Transnational History

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John Boli and George M. Thomas, eds., *Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organizations since 1875* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 363 pp., $22.95 (pb), ISBN 0-8047-3422-4.

Matthew Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 406 pp., $13.50 (pb), ISBN 0-8014-8784-6.

Helen Laville, *Cold War Women: The International Activities of American Women's Organizations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 224 pp., £47.50 (hb), ISBN 0-7190-5856-2.

Sanjeev Khagram, James V. Riker and Kathryn Sikkink, eds., *Restructuring World Politics: Transnational Social Movements, Networks, and Norms* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 400 pp., $24.95 (pb), ISBN 0-8166-3907 8.

Gabriele Metzler, *Internationale Wissenschaft und Nationale Kultur: Deutsche Physiker in der Internationalen Community, 1900–1960* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 304 pp., €29.90 (pb), ISBN 3-525-36246-3.

Sarah E. Mendelson and John K. Glenn, eds., *The Power and Limits of NGOs: A Critical Look at Building Democracy in Eastern Europe and Russia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 300 pp., $16.00 (pb), ISBN 0-231-12491-0.

There has been growing interest among historians in going beyond national history as the key framework for their inquiry. National histories have been the predominant scholarly category since the study of history was established as a discipline in Europe in the nineteenth century, but historians are paying increasing attention to developments and themes that cut across national boundaries, in the process forcing a revaluation of the concept not just of nation but also of history.

Such a phenomenon is attributable in part to what is usually referred to as globalisation, something that has seriously compromised the stability and endurance of the nation state. Transnational forces – economic, social and cultural – have breached state boundaries and at times even violated national sovereignties. Regional associations, most notably the European Union, have contributed to the growth of transnational consciousness. Scholarly attention to cross-national themes, then, may be seen as a reflection of the awareness of such phenomena. Moreover, with the emergence of global issues, ranging from environmentalism and human rights to terrorism and disease, the traditional preoccupation with the nation as the unit

Contemporary European History, **13**, 2 (2004), pp. 211–222 © 2004 Cambridge University Press
DOI: 10.1017/S0960777304001675 Printed in the United Kingdom

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777304001675 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of analysis has seemed more and more parochial, less and less relevant. With the internationalisation of scholarship, whereby historians easily cross oceans and traverse national boundaries, the idea that one studies a country's history without regard to transnational developments is very uninspiring and not conducive to dialogue.

Equally important seems to have been developments in what may be termed the inner logic of the discipline. During the 1970s and the 1980s, historians became fascinated with social and cultural, rather than political and diplomatic, subjects, so that the national framework, a legitimate context for political and diplomatic history, no longer held the same fascination. History, as it were, became de-nationalised when it was studied in terms of social groupings, ideological categories or personal memories rather than of national politics. While such de-nationalisation was therapeutic in forcing a fresh perspective for the study of the past, it also produced a tendency to celebrate the local and the personal at the expense of the bigger picture, giving the impression that the discipline of history was becoming parochial, antiquarian and irrelevant. What was needed, then, was somehow to integrate the national and the local and to develop a new synthesis. In that process, political historians in the last decades of the twentieth century began producing monographs that dealt with issues such as gender, material culture and popular entertainment as they shaped, or were shaped by, politics. Foreign affairs historians soon followed suit and tried to see if social and cultural themes might be introduced into their research agendas.[1] Social and cultural historians, for their part, became interested in political and diplomatic phenomena and sought to write national and international history as social or cultural phenomena.[2] In this way, the nation was brought back into view as a legitimate object of study.

At the same time, an increasing number of scholars grew dissatisfied with the national framework, however enriched by the insights of social and cultural history, and began searching for additional ways of re-conceptualising the study of history. This meant, for instance, that in writing a history of international relations, something more than interstate crises and wars would have to be brought into the picture. To be sure, excellent monographs appeared on such topics as the cultural dimension of the Second World War, or the impact of the Cold War on race relations in the United States.[3] But such studies were still accepting conflict and war as the basic framework of

[1] Among the notable recent examples are Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine – American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); and Marc Gallicchio, *Black Internationalism in Asia: The African American Encounter with Japan and China* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). The former analyses turn-of-the-century US imperialism in the context of gender politics at home, while the latter elucidates how African Americans related themselves to east Asian affairs. These monographs help to broaden the study of international affairs by linking internal developments to foreign relations. For additional examples, see Akira Iriye, 'Internationalizing International History', in Thomas Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 47–62.

[2] A good recent example is Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrown Imagination, 1945–1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). Here a specialist in American cultural history tries to relate the musical theater of the 1950s and the 1960s to the larger drama of the Cold War.

[3] One of the best examples of a cultural study of the Second World War is John W. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1985). On race relations in the Cold War

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777304001675 Published online by Cambridge University Press

analysis. Dissatisfied with this state of affairs, some scholars began focusing on themes that were more continuous, if less dramatic, than international conflict: peace, for instance, not simply as a temporary absence of war but as a state of affairs in which nations dealt with each other through economic, social and cultural interactions, and also as an objective that brought various countries and regions of the world together into a co-operative partnership.[4] By shifting scholarly attention away from interstate tensions towards the pursuit of shared objectives across national boundaries, it would become possible to go beyond traditional conceptualisations of international history and to devise a new chronology that was not determined by war.

Going a step beyond this 'new international history', comparative history and global history also offered promising approaches. These two were related, in that developments in two or more countries would be compared as phenomena taking place within a wider global context. What was happening in one country could be given fresh understanding only if it was contrasted to developments elsewhere, since they could all be seen to be responses to worldwide economic, social or cultural forces. Already, in 1993, a number of scholars published essays exemplifying such a perspective in *Conceptualizing Global History*, a volume edited by Bruce Mazlish and Ralph Buultjens.[5] Since then, the awareness seems to have grown that there are many forces and developments in the world that cannot be understood merely in a national framework.[6] Some such background explains the growing popularity of transnational history.

Transnational history may be defined as the study of movements and forces that cut across national boundaries. Political scientists, economists and sociologists have long been interested in such phenomena, but historians have been slower to shift their focus away from the national towards the transnational. Indeed, most of the books and essays under review are by non-historians, but historians today appear to be more willing and eager to link the national to the international, and the international to the global, with the result that transnational history is emerging as a legitimate approach, a viable conceptual framework. But there are many ways of doing transnational history, and the books that I shall discuss exemplify some of them.

First of all, transnational history may be studied through the theme of internationalism. This is not a novel framework. Historians have been studying the subject for several decades at least, going back to 1963 when H. L. S. Lyons's seminal work, *Internationalism in Europe, 1815–1914*, was published.[7] By internationalism, Lyons primarily meant international organisations and conferences, but recently scholars have been paying particular attention to the ideology or ethos of internationalism. In

era, see Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

[4] A good example of this new approach is Dorothy V. Jones, *Toward a Just World: The Critical Years in the Search for International Justice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

[5] Boulder: Westview Press, 1993.

[6] A good example of this awareness is Bender, *Rethinking American History,* containing essays on the need to internationalise the study of US history.

[7] Leiden: Leiden University Press.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777304001675 Published online by Cambridge University Press

a book published in 1997, I defined internationalism as 'an idea, a movement, or an institution that seeks to reformulate the nature of relations among nations through cross-national cooperation and interchange'.[8] Internationalism as an idea and as a movement is the theme of Gabriele Metzler's book.

Metzler traces German physicists' worldviews from the 1870s to the 1950s, carefully examining their responses to national and international issues on the basis of private correspondence as well as public documents. From the beginning of the German empire in 1871, she points out, the scientists were overwhelmingly committed to national strengthening, viewing their work as an essential part of this endeavour, a means for reaffirming German *Kultur*. At the same time, there was the ethos of transnational scientific universalism that was conducive to creating a community of scholars transcending national boundaries. There was clearly a tension between these two perspectives, and it has persisted throughout modern history. This is not unique to Germany, and Metzler shows some examples of French scientists' extreme nationalism during and after the Great War. What is particularly interesting in her account is the apparent persistence of the national, and often anti-international, strain among German physicists in the interwar years, prior to the rise to power of the Nazis in 1933. These years, especially the 1920s, are often seen as a high point of cultural internationalism, but with the notable exception of Albert Einstein, Fritz Haber and a few others who worked in or near Berlin, Metzler shows that most physicists remained nationalistic. Many of them lived in the provinces, stressed applied as against theoretical physics, gave little support to the Weimar Republic, and were often antisemitic. The ugly developments in the 1930s, symbolised by the exodus of hundreds of German scientists, many of them engaged in theoretical physics and also Jewish, could, in such a context, not have come as a complete surprise. Nevertheless, for most of the scientists who remained in Germany, Nazi rule was a debilitating experience, quite unlike anything that had guided their activities in the past. It would take the disasters of the 1930s and the Second World War for the bulk of them to regain their links to the past and, even more important, to embrace some measure of internationalism.

Metzler's fine book demonstrates how difficult it is for intellectuals to develop a commitment to internationalism, especially in times of crisis that affect their respective nations. They would find it impossible to subordinate their sense of national loyalty to a larger concern with transnational solidarity. If that is the case with intellectuals, it will come as no surprise that internationalism is an extremely difficult proposition for ordinary men and women to embrace. Helen Laville illustrates this point in *Cold War Women*, a study of American women's organisations during the Cold War. The subject is not exactly transnational history and falls more in the traditional category of national history. Nevertheless, the author takes pains to indicate that, contrary to the theme of 'feminine mystique' according to which American women retreated to domesticity during the early period of the Cold War, many

[8] Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 3.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777304001675 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of them were deeply involved in international activities, especially through various nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) abroad. Laville notes, for instance, that in the immediate aftermath of the war, American women's organisations were eager to go to Germany to find, or to found, similar groups there, believing that such grass-roots associations would foster democracy. There was widely shared belief among American women visiting Germany, as a State Department memorandum of 1951 noted, that 'German organisations have a long way to go before they can achieve the active role and effective influence in community affairs which is second nature to American women's groups' (p. 80). Fostering their counterpart in occupied Germany, then, became a principal activity of American women's organisations. German women, on their part, were quite obliging. As Petra Goedde has shown, women in the American zone of occupation – apparently willing partners of the occupiers – were instrumental in causing the initially harsh occupation policy to be modified.[9] There is little doubt that the transnational ties that American and German women forged had a great deal to do with the relatively smooth transition from war to postwar co-operation.

Unfortunately, but perhaps predictably as well, American women's organisations were not able to accomplish much in the way of mitigating Cold War tensions. As Laville points out, these organisations became more and more interested in shifting their objective away from fostering democratisation to combating communist influence. In the process, many of them became eager Cold Warriors, willing to do their share in fighting the enemy. This amounted to an abandonment of internationalism for geopolitical nationalism, a phenomenon that may be said to have paralleled that of the German scientists described by Metzler.

A more successful story of internationalism is chronicled in Matthew Evangelista's *Unarmed Forces*, a study of citizens' organisations that were dedicated to ending, or at least controlling, the nuclear arms race during the Cold War. The 'ban the bomb' and other peace movements are an integral part of post-1945 international history, but they have tended to be ignored in most histories of the Cold War era. It is true that excellent studies have been published of the Pughwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs and other organisations that played crucial roles in these movements.[10] However, virtually all such studies have been based on sources available in the United States and its allies. This is unfortunate, for the real significance of the efforts, of which nuclear scientists were active promoters from the very beginning, was that they involved individuals on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Thanks to the opening of Soviet archives and to the exchange of information between scholars from the former antagonist states in the Cold War, it is now possible to tell the other side of the story. This Evangelista does in his admirable volume. He has carefully examined Soviet and Western sources and uncovered networks of 'the transnational disarmament movement' (p. 5) going back to the 1950s. Even before Stalin's death in

[9] Petra Goedde, *GIs and Germans: Culture, Gender, and Foreign Relations, 1945–1949* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

[10] See Lawrence S. Wittner, *One World or None: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement through 1954* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); Charles DeBenedetti, *The Peace Movement in American History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Presss, 1980).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777304001675 Published online by Cambridge University Press

1953, there was 'a failed transnationalism' (p. 26) connecting American, European, and Soviet scientists, but the movement began to gain legitimacy and effectiveness in the Khrushchev era.

The courage of these scientists, who could and did come under criticism and even ostracisation from their respective national communities, makes for a very moving drama. They came close to exemplifying internationalism, quite distinct from what is often referred to as 'Cold War internationalism' that sought to promote the geostrategic objectives of the United States (or, for that matter, of the Soviet Union) by developing a global strategy for victory. But the disarmament advocates opposed the nuclear arms race that could end up annihilating the globe, so it must be said that it was they, rather than the Cold Warriors, who were the true internationalists. That there were many of them in the Soviet Union, and that some of their activities were encouraged by the Soviet leadership, are among the major findings of Evangelista's book. Theirs was a truly transnational movement; regardless of their nationality, they were all determined to promote cross-national communication and movement in the interest of shared objectives. Their efforts were behind the successful conclusion of such epoch-making agreements as the 1963 partial test-ban treaty, the 1972 strategic arms limitation treaty, and the 1986 comprehensive nuclear disarmament programme. The 1963 agreement, the first ever achievement in nuclear arms control, was successfully consummated because, the author notes, scientists 'from East and West managed to come to agreement on the composition of an arms control verification scheme' (p. 60). The second, so-called SALT I, can only be understood if we note that by 1968 'most of the Soviet scientists engaged in the transnational dialogue on arms control had come to advocate an ABM [anti-ballistic missiles] ban' (p. 223). And the third included an agreement on mutual on-site inspection to ensure compliance, a task that was carried out by 'a transnational coalition of American and Soviet scientists, rather than an official interstate organization', the author notes (p. 279).

These and other data presented by Evangelista are extremely interesting. He is a political scientist, not a historian, but the book is rich in documenting the existence and vigour of NGOs in the Soviet Union and of transnational networks of scientists linking the two sides in the Cold War, a phenomenon that historians will now have to include in any discussion of postwar international affairs. For students of transnational history, Evangelista's study confirms the importance of non-state actors as builders of international networks. Of course, the states are still central to the story; they have to negotiate arms control agreements. Besides, intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) such as the United Nations play important roles in the drama. But the truly original contribution of the book lies in its documentation of energetic activities by NGOs, national and international, that point to the existence and vigour of civil society.

This theme, the growth of civil society, offers a second way in which we may examine the literature of transnational history. International relations as inter-state affairs belong in the category of international history, whereas inter-societal interactions may be considered instances of transnational history. As citizens'

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organisations develop, they may be interested in establishing close ties with their counterparts elsewhere in the world. Conversely, the growth of transnational forces may serve to strengthen civil societies in various parts of the globe. Ultimately, a global civil society may develop on the basis of national civil societies.

The theme of civil society development as an aspect of transnational history is a very promising one, as is demonstrated by many of the essays included in *The Power and Limits of NGOs*, edited by Sarah E. Mendelson and John K. Glenn. The book contains important studies that examine how international (mostly west European and North American) NGOs have helped develop civil society in former Soviet-bloc countries after the end of the Cold War. Here civil society development, a domestic theme, is combined with an analysis of transnational activities, and the essays succeed in presenting an important clue for the understanding of contemporary global history. Because the authors, many of them political scientists, deal with the very recent past, they make use of interviews with participants in the drama to supplement documentary evidence. This may not be entirely satisfactory from a historian's point of view, but the analyses presented in most of the chapters are thoughtful and persuasive. They document activities by a large number of Western NGOs in post-Cold War Russia, eastern Europe, and central Asia, but the authors by and large conclude that in many instances such activities have not yet produced the kind of citizenship awareness and participation that they all assume would be a prerequisite to the development of a healthy civil society. In too many instances, the essays show, Western NGOs have succeeded in creating their replicas in formerly socialist states, but these organisations are usually little more than small-scale study groups, busily seeking to import Western concepts into their societies, and they have not quite grown into active social movements.

One problem seems to be the role of the state. In a socialist regime during the Cold War the state had discouraged private associations, so it might be assumed that the state should be weakened as much as possible so as to encourage the growth of democracy and civil society. Some essays in this volume dispute this, arguing, as Leslie Powell does, in his discussion of Russia, that 'the state's weakness has tended to stunt most third-sector groups in Russia. If the third sector is to develop into a robust network of institutions mediating between state and society, it needs solidly institutionalised procedures for governance and advocacy' (p. 137). In other words, private associations depend for their effectiveness on the prior existence of a system of government that provides the essential legal and political framework for their activities. This is an intriguing thesis and suggests that merely creating NGOs is never sufficient in itself. A healthy tension between state and society, rather than a weak state tolerating a myriad of private organisations, seems to work best, at least insofar as the formerly socialist nations are concerned. Their governments had been so discredited that any institutional apparatus of governance became suspect. This often resulted in the absence of stable institutions of governance, and in such circumstances NGOs could just become, as an examination of civil society in Kazakhstan by Erika Weithal and Pauline Jones Luong demonstrates, 'the equivalent of small business enterprises or corner grocery stores' (p. 162).

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Despite such criticisms, these studies clearly document a key transnational phenomenon in contemporary history: activities by international organisations in various parts of the world to help promote social and political change. A key assumption behind all such activities is the belief that in today's world virtually all issues are of international scope and relevance. There is no such thing as a purely local problem that can be solved in isolation. One could call such awareness global consciousness. John Boli and George M. Thomas name it 'world culture' in their 1999 volume, *Constructing World Culture*. The book contains essays, mostly written by political scientists, examining the roles since the nineteenth century of various types of NGOs. They demonstrate that an examination of global organisations provides another valuable approach to the study of transnational history. I have attempted a brief analysis of such organisations in a 2002 book, *Global Community*.[11] Whereas that volume sought to describe the historical evolution of some intergovernmental organisations and international NGOs and to link them to world political and economic developments, the essays contained in *Constructing Global Culture* seem to be more concerned with addressing theoretical questions and building plausible conceptual models. The editors appear to be particularly interested in offering a critique of the realist literature in international relations theory, arguing that there is more to world affairs than nation-states and geopolitics. This is by no means a new perspective; historians have for some time been eager to go beyond state-centred analyses of international affairs. But they will benefit from the rich statistical data that chapters in this volume provide on the numerical and substantive growth of international NGOs. The data are derived from a close examination of annual volumes of the *Yearbook of International Organisations*. There is a great deal of useful information on the development of NGOs involved in issues ranging from environmentalism to population control, from Esperanto to the pursuit of peace.

Historians will be intrigued by the editors' conceptualisation of 'world political and cultural processes that operate through global and international organisations' (p. 10). According to Boli and Thomas, 'culture is global [in] that it is held to be applicable everywhere in the world', and 'world-cultural models are presumed to be universally valid, usually by functional – imperative reasoning' (p. 19). International NGOs, in other words, represent transnational cultural forces and contribute to creating networks of shared interests. Transnational history at this level amounts to a history of those networks that together contribute to the development of world culture.

That comes close to the theme of globalisation, the fourth approach to transnational history. Transnational history may indeed be another term for the history of globalisation, although there is much disagreement on the chronology of this phenomenon. Some historians date the process of globalisation from the last decades of the twentieth century, and others prefer to go back to the mid-nineteenth century,

[11] Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

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while still others consider the whole history of humankind in that framework.[12] Some of the volumes under review are helpful in providing globalisation with a chronology. It is striking, for instance, that many essays in *Constructing World Culture* point to the significance of the 1970s as a transition period. For example, Young S. Kim offers a useful analysis of the creation and spread of Esperanto and shows how the movement started in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century, grew spectacularly for a few decades, subsided after the Great War, and then picked up momentum again after the Second World War, especially during the 1970s. Likewise, the number of international organisations and conferences dealing with population control shot up during the same decade, as Deborah Barrett and David John Frank demonstrate. In a particularly penetrating essay, Nitza Berkovitch points out that organisations devoted to women's, environmental and development issues became interlinked, mostly through United Nations initiatives, after the Second World War, but particularly in the last three decades of the twentieth century.

These examples point to an interesting fact: transnational history, however that subject may be understood and approached, seems to have entered a distinctive phase during the 1970s. It was then that the number of NGOs grew spectacularly, but that was not all. From the books under review and from other sources, we learn that the same decade saw the beginning of a global movement to protect the natural environment. John McNeill's excellent and comprehensive study of the environmental movement notes that the steady erosion of the earth's rich resources or the continuing defilement of the world's air and water began to be checked in the 1970s as organised international efforts were undertaken to cope with the crisis.[13] It was also in the same decade that human rights became a serious global issue as exemplified, for instance, in the 1975 Helsinki declaration by the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) that had been established by both NATO and Warsaw Pact nations. Henceforth, human rights violations would come to be closely watched, reported on and responded to by an increasing number of international NGOs. In the meantime, as Evangelista shows, the anti-nuclear movement of American and Soviet scientists bore significant fruit as the nuclear powers signed a strategic arms limitation agreement (SALT) in 1972. It is worth recalling that this was the same year when the United Nations convened a world conference on the environment in Stockholm, the first such undertaking that resulted in the creation of the United Nations Environmental Programme, and also in the summer that year Palestinian terrorists attacked and killed scores of Israeli athletes during the Munich Olympics. The world suddenly became aware that there were many transnational forces that were infringing an international system that had hitherto seemed to controlled and defined by the nation states. The emergence of non-state actors – in this context, it is interesting to note that the number of

[12] For a penetrating discussion of the chronology of globalisation, see Bruce Mazlish, 'An Introduction to Global History', in Mazlish and Buultjens, *Conceptualizing Global History*, 1–24.

[13] J. R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World* (New York: Norton, 2000).

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multinational enterprises also grew spectacularly during and after the 1970s, from about 10,000 in 1970 to 30,000 by the early 1990s and to 63,000 by 2000 – is certainly a key theme of contemporary transnational history.[14] Somehow the sovereign state, the key player in international affairs since the seventeenth century, appeared to lose its privileged status towards the end of the century and was beginning to share power and influence with international organisations, both governmental and nongovernmental, and with multinational associations and groups. This is another way of saying that transnational history was becoming a reality, a circumstance that should certainly lead to a re-conceptualisation of history as well.

In groping for ways to do so, the essays included in *Restructuring World Politics* are very helpful. Although the editors' primary concern seems to be to bring together specialists in international relations and in social movement theory, historians can profitably join them in a constructive dialogue. The editors postulate, for instance, that in international affairs we should distinguish three dimensions: the business sector that is characterised by 'the drive for profit,' the government sector by 'the use of authority', and the nongovernmental sector by 'the search for meaning' (p. 11). The 'search for meaning' is essentially a cultural phenomenon, so that non-state and non-profit organisations may be considered embodiments of cultural aspirations. But these aspirations can transcend national boundaries, as the volume edited by Boli and Thomas suggests, and a major contribution of *Restructuring World Politics* is that many of its chapters provide specific examples of the emergence of transnational cultural forces. Thus Kathryn Sikkink and Jackie Smith assert that 'transnational social movements and networks are harbingers of the emergence of international identities that coexist with, and in some cases transcend, national identities' (p. 34). But whereas Sikkink and Smith are referring to contemporary trends and future possibilities, historians would be in a position to investigate 'international identities' that may have existed in the past.

Such an exploration would enable historians to go beyond a preoccupation with national cultures and identities. To cite a specific example, Charles T. Call's essay on human rights concludes by asserting, 'As power over the conditions of labor, capital, and even coercion is accumulated in intergovernmental organizations, regional and international organizations, and multinational corporations, transnational advocacy networks will have to continue to develop new strategies and tactics' (p. 127). But the future-oriented statement can also be applied to the past, and historians can attempt to trace the strategies and tactics of transnational movements as they coped with international organisations that were concerned, for instance, with the promotion of the rights of women or of the handicapped in various countries. Such an exercise will offer a new perspective on national as well as transnational history.

Among other things, even the traditional concept of 'national interest' may be better understood in a transnational framework. In the same volume, James V. Riker

[14] These figures on multinationals are taken from Bruce Mazlish, 'New Global History: A Framing Perspective', paper presented at a conference, 'Globalisation and the United States', Yale University, 31 October–2 November (2003).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777304001675 Published online by Cambridge University Press

cites an Asia Pacific conference on East Timor that human rights groups from fifteen countries had planned to convene in Manila in 1994. Indonesia's President Suharto successfully pressured the Philippine government into preventing foreigners from attending the gathering, asserting that it would be 'inimical to the national interest' (p. 191). This was not a case of colliding national interests among sovereign states, but rather of a definition of national interest in contravention to universal norms as represented by transnational advocacy networks. But history is full of similar instances, and it should be possible to rewrite national and international histories by focusing on the relationship between states and non-state actors, as well as on inter-state affairs. To take another example, in the same year, 1994, the US Aassistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Aaffairs remarked, 'We have a very good relationship with Indonesia on many fronts, but we also have a frank dialogue on some of the problems [of human rights]' (p. 196). It would seem that by stressing such 'dialogue' as much as more traditional 'relationships', we may be able to re-conceptualise the history of international relations. That re-conceptualisation could take the form of examining, in the words of Khagram, 'the gradual institutionalization of transnational norms at both the international and domestic levels' (p. 228). Or it might involve a re-examination of 'dialogue' (a key word in many of the essays in this and other volumes) between states, non-state actors and transnational forces.

Among such transnational forces are civilisations, which are conspicuously missing in all the books reviewed here. This is curious, inasmuch as no transnational phenomenon is as pervasive and influential as the world's civilisations. It can be argued that transnational history has been fundamentally defined by cross-civilisational encounters and interactions. The development of internationalism in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, for instance, had much to do with efforts by intellectuals, artists, musicians and others from various civilisations to engage in serious exchanges. What resulted was not just some sort of 'hybridity' but a genuine dialogue across national boundaries. Civil society development, another theme in transnational history, may also be understood as a civilisational phenomenon in that, as religious, cultural and ethnic groups gain their influence in various parts of the globe, the world will become an arena less for interrelations among states than for the encountering of civilisations. Some international NGOs specifically promote cultural exchange programmes, but even those that are concerned with other issues such as development, human rights and the environment must grapple with the question of how their activities might infringe, alter, or accommodate themselves to existing civilisations. Globalisation, world culture, international identities – all these concepts would be better understood if their implications for various civilisations were spelled out. Are transnational forces, for instance, producing significant changes in Islamic civilisation? Is globalisation bringing Asian and Western civilisations closer together? What are the possibilities for genuine dialogue, or for fatal collision, among civilisations in a period of rapid trans-nationalisation?

It is interesting to note that the United Nations, and especially UNESCO, have been engaged in discussing these and related questions for some time. During the 1950s, UNESCO organised a ten-year study project on mutual understanding

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between Eastern and Western civilisations, and in 1998 the UN General Assembly unanimously voted to call the year 2001 'the year of dialogue among civilisations'. In the turmoil following the 11 September terrorist attacks – these attacks, too, of course, are transnational phenomena – it is too easy to forget that in that very same year many international conferences were being held throughout the world on the theme of inter-civilisational dialogue. In 2002 and 2003, UNESCO sponsored additional meetings, all indicating that from one standpoint, at least, the question of whether civilisations may indeed engage in constructive dialogue is one of the most serious issues facing humankind today.[15]

Future historians may well record these gatherings as having been developments just as crucial at the beginning of the twenty-first century as the threat of, and wars on, terrorism. For scholars of transnational history today, whether in the United States, Europe, or elsewhere, the question of confrontation, accommodation or dialogue among civilisations would seem to present a fruitful avenue of inquiry. For readers of this journal, most of whom may be specialists in European history, there would be no need to point out that the history of Europe has been that of inter-civilisational encounters from ancient times through the Middle Ages and to the present. If a unitary European civilisation has developed, that, too, is an important aspect of modern transnational history. How has European civilisation interacted with American civilisation in the age of globalisation? Have Europeans and Americans figured out a way to define 'Western' civilisation as a distinctive category? Why do some people still persist in talking about 'the West and the rest', as though humankind can neatly be divided in two? Where does Islamic civilisation fit? (It is remarkable that none of the books under review treats any aspect of Islam extensively, a serious omission that is sure to be rectified in the coming years.) It is to be hoped that the exploration of these and related issues will appeal to historians of Europe as well as of other parts of the globe, so that together they may succeed in re-conceptualising the study of history.

[15] For a brief discussion of inter-civilisational encounters in the twentieth century, see Akira Iriye, 'Misperception, Mistrust, Fear', in Geir Lundestad and Olav Njølstad, eds., *War and Peace in the 20th Century and Beyond* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2002), 199–219.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777304001675 Published online by Cambridge University Press