

Subversive Networks: Agents of Change in International Organizations, 1920-1960

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A group of international scholars from the humanities came together in Heidelberg to discuss innovative approaches to the history of international organizations under the heading „Subversive Networks: Agents of Change in International Organizations, 1920-1960.“ In her opening remarks, MADELEINE HERREN (Basel) reflected on the Leitmotif of subversive networks which she recognized as a potential counter narrative to the traditional story of global governance. She challenged the historiographical notion that networks are constructed as the peaceful side of international relations and therefore generally perceived as positive. Additionally, Herren encouraged the participants to look at agents at the margins, at border-crossing dynamics and multi-layered forms of entanglement. The conference aimed to focus on agents and groups that tried to transform the global order from below.

The integration of international organizations (IOs) into international history was the topic of the first keynote lecture by CORINNA UNGER (Bremen). Considering the growing number of studies from various disciplines on the subject, Unger sought to conceptualize IOs historically, highlighting the methodological distinctiveness of historical approaches compared against social science approaches. With the objective to replace the binary social science based classification of IOs as being either influential or powerless per se, Unger catalogued a variety of factors that should be considered in order to assess the meaning and impact of an organization within the larger system of international power relations.

On the following day, KENNETH STEUER (Kalamazoo) opened the first panel on international humanitarian organizations in times of war with a paper on the Young Men's

Christian Association's (YMCA) aid operations for War Prisoners between 1915 and 1923. Steuer provided a detailed account of the relief work done all over Europe where he found the YMCA to be successful in many parts, while the former Ottoman Empire proved to be a more complicated case as the association lost access to Russia after the collapse of the White Russian forces. Ultimately, the association's work to assist young men in need was seen by Steuer as a precedent for many types of social welfare organizations. Concentrating on the years between 1937 and 1942, ALEXANDRA PFEIFF (Florence) compared and contrasted the actions of two Chinese humanitarian organizations during the Second Sino-Japanese War: She found the activities of the Chinese Red Cross to be of a subversive nature, while the Red Swastika Society adopted a collaborative framework in its wartime labor. Pfeiff stressed that the different quality of the societies' relief activities originated in part from the fact that they were incorporated in specific transnational networks. In the last presentation, TIMO HOLSTE (Heidelberg) presented the case of the Boy Scouts International Bureau's policy on Displaced Persons. Focusing on its cooperation with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration and the International Refugee Organization, he showed the Bureau's struggle to maintain its principle of national segregation in dealing with Displaced Persons while at the same time trying to keep its international outlook. PETER GATRELL (Manchester) identified several threads in the discussion on humanitarian organizations: the relationship between global and local, the politics of state building and collapse, the question of faith, the back theme of mass population displacement and finally concepts of masculinity and youth. Further attention, he proposed, should be paid to the different organizations' self-assessment.

The second panel of the day had a regional focus on Turkey and the Middle East. The first speaker, SARAH D. SHIELDS (Chapel Hill), presented two case studies in which local actors attempted to reshape the borders of mandate Syria by referring to the League of Nations, its nationality-based ordering principle and the idea of national self-determination.

Although in the end, the Syrian uprising of 1925 was brutally suppressed by French authorities and the fate of the Sanjak of Alexandretta was bilaterally negotiated between France and Turkey, both cases nevertheless reveal how the League system was perceived by local actors as a chance to push forward their own claims. Focusing on the case of Turkish representation in the League of Nations, CAROLIN LIEBISCH (Heidelberg) showed how Turkish diplomats' efforts to include their own nationals as staff members in the League secretariat served as a means to criticize the organization's Eurocentric structure, and to „universalize it from below“, on the staff level. League of Nations membership, Liebsch concluded, had a subversive potential insofar as it became a tool for challenging the IO structure itself and by doing so, the global power hierarchies it represented. FLORIAN RIEDLER (Berlin) talked about the influence of military networks on German-Turkish relations during the interwar period. He showed how members of the German „Bund der Asienkämpfer“ (Association of Asia Fighters) saw the revisionist Turkish national movement under Mustafa Kemal as a role model for the German state, thereby challenging the Versailles terms and the post-war international order.

The third panel, which targeted the confrontation of global power hierarchies, was opened by KATJA NAUMANN (Leipzig) who portrayed the potentials of East Central European staff members in the League of Nations as vehicles of change. These members appear to be idiosyncratic actors on account of their status in the secretariat, as well as their supposedly marginal position in Europe. Naumann focused on Ludwik Rajchman, the Director of the Health Section, and described his expertise and his „transnational life“ before going to Geneva as a typical characteristic of this group of actors. FREDRIK PETERSSON (Turku) continued the discussion with a paper on the League against Imperialism and for National Independence which sought to expose the behavior and structures of imperialist nations. Established in 1927, this communist-influenced, transnational organization can be understood as a subversive counterproposal to the League of Nations'

attitude towards colonialism. Finally, PHILMON GHIRMAI (Heidelberg / Basel) turned the participants' attention towards the decolonization processes in African regions. Analyzing the proceedings of two pan-African international conferences in Cairo and Accra (1957-1958), he argued that they were subversive not only in the composition of the delegations, but also in opposing established global power hierarchies. Therefore, Ghirmai asserted that in the 1950s subversive spaces were created not solely in the centers of global diplomacy, but in regions commonly interpreted as peripheral.

The last panel of the day was started by KATHARINA RIETZLER (Sussex). She recapitulated the history of foreign affairs think tanks from the end of the First World War until the beginning of the Cold War, outlining the complex interaction between scholarly expertise, public opinion and democratic values. Rietzler focused on the influence of American philanthropic foundations on the International Studies Conference in the 1930s. Next up, SANDRA S. COLLINS (Chico) analyzed the Japanese campaign for the 1940 Olympic Games that exploited the International Olympic Committee's universalistic discourse and strived to present Japan as a legitimate and expanding world power. Employing forms of cultural diplomacy in sports policy, the Tokyo campaign argued that the Olympic Games could no longer be seen as a Western monopoly. In his talk about the Boy Scout's discourse on youth diplomacy, MISCHA HONECK (Washington DC) showed how the performative strategy of „Infantilization“ was used to reinforce contemporary power relations and hierarchies. Honeck maintained that ideas about (male) youth as agents of a peaceful future were intertwined with the actual agency of children and adolescents in the Boy Scouts movement. The following discussion focused on the dualism of nationalism and internationalism as ROLAND WENZLHUEMER (Heidelberg) asked for a clarification of the boundaries between the examined networks and states or other institutions.

In the second keynote lecture, CEMIL AYDIN (Chapel Hill) gave a comprehensive survey of pan-nationalist movements from the la-

te 19th century until the 1960s. Pan-African, pan-Asian and pan-Islamic movements formed a global subversive network challenging the racial hierarchies, universal claims, and legal practices promoted by the international order and highly influenced by imperial ideologies and interests. Aydin sketched the development of pan-nationalism from a reform movement, still loyal to the Empire, to an agenda of state-based independence claims after the Second World War. By introducing key thinkers of pan-nationalist ideas, Aydin demonstrated how fragmented and diverse the pan-nationalist movements were, and reflected on the conceptual challenges this diversity implies.

The workshop's last day began with a panel dedicated to the personnel of international organizations. BENJAMIN AUBERER (Heidelberg) spoke about an active group of former League of Nations staff working at the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London at Chatham House between 1941 and 1944. The so-called „London Report“ (1944) revealed the groups' attempt to gain discursive power over the interpretation of the post-war international system. The next paper introduced Gabriela Mistral, Chilean winner of a Nobel Prize in Literature in 1945, and affiliated with the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation. CORINNE PERNET (Basel) presented how Mistral reinvented herself as a transnational subject and as a cultural ambassador for all of Latin America and subsequently used her connections within the League to gain entrance to the Chilean diplomatic field. ELISABETTA TOLLARDO (Oxford) completed the presentations with a paper on Italians as agents of change in the League of Nations. She challenged the notion of the Italian presence in the League as being a monolithic fascist block, using the example of two officials to demonstrate her point. In her comment, GLENDA SLUGA (Sydney) summarized this panel's main themes. The establishment of the League of Nations created a new type of international civil servant, able to impersonate a variety of identities that were not necessarily seen as conflicting. If they want to define the role and agency of these bureaucrats, historians need to rethink the application of traditional categories like national,

international and transnational.

The last panel of the conference touched on the themes of law and standardization. The international campaign to suppress the traffic in narcotics between 1919 and 1940 was discussed by DANIEL-JOSEPH MACARTHUR-SEAL (Cambridge / Ankara). Emphasizing that the so-called technical issues are still under-represented in historical studies on the League of Nations, he traced the aftermath of the 1925 international opium convention, paying special regard to Turkey. As transnational networks of smugglers subverted the League's attempt to regulate the opium trade, MacArthur-Seal called for the attribution of agency to these actors. Regional conferences in Latin America, which were first being realized in Santiago, Chile in 1936, were the next topic of discussion. VERONIQUE PLATA-STENGER (Geneva / Paris) interpreted these conferences, organized by the International Labour Office (ILO) in the interwar period, as a new form of international cooperation on social and labor issues and as a central aspect of ILO-led regionalization. They exemplified the beginning of an altered international practice, with which the ILO sought to create alternative spaces for dialogue. CAROLIEN STOLTE (Cambridge, MA / Leiden) concluded the panel with a directly related topic as she spoke about Asian representatives at the ILO. She sketched how from 1920 onwards, delegates from the All-India Trade Union Congress to the ILO endeavored to represent all of Asia in the international arena and described the efforts of the Asian delegations to establish ILO regional conferences in Asia. Despite limited participation and the non-involvement of the ILO, the Asiatic Labour Congress of 1934 was an important step in bringing Asian agency on the international agenda. IRIS SCHRÖDER (Erfurt) underlined in her subsequent comment how Latin American and Indian representatives in the ILO pushed for regionalization, undermining the Eurocentric declaration of universal norms.

Over the course of this three-day conference, the participants discussed international organizations as vehicles of change in a period when the world order seemed negotiable. They considered various agents who challenged western-based hierarchies and sug-

gested multiple contexts that allowed subversive behavior. The different presentations exposed the difficulty of defining and applying the term „subversive“. HUBERTUS BÜSCHEL (Giessen) proposed that a stable discourse needed to be constructed in the first place before an action could be categorized as subversive. Madeleine Herren understood the term as a tool to uncover hidden agendas, creating a historical narrative that avoids homogeneity, while enlightening asymmetrical aspects of international border-crossing instead.

Conference Overview:

Welcome and opening remarks

Madeleine Herren (Basel)

Keynote Lecture I

Corinna Unger (Bremen): Integrating International Organizations into International History: Opportunities and Challenges

Panel I: (Post-)Wartime Humanitarian Action
Chair: Lisa-Marie Zoller (Heidelberg)

Discussant: Peter Gatrell (Manchester)

Kenneth Steuer (Kalamazoo): The YMCA as an Agent of Change for the Welfare of Young Men: War Prisoners' Aid Operations, 1915-1923

Alexandra Pfeiff (Florence): The Subversive and the Collaborative Nature of Humanitarianism: The Chinese Red Cross Society and the Red Swastika Society During the Second World War

Timo Holste (Heidelberg): „A Bridge between Nationals within and without their Country“. The Boy Scouts International Bureau's Policy on Displaced Persons and Refugees after World War II

Panel II: Middle-Eastern Agencies

Chair: Patrizia Kern (Heidelberg)

Discussant: Cemil Aydin (Chapel Hill)

Sarah D. Shields (Chapel Hill): Nationalist Agitators Revise the Border: Local Actors, the League of Nations, and the Changing Map of Interwar Syria

Carolin Liebisch (Heidelberg): Universalizing the League From Below: Rhetoric and Politics

of Turkish Membership in the League of Nations

Florian Riedler (Berlin): The Role of Military Networks in Redefining German-Turkish Relations in the Interwar Period

Panel III: Challenging Power Hierarchies

Chair: Isabella Löhr (Basel / Berlin)

Discussant: Hubertus Büschel (Giessen)

Katja Naumann (Leipzig): Confident Acting and Networking: Instances from East Central Europeans in the League of Nations

Fredrik Petersson (Turku): Subversive Articulations of Change. The League against Imperialism and the League of Nations

Philmon Ghirmai (Heidelberg / Basel): Negotiating Decolonization on African Soil. International Conferences in Accra and Cairo in the late 1950s

Panel IV: New Agents and Arenas

Chair: Christiane Sibille (Bern)

Discussant: Roland Wenzlhuemer (Heidelberg)

Katharina Rietzler (Sussex): Subversion from Above? Think Tank Networks, U.S. Philanthropy and the Crises of the 1930s

Sandra S. Collins (Chico): The Alluring Contradictions of 1930s Japanese Olympic Diplomacy

Mischa Honeck (Washington DC): Burying the Hatchet: The Boy Scouts and the Infantilization of Peace

Keynote Lecture II

Cemil Aydin (Chapel Hill): Forgotten Agents of Decolonization? Achievements, Failures and Legacies of Pan-Islamic, Pan-Asian and Pan-African International Networks

Panel V: International Personnel: Bureaucrats, Experts, Activists

Chair: Susanne Hohler (Heidelberg)

Discussant (via skype): Glenda Sluga (Sydney)

Benjamin Auberer (Heidelberg): Imagine Geneva After the War. Planning the International Administration of the Future

Corinne Pernet (Basel): Female, „Queer“, and Modest Background: Gabriela Mistral and the Usefulness of Subversive Networks at the League of Nations

Elisabetta Tollardo (Oxford): Italians in the League of Nations: Nationalism and Internationalism

Panel VI: Contesting Globalized Law and Standards

Chair: Benjamin Auberer (Heidelberg)

Discussant: Iris Schröder (Erfurt)

Daniel-Joseph MacArthur-Seal (Cambridge / Ankara): The International Campaign to Suppress the Traffic in Narcotics and its Discontents, 1919-1940

Véronique Plata-Stenger (Geneva / Paris): „The Spirit of Santiago“ Rather Than „The Spirit of Geneva“: The ILO Regional Conferences in the Interwar Period

Carolien Stolte (Cambridge, MA / Leiden): Who Speaks for Asia? Trade Union Politics Behind the Asian Representatives at the ILO, 1920-1947

Final Discussion and Farewell

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