EDITORS’ NOTE

As we promised in the inaugural issue, this volume of Macalester International is devoted to the first Macalester College International Faculty Development Seminar. Eleven members of the faculty (including the editors) and the director of Macalester’s International Center traveled to the remarkable city of Budapest, Hungary, where the seminar was convened from July 8-30, 1995. The theme for the three-week study and experience was “Transition and Globalization in Central and Eastern Europe.” An encounter between nine authors, whose commissioned papers are presented here, and members of the Macalester group was the pivot of the proceedings. We pen these notes with two purposes in mind: (1) to briefly register our sense of the intellectual context and main concerns of the seminar; and (2) to introduce the formal papers and the reflections of our colleagues.

I. Transition and Globalization

The Central and Eastern Europe of the mid-1990s is a web of inordinate complexities. Old memories, the bane of recent history, and the lengthening shadow of the new millennium have come together to create one of the most interesting as well as worrisome moments in contemporary transnationalism. Caught between decomposing structures and dishearteningly elusive alternatives, the people of Central and Eastern Europe deserve our empathy. Consequently, those who witness this drama should do so with an enlarged sympathy and generosity. For, in addition to acknowledging the immensely difficult tasks facing this part of the world, such a consciousness helps loosen our frame of reference, while reminding us of the limits of our perspectives. It is in this spirit that we offer the following thoughts.

The concept of transition has been preeminent in our discussions on the massive changes taking place in this zone of the world. While most observers agree that a discontinuity of some sort is underway, what this entails exactly and how best to conceptualize it is in contention. In fact, many thinkers resist altogether the usage of the concept of transition because it seems to imply, or even stress, an endpoint. Therefore, some prefer to call what is happening “a transformation”—that is, a non-teleologi-
cal multiplicity of concrete processes that underscore, in the words of one scholar, “the introduction of new elements [that take] place most typically in combination with adaptations, rearrangements, permutations, and reconfigurations of already existing institutional forms.”1 We concur with this sentiment and the inherent element of changefulness. However, we insist on additional value of the concept of transition.

First, since change of any kind conjures up some degree of motion and interactiveness, this itself suggests a starting point—even if this is only a temporary freezing of an ordinarily fluid reality. Such a position need not cause unnecessary alarm given the fact that a habit, mode of doing, or an institution all presume a measure of sedimentation within ever mutable social relations. Second, a beginning becomes meaningless without direction and a target, or at least an expectation of a corner to be turned. Third, transition suggests the possibility of benchmarks for an occasional examination of the ledger of activities (both planned and unplanned) to discern losses and gains, and the balance of forces and opportunities. Fourth, the concept intimates a degree of plasticity of the present and a modicum of openness about the future—that is, the prominence of human agency in the making of history. And fifth, while there is much focus on the particularities of the given situation, the concept is capacious enough to allow comparative propositions or insights.

If, in the wake of the preceding remarks, transition is of conceptual value, perhaps more potent when welded to transformation, many concerns still remain to be addressed: Transition from what to what? At what pace? What mixture of intensity and extensity? And, what criteria should exist for stocktaking at any given time? The essays in this volume will, of course, offer various and substantial responses, but, by way of introduction, we may suggest that the people of the region are experiencing at least three types of transitions. First, there is the basic and familiar movement of time and the consequent instability that is built into the very nature of existence. This immanent impermanence we might call generic change. Second is the dramatic shift from a highly state-centered and commandist social formation toward a private-centered, capitalist, and democratic order. We might identify this as a change in the political economy. The third type of transition marks the growing constellation of ele-
ments associated with the phenomenon of globalization — a key feature of the waning years of the twentieth century and beyond.

In the search for theoretical comprehension of what is happening around us, the concept of globalization increasingly looms larger. In the 1980s, many scholars saw an arresting peculiarity, akin to an ontological or epistemological break, in the disorganization of late modernity, and consequently the term “postmodernism” grew in theoretical importance. But with the meltdown of the communist alternative, the triumph of the ideology of liberal democracy; and the speeded up pace of the transnationalization of commodity-ordered social relations, many have become dissatisfied with the explanatory yield of postmodernism. Consequently, they have proposed “globalization as the concept of the 1990s, a key idea by which we understand the transition of human society into the third millennium.” As we stated in the first volume of this publication, then, globalization initially means the insertion of almost all societies into what Immanuel Wallerstein called, more than twenty years ago, “the modern world-system.” Such incorporation, driven by the movements and transactions in capital, technology, information, and commodities, and by the spread of ideas and cultural values (sometimes through various forms of coercion), presents every society with a mixture of opportunities and tough limits. Simultaneously, these activities also have an impact on the global system itself, inducing constant restlessness and myriad alterations. For students of globalization, the historical evolution, contemporary scope, and force of each facet, let alone the crescendo of their confluence, provide a paramount intellectual assignment.

To be sure, the societies of Eastern Europe have a large reservoir of individual and collective talents and provisions that could equip them to deal effectively with the challenges of transition and the onset of globalization. The depth, richness, and versatility of their cultures, their high rates of education and industrial skills, and their longing for a prosperous economy and democratic governance bode well for a historic effort. But the road ahead is tortuous and contains both costly wanderings and dangerous dead ends. Below we identify a number of large areas that seem to contain some of the region’s critical concerns.
II. Weighty Challenges

A. Democracy and Leadership

There is little doubt that the extreme centralization of authority in the hands of Communist Party executives contributed significantly to the death of statism. During our Budapest seminar, we met no one who did not start the conversation with a bitter condemnation of communist regimes’ monopoly of power and subsequent silencing of the rest of the society. With such a backdrop, there was a persistent reference to the indispensability and liberating value of democracy. However, once that point was established, the excitement subsided and the mood turned, most of the time, into one of despondency. While there could be numerous reasons for this, we think it is a mixture of personal disappointments and disillusionment with the national/regional record and direction since 1990. In such a context, two issues appear to be pivotal: the dialectical nature of democratic politics, and the importance of leadership and legitimacy.

Democracy is both substantive and procedural. A substantive democracy requires a minimum consensus about, in Charles Taylor’s expression, “the constitutive good”—that is, the collective moral endowment that sustains even the most tenuous or pluralist of communities. As a procedure, democracy refers primarily to the operative and transparent mechanisms (e.g., laws) that mediate between duties and utilities, or between the collective interest and the thrust of instrumentalist urges. By this account, democracy is always a combination of collaboration, buttressed by some degree of a common narrativity, and of incessant contestation over individual or group interests. This is quite different from a romanticization that sees it as a magical formula to dissolve all contradictions.

But despite democracy’s tendency to flatten social relations and tame power, there is no way to avoid the imperative of leadership—that is, the necessity of women and men who are able to make important and intelligent decisions. This leads one to the crucial issues of regime formation, state effectiveness, and legitimacy without which democracy, leadership, and effective governance are bound to falter. In one of the most sinewy analyses
of post-1989 situation, Zygmunt Bauman identifies the crux of this question for the region.

The post-communist states live continuously in the situation of an incapacitating legitimation crisis. Under present circumstances, the preferred legal-rational legitimation is unlikely to make much progress. But the plight of contentious charismatic legitimations is not much better. Thus far, they wilt and fade as soon as they are born in a political atmosphere poisoned by the stench of disintegrating hopes.5

B. Ecology and Economic Well-Being

For all societies, conceiving of ways to balance environmental sustainability and material comfort is a most basic and enduring conundrum. Such has particularly been the case since the advent of industrialism. For nearly fifty years, the statist policies of the Eastern European region were driven by a single urge—to “catch up” with the West. Consequently, the focus had been the transformation of largely peasant agriculture into an industrial society. Much seems to have been accomplished in this regard. However, a hurried scheme of large-scale mining and heavy manufacturing whose constituents were primarily chemicals, cement, and metal, coupled with extensive exploitation of energy resources (such as low-grade lignite coal) and further compounded by nitrogen oxides from motor traffic and domestic heating, has left behind one of the most despoiled and polluted zones of the world.6 Added to this burden in the post-Communist period is the danger that could result from the influx of transnational corporations looking for less restrictive regimes or falling for hucksters of older technologies that are now forbidden in their home bases. In short, the possible impact of these activities on the ecosystems has, at minimum, three prongs with long-term consequences: the sudden and drastic disruption of biological mutations—a key matter in the evolutionary process; the health of the human population; and the aesthetic condition of the natural world.

But it is in the crucible of economic development on which most attention is currently focused, and is likely to be so for years to come. In a fundamental sense, economic progress...
implies at least two daunting tasks: the simultaneous acceleration of growth (through newer technologies and superior management) and maintenance of equity; and an effective engagement with the “world-system” and globalization. In the wake of fifty years of a monopolistic state, enthusiasm for the introduction of market mechanisms is both understandable and proper. After all, growth and prosperity seem to flourish in circumstances where consumer choice and entrepreneurial drive are protected, as well as practiced with some consistency. Yet, a full embrace of a chrematistic economy usually comes with liabilities: undue advantage over the producers, regions, and communities outside of the center of activity; and, somewhat reminiscent of recent statist experience, proclivity to externalize environmental damage and costs. These contradictions were in the mind of Karl Polanyi, a seminal scholar of Hungarian origin, when he wrote that

the idea of a self-adjusting market implied a stark utopia. Such an institution could not exist for any length of time without annihilating the human and natural substance of society; it would have physically destroyed [humans] and transformed [their] surroundings into a wilderness. Inevitably, society took measures to protect itself, but whatever measures it took impaired the self-regulation of the market, disorganized industrial life, and thus endangered society in yet another way.8

Polanyi’s statements, written in another era, seem even more relevant for the Eastern Europe of the 1990s.9 In addition to disturbing rates of unemployment and the appearance of new forms of poverty, dwindling state capacity, particularly in health, education, and welfare, and overall weakness of incipient civil societies, the people of the region will also have to come to terms with the highly intrusive processes of globalization. For instance, because of the uncontested reign of neoliberalism as well as their own economic condition, postcommunist governments have hardly any choice but to accept the strictures set by a combination of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and the major states and interests that dominate the world economy.10 These structures include the now famous “structural adjustment” policies designed to align Third World economies
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to the logic of the global market. But, of course, globalization also offers opportunities. These include both technological transfers and entry into vast markets with billions of consumers. The drive to minimize globalization’s drawbacks and maximize its benefits largely depends on the collective strength of the new state and new organs of civil society in every country—that is, the emerging “historic bloc,” in the language of Antonio Gramsci.

C. Artistic and Scholarly Communities

In virtually all societies, the creative arts and the production of knowledge are an important aspect of living. While both signify the role of curiosity in human culture, each has a particular function in the making of civilized habit. The creative arts are primarily associated with the sphere of the aesthetic and subjectivity (i.e., mode of experience). Consequently, poets, painters, writers, and composers are, at their best, thought to possess uncommon originality that verges on the numinous, expressed in rather idiosyncratic style. On the other hand, the domain of scholarship, often short on inner or revealed truths, emphasizes objectivity through the application of reason and rational procedures of verification. Despite the occasionally extreme and exclusive claims of each, the coexistence, if not mutual dependence, of the sensuous and the rational is incontrovertible.

Eastern Europe’s ancien régimes poured great resources into the arts and scientific education. Nonetheless, that effort was undermined by crude censorship. Consequently, the gradual erosion of hegemony and final demise of the old order is partly attributable to the active resistance of a dissident intelligentsia. The death of paternalism carries with it new possibilities and dangers. If the heavy hand of bureaucratic control is no more, so is its generosity. The artist and scholar are now free to imagine and think, but in an ambience of disfigured commercialism. Already, unemployment and irrelevance have taken their toll on the literati, triggering a diversity of coping strategies—including multiple jobs or migration. This is too costly for cultures eager to make up for huge deficiencies, as well as gather provisions for a new time.
D. Identity, Belonging, and Transnationalism

The issues of self-definition, place, and the relationship with the outside world were always present in our seminar discussions. Hungarian and Czech scholars and practitioners frequently, and with occasional passion, stressed their Europeanness, both in racial and civilizational terms. They argued that one of the most pernicious consequences of communism was their severance from the West and the “easternization” of what was historically “Central Europe.” Out of this proposition, other claims followed: (1) that Europe is an essential entity, racially and culturally unique; (2) that “European Civilization” is the most successful of all time; and (3) that the “East,” typified for some by the “dark-skinned” Gypsies, is either barbaric or inscrutable.

With such notions of self and conception of the Other, Eastern Europe’s new ambition is to reclaim a European identity by becoming an integral part of the European Union (EU). Undoubtedly, there are many advantages in seeking full membership within the EU, such as access to capital, technology, markets, security, and the organization of civil society. However, a few critical comments are in order.

First, a full integration into capitalist Western Europe has long been a tantalizing but elusive objective. It is surprisingly little known that Eastern Europe was the earliest peripheral zone of the emerging West European core of the world-system. With even greater imbalance of power at the present, new and grim realities have appeared. Among them is the replacement of the old barbed wire and checkpoints that the communists erected to keep the West out, with an invisible fence placed by the West Europeans to protect themselves from the pauperized millions of the East. Second, an autotelic conception of Europeanness, like so much of what is disquieting about essentialism, is outmoded and dangerous. For we have known for some time now that Europe neither begot itself in its originary state nor made its great achievements in isolation. As Fernand Braudel so aptly reminds us, “Every civilization looks rather like a railway goods yard; constantly receiving and dispatching miscellaneous deliveries.” Hence, a particular and immediate cost results from depriving oneself of the benefits that accrue from being present at the train station at a time in which, like many others, Eastern
Europeans are desperately looking for ways to partake successfully in the global political economy. Up to the present, it is only some of the peoples of the “East” (e.g., Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, etc.) who have, in a dramatic fashion, cracked the peculiar logic that gave Western Europe and its progeny such privileged status. Lessons from their experiences might well be more relevant than those of individual West European countries. Third, the great pace of transnationalism holds the promise of an axial age. A mixture of reinterpretation of who we are and where we have been, the mounting shifts in the totality of human life, and a spirited contestation of what to do with ourselves and for what purpose seems to foretell the possibility of new and mature human civilization perched between the local and the cosmopolitan. Making this happen is a task for all cultures; and each would benefit from heeding Erasmus’s clairvoyant warning, as it echoes through the centuries. Noting his own epoch of rebirth, he declared,

The world is coming to its senses as if awakening out of a deep sleep. Still there are some left who recalci trate pertinaciously, clinging convulsively with hands and feet to their own ignorance. They fear that if [intercivilizational dialogues] are reborn and the world grows wise, it will come to light that they have known nothing.

The peoples of Eastern Europe have a new history to make by themselves as well as with the rest of us. Joining the transnational conversation should be a source of mutual reward.

III. The Seminar Papers

In this first Macalester Faculty Development Seminar, the invited international participants and the Macalester faculty together explored ways to think about globalization in a specific geographical, political, and social context. Scholars and practitioners from economics, environmental science, politics, and culture were asked to present papers with the following questions as background:

• What are the critical factors driving the global system and the Central East European zone?
In what ways are the peoples of Central East Europe coping with these challenges?
What are the prospects for Central East Europe making a successful transition in a context of galloping globalization?
What lessons can the rest of the world learn from the continuing experiences of Central East Europe?

We start with Peter Rutland’s essay, which surveys globalization. Professor Rutland defines globalization as a diversity of phenomena that are not necessarily uniquely modern but which, in recent times, have created a dialectic between the homogeneity (more integration in the world economy, access to the same media, spread of multinationals bringing more products into more societies) and the heterogeneity (distinct ways of organizing the economy, localization of global phenomena, rise of ethnic assertiveness) produced by global processes. Rutland delineates both the positive and negative features of globalization in Central East Europe. His conclusion points to a combination of unpredictability, heterogeneity, and interdependence.

Ivan Vejvoda presents a philosophical discussion of the concepts of socialism, communism, totalitarianism, modernization, democracy, and capitalism as they play out in the region. From his perspective, the Enlightenment idea of a better life (happiness as a goal) provided the philosophical basis of socialism, but, sadly, socialism turned into the most totalitarian and repressive regime in human history. Eastern Europeans are the survivors of two failed attempts to reconstitute a sense of community (fascism/Nazism and communism) designed to overcome the pitfalls of individualism. For Vejvoda, the paradox is that communism disabled, fragmented, and destroyed the community bond by allowing only vertical social links to flourish (to the top of the pyramid). Its positive side was the cocoon-like comfort of paternalism. Life was certain — education, health, pensions, housing, and jobs were guaranteed. But communism was a model for modernizing agrarian societies, and, consequently, achieved modernization (i.e., industrialization) without modernity (i.e., the political and civil institutions of modernity). Given this failure, Vejvoda thinks that there is no alternative to capitalism, the enormous diversity in its implementation notwithstanding. Vejvoda cautions that the triumph of the capi-
talist paradigm does not eliminate contestation and left-right dynamics.

The other papers bring to light a number of important themes. The most obvious is the desire to be situated within the core of Western civilization. Conversely, there is an antipathy toward “Eastern” civilization (particularly in its association with both backwardness and Russia), communism, and authoritarianism (Musil, Jeszenszky, Bollobás). In this vein, Magács, Musil, and Jeszenszky all emphasize the importance of the “Mitteleuropa” idea, and argue against being referred to as “Eastern Europe.” Musil’s paper, for example, analyzes the role of the metropoles of Central Europe—Budapest, Prague, Vienna, and Warsaw—in the processes of integration into Europe. Musil situates the identity crisis firmly in the cities and the urban population.

A second theme prominent in the papers is a strong sense that history has been a heavy burden on the populations of the region. Several authors stress the misfortune of being positioned at the crossroads between East and West, with all of its attendant invasions: those of the Ottomans, the Hapsburgs, the Germans in the two world wars, and finally that of the Soviet Union after WWII. Consequently, the search for identity with the West, which would include membership in NATO and the EU, is also a search for security. For some, the present moment is viewed as a window of opportunity for establishing democracy. Bollobás and Jeszenszky, for example, were part of the intelligentsia elected in 1990 and later voted out of power. Eager to demolish the old system, they have been dismayed by the slowness and difficulty of change. Their papers can be read as both historical analyses and political tracts.

A third general theme is the concern with “mentalities.” In the case of Central East Europe, this primarily refers to the legacy of communism, a legacy that has left people dependent on the state and lacking information about the outside world. Bollobás and Jeszenszky refer to a “mentality” that associates good intentions with good results (a legacy of their experience with “suspect” communist motivations). The surprise to them is that although the motivations of the pre-1989 dissident intelligentsia were “good,” that same intelligentsia worked badly as a government and, subsequently, became discredited in the eyes
of the voters. Only in the Czech Republic is the initial post-1989 government still in power. Both Bollobás and Jeszenszky feel that what they see to be “healthy” democratic competition (arguing out views and making compromises) the voters interpret as signs of incompetent leadership.

A fourth theme concerns social problems that developed during communism. According to Andorka, social stratification during the socialist period was similar to that of Western countries, with a small power elite at the top. During the transition an economic elite has developed, but at least one-third of the new economic elite are the former apparatchiks. At the present, there are indications of a worsening of social well-being. Education has declined. Health has worsened steadily, more for men than for women. Whereas smoking and drinking have decreased in the United States, both have increased steadily in Hungary. The medical system, which relied on “gifts” to doctors and nurses, continues to penalize the peasants more than the urban middle class.

A fifth preoccupation of all seminar leaders, regardless of their assignment and expertise, is the economy. Réti provides a thorough overview of the economic transition in Poland, the Czech republic, Hungary, and Slovenia, and the various approaches taken by those governments — from “shock therapy” in Poland to gradual privatization in the Czech Republic and Hungary. The sobering lessons he draws from the transition are that change does not happen quickly and that those who promise a quick fix are demagogues; that dependence on the world economy makes the transition countries very vulnerable; and that there is no guarantee that the transition will succeed. Stabilization, liberalization, and privatization are not sufficient to create a market economy. The initial expectation that the West would subsidize the East has proved to be an illusion.

Finally, there is the issue of the legacy of the environmental devastation left by the last forty years of industrialization. Moldan laments that the region missed the environmental consciousness-raising events of the 1960-80s, leaving the population uninformed and bereft of civil movements to press for clean air, water, and land. But in the late 1980s this changed rapidly, as green issues became a high priority to all parties.
In sum, the Macalester participants came away with the impression that because of the urgency of the deeper economic and political issues—decrease in the GDP, the slow progress of privatization, inflation, high unemployment, lower standard of living, lack of social security—both environmental and social issues have been sidelined.

IV. Macalester Faculty Papers

The Macalester faculty participants were asked to reflect on the total experience of the seminar: on the content of the invited papers, on their impressions of the region, and on their interactions with the Central East European scholars, as well as with each other. Their essays enrich this volume by responding to the authors’ ideas. And finally, their culturally sensitive pieces speak to the purpose of the seminar—the expansion of faculty awareness of global processes at work in other parts of the world.

David Blaney gives us key insights into some of the basic concepts of the seminar. His provocative essay questions the currently popular idea of “internationalization,” the concept of transition, and the paradox of developing a Hungarian civil society in lieu of globalization.

Ruthann Godollei deconstructs the cynically cute use of the psychological notion of “shock therapy” to describe economic transition programs, and ties such language and thinking to the fate of the arts in Central Europe.

Gitta Hammarberg presents a poetic analysis of Szobor Park—a space on the outskirts of Budapest which today holds all of the city’s now-fallen Communist statuary—as a metaphor for the changed intellectual and cultural semiotic of communism and the Russians.

Dan Keyser reminds us of the enormous talent of playwrights, designers, and actors in the region and asks why the Czech Republic has produced great and well-known work, while Hungary has been more interested in importing theater written and produced in Western Europe.

Gary Krueger explains the implications of centrally controlled economies and the social and political problems of a move to a market economy. He locates the problem of transition in the inability to form a civil society.
Rachel May, whose work focuses on comparisons of Russian and American culture, reflects on the concept of nature and wilderness and its implications for addressing the devastation of the environment in Central Europe and Russia.

Michael Monahan meditates on the relationship between liberal learning and study abroad, and on the question of linking national identity and multicultural issues to study abroad programs.

David Moore compares “East” and “South”—that is, the former Second World with the current Third World — and notes the dual irony that (a) postcolonial literary criticism has failed to include East Central Europe in its analyses, and (b) scholars from the formerly Soviet-dominated lands have refused to borrow the tools of postcolonial criticism for their own relevant purposes.

Emily Schultz sees as problematic the speakers’ emphasis on the place of Central East Europe in the West. She delves into some of the prehistory of the region and ties it to its place at the crossroads of Europe and the East.

Finally, Clay Steinman provides a close analysis of the changes in the region’s newspapers and television after 1989, and reflects on the rising anti-Semitism and racism.

Notes
1995); James Mittelman, ed., Globalization: Challenge and Opportunities (Boulder: Lynne Riener, 1995); and Commission on Global Governance, Our Global Neighborhood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). Two seasoned scholars who foresaw some of the main contours of this phenomenon are the social historian Fernand Braudel and the historical sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein. Before both of them, of course, was the work of Karl Marx.

4. Organizations like the World Bank are more sanguine about the positive economic value of globalization for all. In the words of the bank, “Increasing globalization helps to expand the opportunities for nations and, on average, helps workers in rich and poor countries alike.” Update, 12, no. 3 (May/June, 1995): 1.


10. David Korten, When Corporations Rule the World (West Hartford, Conn.: Kumarian Press, 1995). Many thinkers posit that even the mightiest states are not as strong as they once were in protecting their own national interests. They are threatened, writes Charles Tilly, by “the increasing fluidity of capital, labour, commodities, money, and cultural practices.” Charles Tilly, “Prisoners of the State,” International Social Science Journal, 133, no. 3 (1992): 329.


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