

Macalester International

Volume 1 *The International Community and the Emerging World (Dis)Order*

Article 6

Spring 1995

Editor's Note

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/macintl>

Recommended Citation

(1995) "Editor's Note," *Macalester International*: Vol. 1, Article 6.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/macintl/vol1/iss1/6>

This Front Matter is brought to you for free and open access by the Institute for Global Citizenship at DigitalCommons@Macalester College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Macalester International by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Macalester College. For more information, please contact scholarpub@macalester.edu.

EDITORS' NOTE

Welcome to the first issue of *Macalester International*, a publication of Macalester College intended to record some of the major activities of the college's commitment to internationalism in undergraduate studies. But what does internationalism mean in these last years of the century? What are its relationships to liberal education? Why the inauguration of *Macalester International*?

Traditional Internationalism

In its raw form, the central sentiment behind internationalism in the academy is as ancient as the founding of the first educational institutions and the vocation of liberal learning. The making of the intellect as a universal enterprise, propelled by a search for truth and cosmopolitan wisdom, was a defining feature of Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum in classical Greece, the Alexandria of early Egypt, Confucian China, the Islamic centers of Damascus and Baghdad, medieval Bologna and Paris, and the West African cities of Jenné and Timbuktu. Ironically, however, the advent of the modern nation-state, while generating a competitive context that demanded keen alertness to the activities of others, made claims of ownership and loyalty that were to constrain, if not enervate, the free spirit of universal inquiry.

It was with state pressure weighing heavily, particularly in the wake of the vicious wars of nationalism of the last two centuries, that knowledge about other societies and circumstances began to reenter the curriculum of the college and the university. This model of internationalism was based, first, on educated travelogues, later on more scholarly but narrow ethnographic and immersion studies of Anthropology, and later yet somewhat supplemented and eclipsed by International Relations, a component of Political Science. Aligned with these efforts was the promotion of the study of foreign languages and literatures. For Anthropology, the pursuit of the "Other" required facility with a non-European language, while some proficiency in one of a very privileged group of European languages became a correlate of International Relations. Moreover, an immediate need of both Anthropology and International

Relations was a location (i.e., field) where the researcher could personally stand in the midst of the realities of the targets of study. Here were the beginnings of area studies and study-abroad programs.

With the changing configuration of world order after the Second World War, the onset of a period of exceptional prosperity, and the acute and long overdue pressures from minority communities for the extension of civil rights, colleges and universities in the United States entered a sustained period of academic and bureaucratic expansion. Consequently, most institutions witnessed a rise in the volume of foreign students; an inception of more courses in area studies outside of traditional zones; and the appearance of more women, American minorities, and international faculty exchanges. Despite these developments, however, International Relations as an academic subdiscipline, the proliferation of country/regional and language studies, and the increasing calls for diversity have not added up to an effective response to the rising imperatives of a *new* internationalism. This distance between the substance and organization of the intellect and the onrushing and confounding turbulence in both the quotidian local structures and the international order, constitutive elements of what Fernand Braudel calls “world time,” is the basis for contemporary anxieties and yearnings.

The Coming of Transnationalism

If internationalism, an intellectual project and experiential activity, has been dominated by the affairs of the nation-state, transnationalism loosens that grip and, therefore, refocuses the optic on the human condition—its ecological settings, historical development, contemporary forms, and the making of its future(s). In such a formulation, we take account of the actions of nation-states, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), other social forces, and the world order itself.

However, to lay secure foundations, transnationalism must rediscover the quintessence of liberal learning—that is, the pursuit of wisdom through that ancient Delphic inscription of “know thyself.” For Giambattista Vico, the road to wisdom, antipode of corruption or error, encompasses the following: elo-

quence, or the skill to speak with dignity; certainty, or knowledge and the discovery of truth; and virtue and the ordering of the spirit, or the capacity to act rightly. These old-fashioned tasks and the capabilities that accompany them are as indispensable today as they were in Ciceronian times — they set the tone for both studying and living intelligently the perplexing experiences of the present.

But what is the nature of our times? Few dispute the fact that the dictum of Apollo is being buffeted by the “Other” in a context of dense interactions and mutative webs of interpenetrations. Consequently, the circumstances have called forth a plethora of proposals for how to identify the crux of transnationalist matters. For instance, scholars in communications and geography point to the potency of technology and how its newest applications compress time in a revolutionary fashion that reconfigures space. Demographers alert us to acute population growth and novel forms of migration. Anthropologists underscore encounters that require new sensitivities and the cohabitation of synthesis and survival of cultures. Theologians speak about metaphysical dislocation and the demands of imagining a new metaphor for the sacred. Biologists are becoming preoccupied with the fragility of the biosphere and specific ecosystems. Economists tell us about the fading of the eighth market and the arrival of a new one characterized by the microchip and miniaturization, biotechnology, and genetic engineering. Students of politics and society stress the challenges to autonomy and sovereignty, the danger of pandemic anomie, and the possibility of a deadly clash of civilizations, while historians ponder the case for a new total world history. Philosophers re-problematize the relationships between rationality and intelligibility. Surely these concerns and their correlative insights aid us in comprehending the complexities of our times. In the end, however, each institution must decide how best to formulate the central questions of transnationalism and develop an agenda fitting to its heritage and suitable for its students.

Macalester College and Transnationalism

When it comes to an awareness of the world beyond national borders and sensitivity to the common bond of humanity,

Macalester College has a distinctive tradition — one notable for its foresight and commitment. In the years of Professor and President James Wallace (1887–1927), who bequeathed a legacy of academic excellence at large in civic life, the college defined itself as a scholarly and inclusive community. By the 1940s, that profile was conjoined to active internationalist intentions. With President Charles Turck’s leadership, Macalester embraced the spirit of the newly formed United Nations Organization, a commitment symbolized by the permanent display of the U.N. flag. This was followed by a proactive admissions policy toward foreign students, establishment of opportunities for overseas study, and recruitment of faculty from a variety of backgrounds. Today those early initiatives have become a way of life. Not only is faith in the principles of the U.N. a part of the college’s culture, but the presence of students from other countries and study-abroad programs is considered among the college’s greatest successes. More than 200 students from eighty countries attend Macalester, while more than 55 percent of all students partake in study abroad. Equipped with such a tradition, Macalester College prepares for the future by reconfirming the touchstones of liberal education while remaining cognizant of the bewildering contours of an age that seems to foretell of a new century of revolutionary dimension equal to any that has preceded it.

Substantively, then, Macalester’s approach begins with **globalization** as the master concept of transnationalism. Characterized by a simultaneity of integration and disintegration, globalization is an eventuality that captures the state of the world and, at the same time, triggers ecological, economic, cultural, and political processes in constant motion. A typical feature of globalization is an accelerating paradox with many old and new forces at work in peculiar combinations. On one side are the breathtaking advances made by human civilization. These Promethean accomplishments are best exemplified by the ascendance of science and technological virtuosity, which are transforming our conception of life, time, and place; growth of information, which is drastically altering our knowledge of things; prodigious production, which is creating hitherto unknown possibilities for human well-being; and intensive cultural interpenetrations, which are engendering profound modi-

fications in local symbols, habits, and tastes. Combined, these factors seem to portend a largely centripetal logic. More than thirty years ago, the African novelist Cheikh Hamidou Kane made a prescient observation about this evolving phenomenon:

Every hour that passes brings a supplement of ignition to the crucible in which the world is being fused. We have not had the same past, you and ourselves, but we shall have, strictly, the same future. The era of separate destinies has run its course.

But there are frightening companions to the glory of civilization. These include debilities left behind by decomposing cosmologies; exhausted industrialism and diminishing sovereignties; shifting definitions and fracturing identities; resurgence of ethnic and religious strife; ecological destruction; chronic immiserization and marginalization of the many; a constant shadow of violence; and a feeling of estrangement and collective impotence.

In the teeth of these peculiarities of the epoch, tantamount to a partially new terrain for liberal education, Macalester's transnationalism is guided by, among other things, the following challenging questions.

- What is the nature of globalization?
- What are the historical, scientific, economic, political, and cultural forces that shaped and continue to propel globalization?
- How are we to study the condition and processes?
- Is global *civitas* possible in such a context?
- How are we to distinguish between what is momentary—the “fire-flies of time”—and what is abiding in transnational life?
- What identities, rights and obligations, and faculties of judgment are appropriate in this age of globalization?

These concerns lie at the heart of the emerging transnationalism at the college.

The Inception of *Macalester International*

Internationalism is in vogue in colleges and universities across the United States. This is a boon for attempts against parochialism and cultural insularity. Nonetheless, to move forward the

college has committed itself to a vigorous renewal of its internationalist call. Two instances worthy of note here are the annual Macalester International Roundtable, which is to be held every autumn, and a faculty development seminar to be convened every summer in a particular zone of the world. It is our intention to chronicle these undertakings in future issues of *Macalester International*.

Each year the Macalester International Roundtable will focus on a large global topic. A world figure/a highly distinguished thinker will be invited to deliver a keynote presentation, which will be followed by a set of commissioned meditations on the theme. Each paper will, in turn, be the subject of public response by members of the Macalester community.

The theme of the 1994 Macalester International Roundtable was "The International Community and the Emerging World (Dis)Order." Our authors were asked to engage these questions:

- What is the nature of this time of transition and globalization?
- From your perspective, what are the critical global questions that seem to be driving the world into the twenty-first century?
- What are your suggestions for how we should treat (i.e., think about and act upon) these questions?
- What are the social forces, groups, or states that must come together to make the transition less destructive and more amenable to a viable human civilization?

Brian Urquhart's keynote address establishes two goals: to salvage the concept of the "international community" by discerning specific criteria for its use; and to prevent the United Nations from becoming a burdensome bureaucratic machine by outlining ways to make it more effective.

In the first set of discussions, **Johan Galtung** identifies what he sees as the great fault lines of transnational life. He suggests that to deal ably with these concerns, traditional approaches ought to be supplemented by foregrounding the imperatives of "global governance" built through "global democracy." **Rado Bradistilov** responds by voicing his skepticism about the ability of the existent and powerful democracies to readily jettison their imperial habits; he stresses the divisive complexities of estab-

lished structures of power. **Arif Jamal** confirms the uniqueness of the age and endorses Galtung's sentiments. However, he registers his doubts about the proposals by emphasizing the burden of deep-seated antipathy between the Christian West and Islam and by highlighting what he sees as the monopolistic power of the Western media over the gathering and dissemination of information. **David Blaney** acknowledges the forces that seem to be shaping the currents of global life but questions Galtung's vision and theoretical aspirations. He stresses the deleterious undertow of hierarchy and moral diversity in contemporary life.

The second round starts with **Ernest Lefever's** presentation, in which he states these four propositions: that the end of the Cold War did not abolish politics; that ideology and tribalism are the "greatest enemies" of human liberty and solidarity; that the United Nations is a feeble and corrupt bureaucracy; and that ideas are the energy that moves history. He ends by triumphantly proclaiming the victory of Western ideas, particularly of the American kind, over all others at this juncture in history. **Ilka Piepgras** responds that material life drives history. She writes about the confusion and pain that accompany transition in Eastern Europe and Germany and doubts whether real economic life and social relations in the U.S. can be a model for a new world order. **Erin Beutel** challenges two of Lefever's propositions—that tribalism and ideology are the root of evil in the world and that the U.S. is the paragon of what is good in contemporary civilization. She urges us to conceive of new attitudes and actions for a different world order. **Emily Rosenberg** identifies Lefever's position with what historians call "American exceptionalism." According to Rosenberg, this is as ideological as we can get and, consequently, she focuses on the "structure and language" of Lefever's essay. She ends by propounding alternative premises to guide us in making the interregnum more promising.

The third discussion revolves around **Herb Addo's** cogitations. He construes the times as "convulsive," characterized by a sophisticated and totalistic capitalism about to claim the whole globe for itself. In this sense, the new world order is, essentially, more of the same. The biggest losers, he argues, are the majority

of human beings in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, West Asia, and, to a lesser extent, Eastern Europe. For Addo, whose primary concerns are these zones, the appropriate strategy is “creative pessimism.” **H. Quyen Tran** endorses Addo’s diagnosis and conclusions by drawing on her recent study-abroad experience in Colombia and Guatemala. **Vivian Sequera** partly accepts Addo’s general arguments but accentuates the culpability of domestic action in the plight of the Third World. She illustrates her point by giving a brief description of how Venezuela squandered its oil revenues. **George McCandless** squarely disagrees with Addo’s sense of history, his conception of the present, and his suggestion for Third World involvement in economic development. He returns our attention to what he thinks is an efficacious strategy: curtailment of statism, lower taxes, and unregulated markets.

We conclude this inaugural issue with **Yoshikazu Sakamoto’s** deliberations. He identifies the “fundamental developments” that mark the post–Cold War epoch, the major contradictions that are the engines of modern historical change, and the “critical global problematiques” of this era. **Gretel Figueroa** itemizes some of the points she finds most interesting and then proceeds to interrogate Sakamoto’s insights. **Serap Mahmatli** uses Sakamoto’s thinking as an agreeable point of departure and then uses the example of Turkey to illustrate some of the central preoccupations of the session (e.g., the power of the global economy, the rise of Islam, and the decomposition of the Soviet Union—the last releasing a new debate on pan-Turkic identity). Mahmatli warns against foolish misinterpretations of other civilizations and asks for a concerted effort to accent common bonds and shared virtue. **Yue-him Tam** takes note of Sakamoto’s “painstaking analysis.” He agrees with the growing ineffectiveness of the U.N. but disputes the way nationalism is treated in the paper. Tam emphasizes the importance of South-South cooperation and warns against quick and conclusive pronouncement of “the death of communism.”