

**Interwar Internationalism:
Conceptualising Transnational Thought
and Action, 1919-1939**

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In his 1938 work *The World's Design*, the Spanish internationalist Salvador de Madariaga diagnosed „the rapid evolution of the world towards a world-city and a world-market, with a unity of its own“ and called for political structures to accommodate these developments.¹ Madariaga's writings were emblematic of the concern for organisation on a global scale among a large variety of politicians and intellectuals in the interwar period. Whilst this was especially the case in the immediate aftermath of World War I, visions of closer international cooperation were promoted throughout the 1920s and 1930s.²

Held at University College London (UCL) and funded by the Royal Historical Society, the European Doctorate Programme „Building on the Past“ (FP6) and the UCL Graduate School, the research workshop „Interwar Internationalism: Conceptualising Transnational Thought and Action, 1919-1939“ explored the remarkable diversity of transnational actors and international institutions between the First and Second World War. It thus questioned prevailing images of the interwar years, which centre on national antagonisms and the rise of authoritarian regimes. The efforts of internationalists and the work of the League of Nations often appear as well-intentioned but ultimately doomed, occurring in the face of economic crisis and aggressive nationalisms. However, there is an alternative way of assessing this period, namely by stressing the vitality of transnational exchanges and global visions.

Bringing together thirty historians from six European countries, the workshop explored the ambitions and discontents of transnational thought and practice, placing special em-

phasis on the relation between civil society efforts and institutional or associational structures. PATRICIA CLAVIN (Oxford) introduced the workshop with a keynote address, in which she outlined the problematic cases that researchers of this topic encounter. Referring to the recent popularity of transnational approaches among historians, Clavin proposed to reinvestigate internationalism, a term which seems to have become „curiously old-fashioned“ but could serve as a useful analytical tool, denoting the aspiration for peace, world citizenship, democratic globalisation and world government in the interwar years.

Introducing panel 1 („The League of Nations“), HELEN MCCARTHY (London) focused on popular support for the League of Nations. Her presentation showed how the League of Nations Union reinforced rather than dissolved discourses of national difference in Britain. YANN DECORZANT's (Geneva) contribution on the League's Economic and Financial Organisation examined the development of formal and informal League networks in the early 1920s; in this context, he stressed the importance of links that had been established prior to the foundation of the League itself. FRANK BEYERSDORF (Mannheim) presented a case study on the League's Information Section, a body which successfully took advantage of national institutions and transnational information networks during Austria's financial reconstruction. Together, these papers examined the ways in which the League of Nations related to a variety of transnational networks whose protagonists ranged from academics and civil servants to political activists.

Panel 2, entitled „Transnational Campaigns and Networks“, concentrated on the role of non-state actors in the interwar years. In this

¹ Salvador de Madariaga, *The World's Design* (London, 1938), pp. xv-xvi.

² Pitman B. Potter, *An Introduction to the Study of International Organization* (New York, 1922); Philip Kerr / Lionel Curtis, *The Prevention of War* (New Haven, 1923); David Mitrany, *The Progress of International Government* (London, 1933); but also Richard N. Coudenhove-Kalergi, *Pan-Europa* (Vienna, 1923) and William E. Rappard, *Uniting Europe: The Trend of International Cooperation since the War* (New Haven, 1930).

context, it investigated the internationalization of reform movements in the interwar period, as well as the limits thereof. STEFAN COUPERUS (Groningen) traced the linkage of „municipal transnationalism“ to local contexts in his presentation on the Union Internationale des Villes et Pouvoirs Locaux. Here, he juxtaposed a „techno-administrative“ agenda with an earlier „socialist-utopian“ vision. AMALIA RIBI (Oxford) argued that the establishment of the League of Nations played a role in re-launching slavery as a subject of international concern, yet that anti-slavery was tied to imperial designs, most significantly in the context of Italy’s invasion of Abyssinia. Finally, MARIE SANDELL (London) explored the international women’s movement and its growing interest in cooperation between women from the „West“ and the „East“. Thus, from a different angle than Ribi’s paper, Sandell’s contribution addressed the question of Eurocentrism and the cultural and political concepts that underpinned internationalism.

Cultural Internationalism was the overarching theme of panel 3. DANIEL LAQUA (London) argued that schemes for the international coordination of cultural and intellectual efforts experienced a boost after the Great War but were often hampered by competing objectives: this was especially the case with regard to the relations between organisations like the League’s International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation and intellectuals who operated outside institutional constraints. ALGO RÄMMER (Tartu/Stockholm) and DINA GUSEJNOVA (Cambridge) presented further case studies: Gusejnova explored the role of publishing in transnational networks, focusing on the role of the German Harry Count Kessler in Switzerland during World War I. Rämmer, on the other hand, showed how transnational intellectual cooperation could also have a regional dimension, exemplified by the Baltic-Nordic Conferences of Intellectual Cooperation, launched in 1935.

Exploring the epistemological dimension of interwar internationalism in panel 4 („Science and Internationalism“), the presentations of WAQAR ZAIDI (Imperial College) and KATHARINA RIETZLER (UCL) analysed how interwar internationalists engaged with debates on technology and the social sciences, ba-

sing their arguments for international organisation on the need to deal with a modern „machine age“. ³ Zaidi tackled the role of science and technology in liberal internationalist theorising about international relations, stressing that the transformation of modern warfare had a significant impact on calls for the development of international structures. Rietzler’s paper, on the other hand, showed how American philanthropic foundations considered the promotion of social science research in Europe (in particular the study of international relations) as a way of fostering and controlling global interdependence.

The workshop concluded with a panel discussion, putting interwar internationalism into perspective and highlighting its limitations. For ROBERT BOYCE (London), its prime importance lay in the ideas it generated and tentatively sought to put into practice. JOHN BREUILLY (London) was sceptical about the term transnationalism, pointing at the conceptual limitations of both the national and the transnational. JAN-GEORG DEUTSCH (Oxford) cautioned against constructing Eurocentric narratives, juxtaposing them with the African perspective where - despite the administrative changes introduced by the Mandates System - the local experience remained more continuous than Eurocentric visions of a transition from the pre- to the interwar period might imply. Indeed, what emanated from many of the contributions was interwar internationalism’s uncanny ability to combine cooperation with exclusion. Further research is needed to explore the interplay between notions of inclusion and integration on the one hand, and discriminatory practices on the other. This will also help to bring a genuinely global perspective’ to debates on transnationalism in history.

Conference Overview:

Keynote address: Patricia Clavin (Oxford)

PANEL 1: The League of Nations (chair: Kathleen Burk)

Helen McCarthy (IHR): The Limits and Tensions of Popular Internationalism: The League of Nations Union in Interwar Britain

³ James T. Shotwell, *On the Rim of the Abyss* (New York, 1936), pp. 42-3.

Yann Decorzant (Geneva): Internationalism in the Economic and Financial Organisation of the League of Nations

Frank Beyersdorf (Mannheim): „Austria's Rising Sun": Financial Reconstruction and League Propaganda

PANEL 2: Transnational Campaigns and Networks (chair: Mary Hilson)

Amalia Ribí (Oxford): Anti-Slavery Campaigns and International Humanitarianism in the Interwar Years

Marie Sandell (Royal Holloway): „A Real Meeting of the Women of the East and the West": Women and Internationalism in the Interwar Period

Stefan Couperus (Groningen): „Glocalisme mondicipal": Urban Reform and Municipal Administration as a Transnational Project, 1913-1939

PANEL 3: Cultural Internationalism (chair: Nicola Miller)

Daniel Laqua (UCL): „Une Société Intellectuelle des Nations": The Competing International Schemes to Organize Intellectual Life

Comments and case studies: Dina Gusejnova (Cambridge) and Algo Rämmer (Tartu/Stockholm)

PANEL 4: Internationalism and Science (chair: Bernhard Rieger)

Katharina Rietzler (UCL): Scientific Philanthropy and American Internationalism in the Interwar Years

Waqar Zaidi (Imperial College): The Liberal Internationalist Commitment to Science and Technology during the Interwar Period

CONCLUDING PANEL DISCUSSION (chair: Axel Körner)

Comments by Robert Boyce (LSE), John Breuilly (LSE) and Jan-Georg Deutsch (Oxford)

Tagungsbericht *Interwar Internationalism: Conceptualising Transnational Thought and Action, 1919-1939*. 02.05.2008, , in: H-Soz-u-Kult 01.11.2008.