere.[45]

Privacy is so valuable because it creates a reserved space that is separate from the public domain. It rises in importance for individuals as the differentiation and specialization of social domains increase in modernity. Georg Simmel referred to it as "discretion." Erwin Scheuch puts it this way: "Differentiation leads to the specification of life spheres, and privacy as a new norm allows us to function in such an area largely regardless of what we are in other areas. We are used to a life where work and the private residences are separated, where we are able to function differently with bureaucratic organizations and a leisure group of our choice. Managing the differences between the various spheres becomes a necessary social skill. Totalitarianism is the attempt to negate this kind of differentiation by enforcing the same ultimate meaning across all life spheres."[46]

Accountability, like privacy, is widely regarded a virtue and a necessity. It involves conditional secrecy, as in the case of fiduciary responsibilities of a trustee or in the protection of property and privacy. The trustee is accountable for the responsibilities to protect the person (or legal entity) for which he or she acts. This does entail the responsibility to protect the information about and the property rights of that person. Intellectual property (as in the case of patents, for example) and business plans are examples of such rights. In fact, privacy rights and transparency of a system may well go hand in hand as these respective values are balanced with each other.

Accountability thus is a concept closely linked to transparency. It is the responsibility of actors to justify their actions, their motives, and their consequences. The idea of accountability includes the notions of "holding responsible," including in some cases being "liable" in the sense of providing remedies for damages caused. An edifice of legal concepts here has created highly differentiated institutions and norms for governments, corporate entities (legal persons), and individuals.

All of the values mentioned this far have contentious boundaries and complex relationships to each other. There are major debates in most countries as to what information should be transparently available. There are intense conflicts about what should be "classified secrets." How the boundaries of privacy should be drawn and how they should be protected is a matter of legislative debates and many professional codes of conduct. Questions as to what information may be treated as "confidential," and by whom, have been the subject matter of many court cases. How the accountability of, for example, trustees should be defined and enforced is not a simple mat-

ter, either. In fact, in the era of rapid expansion of information technology, these debates create new norms for information policy and thereby affect cultural change.

The contentiousness of these issues derives from the fact that new norms benefit some and place a burden on others. Nevertheless, there are some common denominators in the contentious growth of these aspects of information culture: distinctions that were at one time non-existent or at best implicit now become explicit and codified. Social relationships, therefore, become more rule-bound and specific. There is a need in this process to establish criteria for trust at a distance – among strangers. The international bank manager in one country needs to understand the information norms of another culture to make decisions with confidence. Therefore, institutionalization of transparency triggers a cultural change toward more explicit standards of conduct, but it also creates formal bases for trust "at a distance" among strangers.

All of these notions of values that co-define the flow of knowledge among actors affect, and often in very direct ways, the norms for social interactions, especially between the relatively powerful and those of less power. In turn the scope and boundaries of these values are shaped by what a culture considers the rights and obligations of persons. We now need to consider the very fundamental matter of the fabric of laws and cultural conventions that define the relationships between state and individuals, individuals and the public in a particular society. The inquiry into these institutions enables us to understand the structure and strength of "civil society," in a country as well as the scope of "free markets," the domain of "free speech," and the degree to which the state can claim the right to regulate the beliefs of its citizens.

At the core of these standards defining rights of persons are matters of law. Fundamental is the complex of law defining the rights of persons, both natural (individual) and juristic (such as corporate entities) in a country. This complex includes the concept of property (in the sense of ownership) since it is one major limitation to the power of the state. The institution of private property obviously underlies the concept of the "private sector," the domain of market activities. It is a legal concept that has received widely divergent definitions in different legal systems. Everywhere the notion of private property has its limits, as, for example, in the American concept of "eminent domain." However, where the institution of private property does not exist or is assailed as detrimental to the public welfare, as in the former Soviet Union, relations between individuals and the state are fundamentally different from what they are in democratic, market-based societies.

Ronald A. Brand has clarified this point in an essay comparing the role of property law in the relationship between the state and the individual.[47] He distinguishes between the "private function of property and the social function of property." On this basis he constructs "a private rights model and a social rights model of property law." The former predominates in Western market-oriented societies; the latter was the norm, for example, in the welfare states of the former Soviet domain of influence. Actually, Brand focuses here on "entitlements" to benefits provided by the state rather than the common concept of "ownership" of things. He points out that the transition from the social rights (or entitlement) model of property law to the private rights model involves a fundamental change in the relationship between persons and the state. In the social rights model all property is owned by the state, but the individual "owns" rights for work, income, housing, health care, education and so on. However, such social entitlements in fact do not define a zone of personal autonomy, but rather constitute bonds of dependency – especially in closed, authoritarian societies. The argument can be made that the private rights model is more conducive to transparency than the social rights

model. It does draw the boundary of privacy as well as of control around the property-owning person.

It is true there are communities in which neither of these ideas makes sense. In many tribal cultures there is neither a formal institution of property nor the idea of state-provided "entitlements." These are the pre-modern, under-developed societies without the legal concepts of property and certainly without the infrastructure for state support of property (through registers of title to real estate, or automobiles, certificates of sales and so on and on). In the sense of the transparency syndrome, there is a vast domain of social opacity in such countries. The comparison illuminates how enormous the state infrastructure has to be to create the feasibility of a functioning society based on the concept of private property and transparency.

In the diversity of cultures in the global age conflicts over the legal nature and ethical underpinning of property rights are intensifying. Often demands for transparency are wielded as weapons in the struggle. Pharmaceutical companies that register patents and ownership of the medicinal use of tropical plants that have for a long time been used in tribal cultures, now experience sophisticated resistance. They are charged with seizing tribal property. There are innumerable other examples of conflicts over the definition and legitimacy of asserted property rights across cultural boundaries and their extension into novel domains.

However, the institutions defining the rights of persons are broader than those defining property rights. They include also such conceptions as the right of persons to negotiate contracts, as for example in labor-management relations or in commercial transactions. They include further rights to free inquiry, free speech, and freedom of assembly. In other words, these values are about the constitutional framework that makes open societies and the formation of civil society possible.

Transparency syndromes in global diversity

It can be argued that our analysis of the linkage between open societies, transparency, and the rights of persons (including property) is slanted. Transparency is clearly based on values historically articulated predominantly in Western civilization. There is no denying that this is a historical fact. However, in global change there are incentives in all cultures to look for and to adapt "best practices" regardless of wherever they have originated. The origin of these values in the West does not mean that they remain a Western monopoly.

The incentives and disincentives to move in the direction of transparency examined in this paper do occur in all societies exposed to global change. Only in a few remaining closed societies like the Afghanistan of the Taliban or the North Korean dictatorship do we see the all-out rejection of transparency, at great social cost. In most countries transparency is in the ascendancy, albeit at different rates (in some cases very slowly) and with different controversies.

Different legal systems and traditions do matter. There are differences in social systems and cultures that yield different patterns in the configuration of values. Fundamental convictions about the rights of persons and their social responsibilities are embodied in the constitutions of countries. Their conceptions of property rights and responsibilities differ. In many cultures there are strong forces of resistance to transparency, based on the appeal of the "loyalty ethic" that forms such a powerful basis of trust. Where transparency norms are new, contentious debates do occur and there will be different delineations of the boundaries among the components of the transparency syndrome. Each country will give its own transparency syndrome a special, unique configuration. Just how

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these processes shape social and cultural change in different societies and in their relations to each other is one of the most important topics for the study of globalization.

Historical transparency

The specific manifestations of the transparency syndrome are connected to each other, if only loosely. Market transparency does have political significance, but not necessarily as a pervasive political issue. Disputes over "informed consent" may be a legal matter for individuals and the professionals they rely on, but only on occasions does the matter become a focus of society-wide, public efforts for change in the direction of transparency. Nevertheless, these specialized transparency norms do connect with each other and with the broader values of individual rights and liberties. They find their way into public policy debates, partisan conflicts and at times legislation. The issue of trust and especially perceived breaches of trust bring these connections into heightened public awareness. Value changes are changes in perspectives and, therefore, they may, indeed, create strong perceptions of wrongdoing in traditional practices that were previously thought of as a matter of routine. It seems that historically, "scandals" have played a significant role in promoting and enlarging the transparency syndrome in modern society and, especially, in global change. Scandals typically break out in a period of value shifts, when practices that at one time "were quite all right" become ethically intolerable and unleash determined efforts at inquiry, correction and punishment. Thus, scandals become useful research sites for understanding the dynamics of the transparency syndrome.

Historical transparency, however, involves a great deal more. Recent studies of the construction of "collective memory" in defeated nations[48] examine the dynamics that shaped the way in which Germany and Japan view their history in the period of World War II. The way in which a national society examines its own history and learns to go beyond its myths about its past can involve very different degrees of transparency or resistance to it. These processes involve painful debates. For example, international critique of (and sometimes cooperation in examining) national history textbooks is an important aspect of these struggles. These debates do impinge on constructions of collective identity that are in one way or another at work in all collectivities. Today they occur in the arena of inter-cultural, global debate and at times result in wide international consensus about emotionally charged historical facts.

Historical transparency was the subject of South Africa's Truth Commission – a path-breaking innovation in managing the transition from a criminal regime to democracy. Such transparency and accountability is the focus of the legal and political debate around the fate of General Pinochet in Chile. The theme reverberates in many places in the world. It is the case that the value of historical transparency has spread. This fact in itself has had a major impact on politics and cultures, and on the profession of history.

Historical denials and espousals of myths are enemies of transparency. The time in which history was often written for the glorification of one nation has now ended (but not everywhere). The history profession is inevitably becoming a global profession. That means that national histories will be reviewed, criticized and improved in global debate. Factual corrections are being made. There is such a thing as truth and falsehood in history.

There is, we are convinced, a deep and complex connection between the degree to which a collectivity (national, regional, cultural or religious) resists or espouses historical transparency and its general openness in other regards. The link between historical transparency and the openness of a society and its government needs to be examined.

Conclusions

This concept paper has offered an exploration of the interplay of the value of transparency with a syndrome of allied and counter-values. It has defined the "transparency syndrome" and "informational ambivalence" as a complex of interconnected processes of cultural change within societies induced by the several pressures of global change. These different sources of pressure – such as technical requirements for financial transactions, value changes toward democracy and civil liberties, technological inventions that reveal hitherto inaccessible information and others – nevertheless converge. They combine to create powerful incentives for far reaching changes in the culture of information in centers of power and their publics.

The analysis has shown the dialectic nature and complexity of these changes. Overall, they point in the direction of increasing openness of information and knowledge flow in the emerging global networks of societies. However, transparency requires an institutional structure that may be very limited in many societies. Serious effects for cultural continuity and change, with the possibility of cultural conflicts within (and among) societies are a consequence. The culture of secrecy and the ethic of loyalty have their strong adherents in many places. In the ensuing struggle the "transparency syndromes" of different societies emerge in recognizable but diverse patterns resulting from divergent strategies for change as well as for resistance to change. The rise of the international debate about historical transparency is an indication of the depth of cultural change involved in transparency. This sociological concept paper has focused attention on these emerging global information norms and their deep impact on cultures.

Endnotes

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16. David Lockwood, *The Destruction of the Soviet Union: A Study in Globalization* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 2000).

17. John Markoff, *The Abolition of Feudalism: Peasants, Lords and Legislators in the French Revolution* (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996) and private communications about the history of archives.

18. *Encyclopedia Britannica Online,* Rights, Bill of.

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