

ON THE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION  
OF TRANSNATIONAL UNIVERSITIES \*

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1. *The Transnational Process and Its Biases.*

There is a transnational process going on, building a non-territorial continent, a sixth continent, the quickly expanding continent of international and transnational organizations, some of them non-profit, many for profit, a north-western continent; both western, and northern-culturally, economically, politically; dominated by that part of the world both with regard to structure, human resources and concepts. A couple of words about this are needed before any attempt to develop some thoughts about transnational universities.

As we know, more than 80% of the headquarters of international organizations, whether they are profit or nonprofit, governmental or nongovernmental, are located in the north-western part of the world and very often in what one might call the far north-west, the USA. This means that structurally speaking, to a very large extent, the non-territorial continent is a replica of the territorial one: the system of States with their power relations is reproduced inside the non-territorial organizations which for that reason to some extent reinforces that system of States. This is particularly true for intergovernmental organizations, but less true today than 20 years ago, and it will be still much less true in 15 or 20 years. Studies have shown<sup>(1)</sup> that this type of activity brings into the foreground, as secretary generals, presidents, directors of international organizations, middle-aged men; urban, university-educated from small, rich countries like Norway, Israel, Switzerland and so on. So we are the colonizers if you will, of the sixth continent I think,

to some extent because the big countries colonized the territorial continents. It is very important to keep this in mind because sooner or later reaction will come, and some of the points about transnational universities is in anticipation of just that type of reaction.

There is also the conceptual bias. Why are there no Chinese in international organizations, or so few Chinese? One reason for it is conceptual: the very idea of detaching an individual from his or her habitat and placing that individual in the context of a conference room is an idea highly compatible with individualizing western civilization, but not so compatible with the thinking, concepts and traditions developed elsewhere. However, while we should be aware of our limitations, the non-territorial continent is in fact growing, and much more quickly than the territorial one. The territorial, geo-political, area has its obvious limitations; the non-territorial, socio-cultural area is practically unlimited. It can grow endlessly. We can multiply the number of organizations, being only limited by one single factor: the number of human beings and the amount of time available for meaningful participation. But with 4 billion human beings and each one of us capable perhaps of being a member of say ten organizations, we still have some work to do saturating the non-territorial continent if we want to continue.

Let us then add two more phenomena to this picture. The schooling level is rising in all countries; people demand and seek deeper and deeper educational experiences. Education has become a way of life for many, also after schooling. So has international travel. In short, people are to a large extent ready!

## *2. The transnational universities: form and structure.*

The following is based on some experience as the first Director-General of one transnational university, the Inter-University Centre (IUC) in Dubrovnik, which by 1977 had 83 universities and university organizations from different parts of the world as members, and had organized 30 courses in the

3 years of its existence from 1974, involving hundreds of students and professors from various countries. These were very intensive post-graduate courses, of 3 to 4 weeks' duration, with 6 to 8 hours of work every day. Without referring much to this particular case, it gives some basis for a general theory of such enterprises, which can conveniently be divided into two parts: form and content.

The form of a transnational university is terribly important, the structure of the enterprise is already half the message. One can easily imagine the false transnational university. It is the so-called "international university" founded in one country, where all teachers are of one nationality and the students are of different nationalities. It looks colourful because there are students from different corners of the world, but they are all given the same kind of thinking and training. This form is, of course, associated with territorial colonialism, and is a continuation of territorial colonialism into the cultural imperialist forms of our age. I am not saying it cannot be useful. Sometimes the reactions developed by students in such places when they put a minus or "no" in front of all that they hear can be very useful. In the Third World one now even says, half jokingly: if you want your son/daughter to be conservative, send them to the Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow; send them to the US if you want a marxist. But to the extent that teaching merely consists of imitating and reciting, this fake type of departure is essentially a continuation of the status quo or even a reinforcement of it. It is a way of colonizing other countries by colonizing the minds of their elites - by making national study programs internationally available. It is big power politics, (2)

There is another interesting variety which is just the opposite of this traditional model: Students from one country, but a faculty of all kinds of colours and nationalities. It was a form practised by Japan in the early Meiji period, inviting professors from other countries. It is also a form practised by Cuba today for technical assistance. (3) As a matter

of fact socialist Cuba and imperial Japan had exactly the same idea: invite professors from all kinds of places, but let them stay for a short time only and kick them out afterwards. Give the professors the same task, but do not let them communicate too much with each other, listen to what each one has to say, and when they have left, see what they have left behind, compare notes. This puts the recipient country in a very advantageous position because it can compare the messages. It has the advantage that they can see clearly that there is no such thing as an objective unambiguous expertise in the world because the moment you bring together one Norwegian, one Pole and one Japanese teaching economics, one has three different types of concepts of economics, which means, there is more to draw upon. On the other hand, however, this clever strategy is also a part of the territorial system. It is one territorial unit using the multiplicity of the territorial system for its own advantage as a resource that it can convert into its own national growth, as was the case with Japan, and as is the case with Cuba. There is nothing wrong with that, but it is not necessarily what we would mean by a transnational university.

A transnational university has faculty members, resource persons from all kinds of places, and students, participants from all kinds of places. In addition the topics of study, the themes are international, not conceptually limited to one nation only. And there are the fourth and fifth internationalizations, the composition of the governing body and the sources of finance. As there has to be a territorial base somewhere that leads to a key question: Where is that host country in the world willing to locate this when the purpose is neither to spread national doctrine nor national growth? To the extent that there is such a place, one might say that Geneva comes closer than most others, that Geneva is the place in the world where the non-territorial continent dips down into the territorial one and has a point of contact. One finds it in such celebrated institutions in that particular host city as the Institut Universitaire des Hautes Etudes Internationales and the Institut Universitaire d'Etudes du Développement. But again

it will take colour from the territorial setting in which it is located, a western one, even a Swiss one: of the five internationalizations the student body comes closest; the other four are predominantly Swiss, with international colouring.

Some people have suggested that one should take the consequences of this and establish the transnational university on board ships. Let them circle around the world, let them be transterritorial at the same time as they are transnational! It is one solution and an interesting one to the asymmetry in having a host country, but it is also an artificial one, not located in the type of environment where things can be tested in real concrete human practice, immediately in interaction. Ideally a place like the IUC in Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia, once a free port, should become a free intellectual port. But it is not as simple as that: the moment the transnational idea of bringing together resource persons, participants, professors, students with the purpose of promoting knowledge puts down roots on a concrete spot in our territorial world, the particular circumstances of that territory will easily transgress into the little transnational cell. Thus, the IUC was rocked 1976-77 by the demand that Yugoslav professors not permitted to teach at Yugoslav universities should not teach in Dubrovnik either. (4) But there is hardly any country in the world where there would not be some kind of constraint, some type of limitation. In Norway, for instance, a transnational university wanting to organize a course on Quisling's philosophy would have difficulties if the conclusion were not known in advance to be negative, and if in addition someone suggested that it might be interesting to bring some of Quisling's old ministers, still at large, as resource persons. (5)

I mention this to arrive at a symmetric solution in addition to the transterritorial, oceanic shipping enterprise: to see a transnational university as something with many campuses, one here, one there, a network, with each one of them fulfilling certain roles under certain rules and obligations, set up so that the course that cannot be taught in country X can be taught in country Y. In other words that network itself is the trans-

national university, not a particular place. That, then, would be the sixth internationalization; in space.<sup>(6)</sup>

The United Nations University comes relatively close to this concept. Five of the six internationalizations are there,<sup>(7)</sup> but the one missing is rather crucial: there are no students! Five years after its inception there is still no education for development program - possibly indicative of how much is at stake in this connection.<sup>(8)</sup>

### *3. The transnational universities: content and function.*

What is the content of transnational universities, what do they do?. The form is already half the content; one can communicate more through the form than through a curriculum because students these days take the structure extremely seriously, just as they will look more at the lifestyle of a professor of ethics than at the brilliance of his teaching, watching very carefully how he relates to his family, comparing that to his lecture notes about inter-human relations.

Let us start by making one small but important point: national governments have traditionally been used to one very comfortable thought, namely that if there is a crisis, when the chips are down, then they can call upon their academics to rally to the national cause. Ideals of universal science and dedication broke down very quickly in 1914, as they did in 1939-40. Brilliant U.S. academics have made use of their brilliance to devise ways and means whereby the population of a certain country in Southeast Asia could be substantially reduced. Thus, it seems obvious that a transnational university would have as one of the goals, as part of its content, to inspire other loyalties. But which are those other loyalties? They are, of course, vaguely put, to humankind on the one hand, and to the global system on the other. That does not mean to any global system. I think for instance very many people in the world, particularly the Third World, would say, and I am now trying to write not as a north-westerly, that they would be more willing to sacrifice for

the UN system today than for the UN system as it was designed in 1945 by the Allies, the victors of the Second World War.

How does one build such transnational concerns into courses? In the experience in Dubrovnik, there are two very transnational topics that are eminently teachable, researchable, discussable, debatable in such courses. One of them relates to human needs. It is an endless topic: material needs, non-material needs, the theories of human needs, the practice of human needs, the idea of human needs, variations in time and space, the problems of founding some kind of theory of peace or development on a theory of human needs.<sup>(9)</sup> These things bring together, across disciplinary borders, philosophers, theologians, social scientists, biologist, economists, physical scientists. Just to mention some. Ideal topics for transnational universities, also because any human is an expert at least on the particularity of his and her own needs. It is very interesting to see how the UN agencies in recent years are moving their whole thinking about development towards basic human needs and away from economic growth. The very important conference which took place in the ILO building in June 1976 was all expression of this based on a world model to a large extent developed as an anti-thesis to the Club of Rome, by the Fundación Bariloche in Argentina. Unfortunately, however, there is the tendency for the UN agencies to pick up only material needs, because they are less controversial.

Another topic equally eminently researchable, teachable and discussable has to do with the conditions for the satisfaction of human needs, such as production, distribution, structural transformation, cultural conditions, institution-building, ecological balance. All these things are so much better taught in a transnational setting and a multiplicity of experience gives testimony to this. But there is one condition.

It is my experience, and not a very original one, that professors are much more similar to each other than students. If there is a transnational setting with 20 professors and 100 students, there will be much less variety among the professors than among the students, the reason to a large extent simply being that professors

have come further in reading the same books than the students. They have had their minds more formed by the same super-professors, read in all countries. The students will soon follow suit when they catch up in years and get their degrees and positions. But as long as they are still fresh, meaning 25 years old rather than 35, not to mention 45 - at 55 they are lost - national and other differences will show up for full. The condition needed to reap full benefit from this variety is the type of setting where participants and resource persons have a very high degree of symmetry in their relations. In other words a basic point of transnational teaching is precisely to establish dialogue, for if one does not have dialogue, the pluralism in the transnational setting is to a large extent lost, and that pluralism is best articulated if the students are permitted to say as much as possible. This may often be a trying experience, and my own experience from Dubrovnik is that I have rarely seen so many people so upset and to some extent frightened because things they regarded as universal, scientific truth just simply did not look like that from other countries.<sup>(10)</sup> The first temptation, then, is of course to say that such countries are underdeveloped and that they will catch up when the material for the appropriate degrees has been communicated through telesatellites. On second thought one gives up the idea, and the problem becomes how to establish the kind of setting where this type of world diversity can be made use of in a critical and constructive way.

#### 4. *Conclusion: form and content combined.*

A transnational university takes transnationalization seriously: it appeals to people having some kind of double existence. There is nothing so terribly new in that: one of the most important non-territorial movements in the western world for 2000 years has been Christianity. It has national colour, yet is also a transnational college exploring what for Christians are perennial truths. But a truly transnational enterprise has to under-

stand, as Roger Garaudy has expressed it, that western civilization is only one among many and for that reason our task is to call for a dialogue des civilisations. A painful experience because it may make us see better some of the dubious assumptions that we have not questioned in the last 2000 years. And yet this is a third topic of tremendous importance ideally suited for an institution that has realized all six internationalizations.

As the world is coming closer together, in part because of communication facilities, universities will also come closer together. But this, curiously enough, will not make human knowledge more universal; on the contrary, it will probably have just the opposite result. The idea of universal science is a typical western idea, because the assumption has always been that it is western science which will be the nucleus of universal science. Thus, one will hear no western mathematician seriously questioning the basic idea of western mathematics, namely to arrive at contradiction-free systems, although so much of for instance Chinese thinking is based on the idea that contradiction is fundamental to everything. One will hear no western mathematician (and I was once one of their students, although later deserter from the cause) develop on the theme which now seems relatively obvious, to me at least, namely that mathematics is some kind of western conspiracy, brilliantly developed, brilliantly disseminated, but nevertheless a western conspiracy. As our world develops more along horizontal lines, the variety of human experience will become more obvious to us and it will be a pluralistic concept of knowledge more than a universal, western concept that will prevail. And in that it seems to me lies real strength - and a clear program for transnational universities: to contribute to that essential dialogue, to offer a forum for exchange rather than indoctrination of any kind. For if the quest for knowledge is a process rather than an end result, then the form of that process becomes as important as the content of the deliberations. The task for transnational universities is to provide that form and fill it with a content that responds to the deep problems besetting our world today. That transnational

universities are very effective sources of personal enrichment for students and faculty alike is obvious. They also serve a function as a source of cross-fertilization among intellectual milieus. But we should add to this the third dimension of growth of global solidarity through the exploration in true dialogues of global problems.

In short, the model here is not approximation to a universal consensus which is then the same as truth. At least in social affairs truth is particularistic rather than universal, it is truth here, now, for us - not space-and time-less, for everybody. Precisely for that reason it should be tested through dialogue in a transnational setting. If it is not, people somewhere, sometime get this tendency to believe that their insights are universal, transcending them and their circumstances. Of course it may be, but not because they say or think so. Any such assumption has to stand at least up to a dialogue, and the more diverse the partners, the richer, more interesting the dialogue.

But that dialogue becomes much more stimulating the moment the goal of consensus is abandoned in favor of mutual enrichment: others see better than me what I have left out and can see some of my truth better than I can myself - and vice versa. A true spirit of mutual intellectual and emotional aid is needed for this, and that is not so easy to obtain - at least not within a Western tradition so bent on the ideas of universalism and centralism, with the West being the center of the universe. With a changing world, a more polycentric world, such illusions can no longer be upheld. Hence, transnational universities are not only interesting, attractive. They are a necessity, for new types of knowledge, more relevant to the new international order, to emerge.

N O T E S

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(1) For one summary of such data, with an interpretation of them, see Johan Galtung, The True Worlds, New York, The Free Press/Macmillan, 1980 - chapter 7 on "The Non-territorial System".

(2) The scramble for the best students from the third world, or for any "world" for that matter, is Realpolitik: if one can have them learn the language of the big power, chances are they will pick up more of the culture and see the big power as their source of learning in general; if they do that, they may also become more susceptible to any exercise of power from that big power, be it normative, remunerative or punitive. In short it is used for bridge-head formation: each engineer trained and sent back is a potential source of orders. It should be noted that the first, now somewhat antiquated, generation imperial powers, such as Great Britain and France seem to proceed via language and culture (with Italy and Germany soing something of the same - all four of them have cultural institutes abroad, British Council, Alliance Française, Goethe-Institut, Dante Alighieri) whereas the second generation imperial power (created partly as a reaction to those in the first wave), the United States, Soviet Union and Japan seem to aim more directly for the technical training, building patterns of technical/economic dependency without a general and deep cultural respect as fostered by the British and the French.

(3) As visiting professor in Cuba August 1972, at the Universidad de la Habana, I had the occasion to see how the system works. Having been visiting professor in a score countries I can only testify that I have never felt so squeezed, so efficiently mined, as in the Cuban context - in no way a negative comment.

(4) This referred to a number of Yugoslav "dissidents", the famous 8 Beograd philosophers, Praxis group members from Zagreb and some others; but particularly to the Beograd group (from the Party Central Committee's point of view the left wing marxists in Croatia were the lesser of two evils, the greater one being the right wing Croatian nationalists). The pressure was exercised through the League of Yugoslav universities and was, of course countered by insisting on the difference between a national and a transnational university. The obvious counterargument was that Dubrovnik was Yugoslav territory, the counter-counterargument that the courses abstained from any interference into internal Yugoslav affairs on the assumption that there would be no interference into internal IUC affairs, etc. The struggle for the right of the philosophers to be resource persons at the IUC was eventually won.

(5) Quisling was executed on 24 October 1945, in Oslo. Now, 35 years later, it can safely be said that very few outside the circle of adherents have a clear view of what he stood for as he himself would formulate it, not as his executioners did; so taboo is the subject.

(6) Something that to many would come close to this would be the organization headed by the late Earl Mountbatten, the International Council of the United World Colleges, with Atlantic College in Wales (founded 1962), the Southeast Asia College in Singapore (1971) and the Lester B. Pearson College (1974). The next countries were to be in Iran, West Germany and Venezuela (interview in Aftenposten, Oslo, 5 February 1977). Both faculty and students are international, so are the themes, the governing board, the financial sources and the host countries - and there is a network, even a federation (there is a super-structure, the Council. But what is the meaning of "international": highly Western, even with a commercial bent which comes out when it is emphasized that the training would be useful for future executives in multinational corporations (of which there is no doubt). Thus, the key factor missing in the internationalization here is the theme itself. Yet it may open for more than the ubiquitous summer school in languages and host country culture, international only in terms of the student body.

(7) There is a headquarter in Tokyo, Japan, which also has contributed most of the money and the administrative staff (although few high level positions). But as a research organization it is best characterized as a loose federation of networks.

(8) Thus, given the comment in footnote 2 above, is there any reason to believe that the big powers would easily accept a competitor within the UN family, eventually even bestowing

prestigious degrees on candidates that might have been their candidates? And what about the jealousies within the UN system itself? Is it not more likely that the maximum the UNU would be permitted to do would be small discussion courses for consciousness-enhancement, not to be scoffed at as such, but not a threat to the vested interests in the international education structure either!

(9) See Lederer, Galtung, Antal (eds.): Human Needs: A contribution to the Current Debate, Berlin, 1980.

(10) A good example was the course on Transnational Corporations run in January 1975, with top executives of (small) transnational corporations among the resource persons - people who had never before been exposed to fundamental and fairly unsympathetic criticism of their enterprises. They judged their enterprises by their own intentions as they saw them, and found themselves evaluated by the consequences as seen by others. And they saw themselves as surrounded by handpicked communists. Both sides were convinced the world would be a better one without the other: in other words, there was the emotional material out of which high temperature, penetrating pedagogy can be wrought.