

# Remembering 1919: international organizations and the future of international order

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At what feels like the dusk of the existing international order, the balance in remembering its origins in 1919 has begun to shift. For much of the century after the Paris peace conference, popular and scholarly reflections alike focused less on its invention of the League of Nations and more on the League's failure to prevent another world war. Out with the historical bathwater went the study of international organizations altogether, let alone the people involved, their expectations, and the social context of international thinking that brought them into favour. Now, however, historians are increasingly situating 1919 in a longer and deeper history of *intertwined* thinking on national and international politics.<sup>1</sup> From this perspective, 1919 marks both the continuation of nationalist global trends and the imprint of international organizations, particularly of the intergovernmental kind. Granular historical accounts of the twentieth century's national and international world order are restoring the 'multiverse' institutional spaces of these international bodies, populated by flows of delegates, bureaucrats and NGOs, and subject to constant reinvention.<sup>2</sup>

Many of the world's intergovernmental organizations have now existed for longer than many nation-states. Among the better known, the UN had its origins in the League, and the WHO in the League's health organization—and the International Labour Organization remains, nominally unchanged. Rarely is the detail of how they work or who works in them, or of the myriad other international organizations that can trace their roots to 1919, or earlier, on the tips of our tongues. The centenary of peacemaking seems an appropriate moment to make use of what these new histories tell us about the shifting horizon of international expectations, the social dimensions of international thinking and of international political

<sup>1</sup> A useful account of this changing historiography can be found in Susan Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations', *American Historical Review* 112: 4, 2007, pp. 1091–1117. In this article I draw on the following: Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the age of nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); the essays in Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, eds, *Internationalisms: a twentieth century history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Sunil Amrith and Glenda Sluga, 'New histories of the UN', *Journal of World History* 19: 3, 2008, pp. 251–74; Mark Mazower, *Governing the world: the history of an idea 1815 to the present* (London: Penguin, 2013). For more on the different ways in which nations and international politics are assessed, see Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, 'Rethinking the history of internationalisms', in Sluga and Clavin, eds, *Internationalisms*, pp. 3–16.

<sup>2</sup> For a fuller list of these organizations, see Bob Reinalda, *Routledge history of international organizations: from 1815 to the present day* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009). See also Patricia Clavin, *Securing the world economy: the reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920–1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 7.

culture, its nation-state roots, and what this (lost) international past adds up to.<sup>3</sup> Adding this international past to our repertoires of historical understanding is not a question of eliding realism, or *realpolitik*, but rather raises other kinds of questions: Why, and for whom, were international organizations invented? When in the twentieth century did the promise of governance through international organizations seem as realistic or important as the nation-state? How critical were these moments, and what did they change—or what would have been different without them?

In this article I draw together the various strands of this new historiography in order to survey how 1919 launched the world into a century of often profound discussion about international organizations as necessary instruments of multilateralism.<sup>4</sup> This discussion sometimes dwindled, and it did not prevent wars; but it had other impacts on the world, in the imagination it brought to bear on the question of how to solve the world's most serious problems, in the practices of international governance, and through its potential for representing the diverse interests of the world's populations, even the stateless. At crucial moments in the twentieth century, world-scale solutions to world-scale problems gave people ideas—even when the window of opportunity was small. If this history is good for anything, it might be for orientating our present in relation to that international past, and how we begin to imagine the future of the international order, as we know it.

### Why were international organizations invented, and for whom?

A century ago, in the aftershock of the first 'total war', the representatives of the victorious governments who gathered to make peace articulated a schematic sense of the international stakes and scope of change that we would be hard pressed to hear from statespeople in our own time. From President Woodrow Wilson's America to Taisho-era Japan, the focus of Allied peacemakers was on both the *principle of nationality* and international government in the form of a *League of Nations*.

Neither the national nor the international planks of the peace magically appeared in Paris in 1919. Nor can historians simply credit (for better or worse) the American President with the League's creation. Like the 'principle of nationality', the establishment of the League of Nations arrived as a topic of international significance on the back of decades of intergovernmental conferences on protective labour regulations, via the fashion for international law as the method of arbitrating commercial and territorial disputes between states, and popular discussion of the topic of 'international government'. The geographical extent of these developments is still subject to historical clarification, but uneven evidence has turned up in China and the Ottoman empire, as well as across the urban networks of the western empires and their colonies. By the 1880s there were transnational

<sup>3</sup> Robin Niblett, 'Rediscovering a sense of purpose: the challenge for western think-tanks', *International Affairs* 94: 6, Nov. 2018, pp. 1409–29.

<sup>4</sup> The International Relations scholar Tom Weiss makes a good case for *more* history, while capturing the reason why some social scientists resist it: 'Self-doubt and reflection flow naturally from historical analysis in a way that they do not from abstract theories.' See Tom Weiss, 'The United Nations: before, during and after 1945', *International Affairs* 91: 6, Nov. 2015, pp. 1221–35.

peak bodies for issue-based concerns and social movements—including women's suffrage—as well as international organizations coordinating the movement of mail, money and messages across state and language borders and across multiple currency areas; so-called 'public international unions' connected train and shipping services, telegraph lines and state-based bureaucracies. The bulk of these were housed in European cities such as Bern, Brussels and The Hague, a significant indicator of the geopolitical imbalance of the existing international order.

Europe's role in this international past was a by-product of the politics of imperialism, including efforts by those empires to manage their rampant economic and military rivalry, on the assumption that conflict threatened the status quo. The first Hague peace conference, in 1899, was the product of a Russian invitation issued precisely on that imperative to European, American, Chinese and Ottoman governments. The plan was to discuss 'international cooperation', disarmament and the codification of the international (humanitarian) laws of warfare.<sup>5</sup> The result was a series of conventions, and the Hague Permanent Court of Arbitration. The American Secretary of State at the time, Robert Lansing, was typical of the type of lawyer/politician who cut his legal teeth at the arbitration court—before the First World War, Lansing even predicted the twentieth century would be the age of 'internationality'.<sup>6</sup> Prewar experiences of 'internationality'—congressing, cooperation, technical coordination, arbitration—established the precedents and the networks brought to bear in 1919 in Paris, where prominent roles were played not only by Lansing, but by Léon Bourgeois, a former Prime Minister of France and a stalwart of the first Hague conference.

Equally important in this new international history is the social history of the war years, when national associations in favour of international governance through international organizations took root. In England, the League of Nations movement gained momentum around 1916, thanks not only to an elite network of male academics and politicians, but also to the women's pacifist and religious groups who brought to bear their local, national and international connections.<sup>7</sup> Across Europe from France to Austria, and in the British dominions, the appeal of a League of Nations was gaining a political toehold, although its social footprint varied.<sup>8</sup> Further east, Republican China boasted a General Union of the Chinese Associations for the League of Nations, supplemented by a Society for Studies Relating to the League of Nations. Both the Chinese and Japanese League associations lacked a popular base, and were instigated by men with 'experience studying, working or living in an industrial nation', sharing 'a common admiration of Western civilisation'.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Maartje Abbenhuis, *The Hague Conferences and international politics, 1898–1915* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> See Sluga, *Internationalism in the age of nationalism*, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Helen McCarthy, *The British people and the League of Nations: democracy, citizenship and internationalism c.1918–45* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p. 185.

<sup>8</sup> Jean-Michel Guieu, *Le Rameau et le glaive: les militants français pour la Société des Nations* (Paris: Presses de Science-Po, 2008); Glenda Sluga, "'Global Austria' and the League of Nations: reframing empire and internationalism', in Peter Becker and Natasha Wheatley, eds, *Remaking central Europe: the League of Nations and the former Habsburg lands* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Liang Pan, 'National internationalism in Japan and China', in Sluga and Clavin, eds, *Internationalisms*, p. 178.

By 1919, then, the political and social soil in which the principle of nationality and a League of Nations were seeded had been tilled to some extent across the countries participating in the peace talks. When the young American Walter Lippmann included a clause in his draft of Woodrow Wilson's 14 points on the establishment of 'a general association of nations ... for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike', he was channelling what he knew of transatlantic developments.<sup>10</sup> All the talk about a League and the importance of 'international government' soon gave rise to questions: should a future League be an exercise in sociability among nations, or actual governance by an international body? An alliance or a federation of nation-states? A dissoluble or indissoluble union? What kind of influence should a League exert over other international organizations, let alone empires and nations? *Who* should be included in the community that would put flesh on a League's organizational skeleton?

At the Paris peace conference, the answers that mattered were voiced by the United States, Britain, France and Italy. Some British delegates assumed the League would act in the mode of a nineteenth-century imperial conference, meeting only occasionally and 'composed of statesmen responsible to their own peoples, and dependent on unanimous agreement'.<sup>11</sup> Other delegates were more audacious. Léon Bourgeois took to his new role on the commission drafting a 'Covenant' for the League like the Hague veteran that he was: national sovereignty was an obsolescent fiction, and the sovereignty of each state was less than absolute, he argued.<sup>12</sup> The French government conceived of the future League as a *société* empowered to maintain peace and guarantee sovereignty through the creation of an authoritative international body that could compel its members to accept its decisions as well as those of an international court.<sup>13</sup> Germany, the villain of the war, had no representation on the commission, but its delegate Walther Schücking, another veteran of prewar international arbitration, submitted a plan for a political 'world parliament' on the German federal model.<sup>14</sup> Even though some British delegates were quick to dismiss this plan as 'German liberalism', the Swiss submission argued for a federal League in the image of the Helvetian 'indissoluble alliance of states'; their proportional representation model gave populous China more influence than France, Germany, Italy or Japan.<sup>15</sup>

The broad spectrum of expectations imposed on the creation of a League of Nations reminds us just how different international politics was a hundred years ago. In 1919, debate around the purpose of international organizations incorporated both the imperative of social justice *and* the inevitability of race hierarchies that favoured white Europeans. When the Japanese proposed including racial equality as an 'indisputable principle of justice' in the Covenant of the League of

<sup>10</sup> See Glenda Sluga, *The nation, psychology and international politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), pp. 10–11.

<sup>11</sup> Harold Temperley, *A history of the peace conference of Paris* (London: H. Frowde, 1920–24), vol. 6, p. 461.

<sup>12</sup> David H. Miller, plenary session, 31 May 1919, in *My diary at the conference of Paris* (New York: Appeal, 1924), p. 73.

<sup>13</sup> Temperley, *History of the peace conference*, vol. 6, p. 428.

<sup>14</sup> Temperley, *History of the peace conference*, vol. 2, p. 457.

<sup>15</sup> Temperley, *History of the peace conference*, vol. 6, pp. 455–7.

Nations, Wilson infamously discounted the vote in support of equality by 11 of 17 members of the drafting commission for lack of unanimity.<sup>16</sup> His act rendered race an internal matter for states and empires, not for the League.

The promise of a League encouraged demands for race and gender equality from outside the official state forums. The American philosopher W. E. B. DuBois collaborated with French politicians to run a simultaneous pan-African conference, stipulating rights for the world's colonized peoples. Liberal and socialist international women's organizations ran a women's conference offstage, in Zurich, in the hope of adding women's rights to the peace agenda. Well-networked female campaigners brought their requests directly to the peacemakers in Paris, asking why women's self-determination could not be given the same international status as national self-determination? To a man, the peacemakers—including the Maharajah of Bikaner and Japanese delegates—rejected the universal applicability of women's equal rights to self-determination; national sovereignty over women's status was part of the national self-determination now lauded as a universal political principle.<sup>17</sup>

When the form of the postwar international order was finally settled, the arena of rejected proposals was very full indeed. The actual League was no federal government; it was given no power over the enforcement of arbitration between nations, the status of conscription within nations, or the kinds or amounts of armaments being stockpiled or reduced. The idea that international organization might extend to the distribution of foodstuffs and raw materials, as had been practised during the war, had to await the establishment of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization a quarter of a century later. There is no doubt that in 1919 women expected 'the feminist point of view ... to be brought into the realm of world government'; but it remained an expectation.<sup>18</sup>

What 1919 had achieved was the expansion of popular expectations of international politics.<sup>19</sup> It fed those expectations in part by creating international organizations that granted a formal role for 'non-governmental organizations'. The result was a more energetic sphere of individual engagement, claims and disputes, and also disillusionment.

## What was the League of Nations?

It did not take states and quasi-states, and all manner of claimants, long to work out that, for all the new League of Nations' limitations, there were advantages to membership, not least international legitimacy. Within 15 years, the League's membership grew from 42 to 62—thanks to the dismantling of the Habsburg, German, Russian and Ottoman empires. This expanding number of states reinforced the League's ostensible mission of 'international cooperation' and

<sup>16</sup> Naoko Shimazu, *Japan, race and equality: the racial equality proposal of 1919* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 119, 182.

<sup>17</sup> Sluga, *The nation, psychology and international politics*, pp. 19ff.

<sup>18</sup> Constance Drexel, cited in Glenda Sluga, 'Women, feminisms and twentieth-century internationalisms', in Sluga and Clavin, eds, *Internationalisms*, p. 69; Carol Miller, 'Geneva—the key to equality: inter-war feminists and the League of Nations', *Women's History Review* 3: 2, 1994, pp. 219–45.

<sup>19</sup> Manu Goswami, 'Imaginary futures and colonial internationalisms', *American Historical Review* 117: 5, Dec. 2012, pp. 1461–85.

‘international peace and security’, even though its structural features hardly encouraged inclusivity. Ultimate authority was vested in a League Council comprising only four permanent members, the Allied imperial powers of the time: Great Britain, France, Italy and Japan. There were also four *non*-permanent members elected for three-year terms by the League’s General Assembly, playing to the permanent members’ tune. The Council directed Assembly business and controlled the League Secretariat. Neither the Council nor the General Assembly was allowed to make recommendations that contravened a member’s domestic jurisdiction.

The limited scope of the League, relative to some expectations, and the absence of the United States, determined by the US (Republican) Senate’s preference for a splendid isolationism, already marked it as a failure in many eyes.<sup>20</sup> And yet, the idea of the League exerted power and influence of a kind. The fact of the League’s existence encouraged actual and aspiring states to seek a voice on the world’s new stage. Middle and smaller powers found that here they could be heard. Most famously, Haitian delegates and the Ethiopian Emperor made good use of the League’s General Assembly to denounce, if not prevent, atrocities, whether the bombing of civilians in the Middle East and Africa or the occupation of sovereign territory. Non-state actors sought out League commissions to make their own demands when nations or empires let them down. Even one of the most controversial League innovations, the ‘mandate’ system, became an unintended weapon with which the colonized could speak back to imperial powers.

In 1919, the US and British experts advising on the peace hit on the concept of ‘mandates’ as a decorous means of dividing the captured colonial territories of the defeated empires among the victorious powers—to whom responsibility for them was to be awarded as a ‘sacred trust’.<sup>21</sup> The League was made the moral linchpin of a system of colonial trusteeship—eventually transferred (in altered form) to the UN, and abandoned only in 1994. In early 1919, anti-imperialists such as DuBois heralded mandates as a potential answer to the phasing out of imperialism. But between the idea and the reality fell the shadow of the deliberate inhibitions of this scheme.<sup>22</sup> The League Covenant’s definition of mandates enshrined their purpose as the ‘tutelage of backward people’.<sup>23</sup> The classification of mandated territories from A to C was introduced as a purported measure of the relative stage of each territory’s political evolution, as if its people were taking their place in a queue: Arabs at the front, Africans in the middle, Pacific islanders at the rear. There was no acknowledgement of the available evidence of the political aspirations of those same people.<sup>24</sup> The mandates veiled the renegeing on wartime promises of colonial withdrawal. Arab regional leaders who had taken the British at their word and risen up against the Ottoman empire during the war on the promise of a pan-Arab

<sup>20</sup> See Joseph S. Nye, Jr, ‘The rise and fall of American hegemony from Wilson to Trump’, *International Affairs* 95: 1, Jan. 2019, pp. 63–80.

<sup>21</sup> Sluga, *The nation, psychology and international politics*, p. 19.

<sup>22</sup> Arnold Toynbee, *The world after the peace conference: being an epilogue to the ‘History of the peace conference of Paris’ and a prologue to the ‘Survey of international affairs, 1920–1923’* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 82.

<sup>23</sup> J. C. Smuts, *The League of Nations: a practical suggestion* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1918), p. 40.

<sup>24</sup> D. H. Miller, *The drafting of the Covenant* (New York: Putnam, 1928), vol. 1, p. 348.



state found their territories shared out between France and Britain. Adding to the frustrations of these populations, the League's Permanent Advisory Commission on Mandates did not have the oversight that was anticipated by its enthusiasts, being entitled only to receive annual reports from the mandate powers.

Even so, as with so much of this history, the idea of representation, and the importance of being seen to advance the interests of colonial subjects, resonated. Inazo Nitobe, the League's Under-Secretary-General, was a Japanese diplomat and former colonial adviser who became a regular spokesperson for Geneva as the new Mecca, the League as the 'conscience' of the world, and 'colonisation as a means to civilisation and world peace, with clear moral obligations for the colonisers'.<sup>25</sup> The African American political scientist (and later the UN's Director of Trusteeship) Ralph Bunche wrote a Harvard doctoral thesis in which he concluded that mandates did little in practice to improve the lives of colonial subjects. Nevertheless, only mandate subjects were able to galvanize around the ideal of 'trusteeship' and international oversight, particularly through petitioning.<sup>26</sup> Thus, from its early days, the League of Nations acted as a lightning rod for criticism of the same imperial powers some had expected it to defend.

Talk might not count for much when institutions have no way of exercising direct power. But in emulating the institutional forms and political forums of democratic states, the League set up expectations for representation, debate and negotiation at an international level. Rabindranath Tagore reflected that 'somehow or other, the expectation of understanding and fellowship is in the air'.<sup>27</sup> George Rich, a justice of the Australian High Court, arrived at the League in 1922 as a sceptic. He was soon won over by the process of 'shrewd, practical, able and conciliatory men of the world, meeting together to solve in a common-sense way problems that baffled nations'.<sup>28</sup> It is also true that the same process left the early League enthusiast Helena Swanwick more ambivalent. A stint at the League Assembly in 1924 as a replacement British delegate only convinced her that 'men were in all places of power'.<sup>29</sup>

Thanks to the persistence of women's organizations, women's involvement with the League counts as a relatively positive story—even though women were denied demands for a Women's Charter.<sup>30</sup> What they got was a provision in the League Covenant that required all paid positions within its Secretariat to be open

<sup>25</sup> Thomas W. Burkman, 'Nationalist actors in the internationalist theatres: Nitobe Inazo and Ishii Kikujiro and the League of Nations', in Dick Stegewerns, ed., *Nationalism and internationalism in imperial Japan: autonomy, Asian brotherhood, or world citizenship?* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 103.

<sup>26</sup> Susan Pedersen, *The guardians: the League of Nations and the crisis of empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 232.

<sup>27</sup> Sudhin Ghose, 'Three conversations: Tagore talks with Einstein, with Rolland and with Wells', *Asia*, vol. 31, 1931, pp. 139–43, 196–7.

<sup>28</sup> Nicholas Brown, 'Enacting the international: Raymond Watt and the League of Nations Union', in Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woollacott, eds, *Transnational ties: Australian lives in the world* (Canberra: Australian National University e-Press, 1999), pp. 75–96 at p. 84.

<sup>29</sup> Helena Swanwick, *I have been young* (London: Gollancz, 1935), quoted in Glenda Sluga, 'Gender', in Patrick Finney, ed., *Palgrave advances in international history* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), pp. 315–16.

<sup>30</sup> These efforts were in many ways a precursor to the Women, Peace and Security agenda in the UN today. See Paul Kirby and Laura J. Shepherd, 'The futures past of the Women, Peace and Security agenda', *International Affairs* 92: 2, March 2016, pp. 373–92.

to both sexes—in striking contrast to the postwar push by many League member states to remove women from jobs they had temporarily occupied in wartime.<sup>31</sup> As a result, often overqualified women were an imposing minority presence in the League bureaucracy, especially in its ‘second division’ of administrators, doing the bulk of work for little credit. Women’s NGOs were also prominent in the League’s social and humanitarian work—in areas such as ‘Opium, Refugees, Protection of Children, Relief after Earthquakes, Prison Reform, Municipal Cooperation, Alcoholism, Traffic in Women’—which accrued a reputation as ‘feminized’ areas of governance.<sup>32</sup> A hundred years later, the concept ‘governance feminism’ underscores the feminization of international organizations more generally—and the frequent equation of an openness to women and women’s rights with a lack of ‘hard power’.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear that the *longue durée* history of international organizations and their impact looks very different when seen from the perspective of groups otherwise marginalized within national polities, or even those state powers otherwise marginalized in international politics. The pull of the League in all these respects—its symbolic power, the chinks of bureaucratic opportunity—helps to explain why by 1939 around 730 NGOs had moved to Geneva.<sup>34</sup> The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom was among the first to set up its headquarters there.<sup>35</sup>

Equally important for these bodies was the International Labour Organization, another product of the 1919 peace. Labour questions and regulations had for decades been discussed between European powers in order to ensure that no one state gained economic advantage over another by refusing standards adopted by others. By 1919, there was the added impetus of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. The liberal democratic governments meeting in Paris sensed they were competing for the hearts and minds of disenchanted soldiers and workers. That imperative explains the ILO constitution’s invocations of ‘sentiments of justice and humanity’, ‘social justice’ and ‘human dignity’, and its warning of the threat posed to world peace by the ‘conditions of labour ... involving such injustice, hardship, and privation to large numbers of people’. The ILO’s American architects gave it an innovative tripartite governance structure meant to represent states, workers and employers—in contrast to the League, where only member states could vote. It even required a female expert to be present whenever women were discussed.<sup>36</sup> The aim was to create an organization that could coordinate social reform; standards of labour and health were regarded as crucial to ‘the stability

<sup>31</sup> Miller, *The drafting of the Covenant*, vol. 1, p. 348; vol. 2, p. 537.

<sup>32</sup> Swanwick, *I have been young*, pp. 385, 246.

<sup>33</sup> See S. Neil MacFarlane and Yuen Foong Khong, *Human security and the UN: a critical history* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); cf. Heidi Hudson, ‘“Doing” security as though humans matter: a feminist perspective on gender and the politics of human security’, *Security Dialogue* 36: 2, 2005, pp. 155–74.

<sup>34</sup> Jeremy Suri, ‘Non-governmental organizations’, in Patrick Finney, ed., *Palgrave advances in international history* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), p. 237.

<sup>35</sup> Swanwick, *I have been young*, p. 32.

<sup>36</sup> Marie Sandell, ‘A real meeting of the women of the East and the West: women and internationalism in the interwar period’ in Daniel Laqua, ed., *Internationalism reconfigured: transnational ideas and movements between the world wars* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011), pp. 161–86.



of states, and hence the stability of the international system'.<sup>37</sup> Just as important was the ILO's taking a role that was more administrative and institution-building than legislative, more agenda-setting than binding—and the fact that the United States, one of its key architects, did not join until 1934.

Once we accept the 'historical situatedness' of international organizations, we should not be surprised to find that alongside the more ambitious aspects of the ILO Charter's rhetoric about social justice, it also stipulated that 'differences of climate, habits and customs, of economic opportunity and industrial tradition may restrict uniformity in the conditions of labour difficult of immediate attainment'. This clause used imperial race propaganda to justify exceptions to its progressive labour norms: Indian children matured earlier, or Indian labour was less productive, therefore ILO regulations did not apply.<sup>38</sup> A characteristic combination of progressive and imperial imperatives permeated the League's approaches to the world's political, social and even economic fortunes, leaving historians, like many of its contemporaries, asking whether it was ultimately an instrument of imperialism.

For all the League's acquiescence in empire, its institutional structure reflected the technocratic as well as democratic norms of state formations. The bureaucrats who busied themselves in an adapted hotel renamed Palais Wilson assumed roles copied from English government. (It was only in the mid-1930s that the League, well past its heyday, moved into the imposing purpose-built lakeside campus, the Palais des Nations.) The League Secretary-General Eric Drummond, an English aristocrat and former private secretary to the British foreign minister, was more a proponent of British bureaucracy than 'the spirit of Geneva'.

Regardless of Drummond's lack of interest, the bureaucracy took seriously its efforts to collect data on its internal employment practices, reflecting on its representativeness. Despite best intentions, the first division of directors and chiefs included a maximum at any one time of three Australians, Canadians, Indians, Japanese and New Zealanders, two Chinese, and one Albanian, one Iranian, one Thai and one Turk. This was in contrast to 39 British staff and 32 French.<sup>39</sup> The Far East region could boast only six posts overall, even though it supplied 12 per cent of the total budget and as a 'civilization' comprised millions of people. British-ruled India paid almost as much into the League's budget as the permanent council member Italy, yet few Indians made it into the ranks of the Secretariat.

What was the League good for? Theories circulating at the time attested that the sociability contrived in the League's corridors and meetings, coffee rooms and dining halls fostered enthusiasm for international governance as the path to peace. In 1921 Sara Wambaugh, an American temporarily with the League's Minorities Section tasked with protecting minorities in the new postwar states of central Europe, described the cosmopolitan Secretariat as a 'league in miniature'.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Douglas Galbi, 'International aspects of social reform in the interwar period', draft MA diss., Common Security Forum Center for Population and Development Studies, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, 12 June 1993.

<sup>38</sup> Temperley, *History of the peace conference*, vol. 2, p. 466.

<sup>39</sup> Egon F. Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat: a great experiment in international administration* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1945), pp. 335–7.

<sup>40</sup> 'American woman who was attached to Secretariat tells how questions are handled', *New York Times*, 14 Aug. 1921.

Viscount Ishii Kikujiro, a Japanese delegate to the League's Council and Assembly from 1920 to 1927, reminisced that delegates in daily contact with one another lost much of their fierce patriotism and gained moderation and conciliatory tendencies.<sup>41</sup> But new historical work suggests also that the bureaucracy's actual work made a difference. The League's published annual compilations of textual and tabular data on military organizations, armaments and economics suddenly made it possible to know the number and value of arms imported and exported by each nation.<sup>42</sup> Disarmament negotiations and arms trade regulation—and public awareness of militarization—were impossible without these data.<sup>43</sup> The expert committees that advised the technical sections of the Secretariat on health, child welfare, opium control, housing, nutrition, land and sea communications, and economic and financial questions all relied on the data collected by the League and the ILO: 'the raw material of national statistics to make a new kind of raw material for the study of world problems'.<sup>44</sup> The League's collection of financial data put at the disposal of statesmen, economists and businesses 'indices of foreign trade and industrial production, statistics on the gainfully-occupied population, housing, capital formation, balances of payments, tourism'. These were 'truly comparable trade statistics' without which there was no graspable 'world economy'.<sup>45</sup>

The international thinking that underscored all these efforts was the intersection of stadist (*sic*: the idea that the world's progress was measurable in ever-expanding communities of political organization), technocratic (that science could solve the world's problems) and capitalist (that the free flow of trade and commerce brought prosperity and peace to everyone) assumptions. Each of these strands of thinking influenced the invention of the League's Economic and Financial Organization (EFO), as the world's first intergovernmental body devoted to the promotion of economic and monetary cooperation, focused on connecting 'economics and finance to politics and society'.<sup>46</sup>

Like other League instruments, economic intervention was subject to invitation from member states. In October 1922, that invitation came from a defeated Austrian government desperate for immediate food aid. The collapse of the Habsburg empire had left Austria cut off from its established sources of production and trade, and hyperinflation exacerbated its crisis. What was at the time the League's Economic and Financial Committee responded with a plan for long-term capital supplies from financiers, contributing on a 'humanitarian impulse'. The 'Geneva Protocol' provided fiscal assistance but also demanded that Austria pursue a rigorous austerity programme: food subsidies were cut and state expenditure was slashed. Some 50,000 civil servants lost their jobs, and there were continuing attempts to reduce the pension provision of former officials who

<sup>41</sup> Burkman, 'Nationalist actors in the internationalist theatres', p. 90.

<sup>42</sup> David Lincove, 'Data for peace: the League of Nations and disarmament 1920–40', *Peace Change* 43: 4, Oct. 2018.

<sup>43</sup> Andrew Webster, 'The League of Nations, disarmament and internationalism', p. 143, in Sluga and Clavin, eds, *Internationalisms*, pp. 139–69, at p. 143.

<sup>44</sup> Charles K. Nichols, 'The statistical work of the League of Nations in economic, financial and related fields', *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 37: 219, 1942, pp. 336–42 at p. 341.

<sup>45</sup> Nichols, 'The statistical work of the League of Nations', p. 340.

<sup>46</sup> Clavin, *Securing the world economy*, p. 3.

had once administered the now lost empire. This was the League's 'financial "dictatorship"', overseen by the League-appointed Commissioner General, who now had extraordinary powers 'to determine when and where Austria's government disbursed or cut expenditure'.<sup>47</sup> Within six months the Austrian economy had stabilized, and within a year the budget was in the black. The human cost was lost on the League officials who presented Austria as a success story and used it as a template for consolidating the League's roles and tackling economic crises in Hungary and Germany in the 1920s; bankers such as J. P. Morgan and Montagu Norman were heralded as its heroes. In Austria the mood was more ambivalent. Social democrats came out in opposition to Geneva's imposition of a 'bourgeois capitalist order'.

It was precisely because the League's bureaucracy and technical commissions gave space to a range of voices that it became a useful scapegoat for both left and right, particularly as interwar Europe grew more politically polarized. The conservative economist Friedrich Hayek was a League consultant on business statistics. But international women's NGOs with networks inside the League manoeuvred for the inclusion of Emmy Freundlich, a Bohemian-born social democrat, at the first world economic conference, organized by the League in 1927. Freundlich argued for a 'new economic evolution' based on economic governance of prices, representation for consumers *and* reducing tariffs.<sup>48</sup>

More generally the European landscape of international organizations was filled with intergovernmental bodies and 'public international unions' that oversaw the globalization of infrastructure and regulations—in telegraphs and telephony, shipping and airspace. The Hague Permanent Court of International Justice (now the ICJ) picked up where the Court of Arbitration left off. Whereas its prewar predecessor was limited to adjudicating disputes between states, the new court could hear and determine any dispute of an international character. As the world changed, the League, with its state-based foundation, followed suit, torn between its international imperatives and its representation of national and imperial member interests, and between its bureaucrats' and delegates' progressive and conservative tendencies.

By the 1930s, intergovernmental organizations were affected by the strains of populism and fascism that were infecting European governments in particular. In 1933 Hitler withdrew Germany, rejecting oversight of its military programme; Japan left in a fit of pique when the Assembly criticized its occupation of Manchuria. Even so, the political potential of international organizations drew the curiosity of fascist regimes, which ventured their own adaptations or attempted to influence the existing bodies.<sup>49</sup> The Italian fascist government retained membership until 1937—the Marquis Paulucci di Calboli Barone, formerly of

<sup>47</sup> Patricia Clavin, 'Men and markets', in Sluga and Clavin, eds, *Internationalisms*, p. 85–110; Patricia Clavin, 'Transnationalism and the League of Nations: understanding the work of its Economic and Financial Organisation', *Contemporary European History* 14: 4, 2005, pp. 465–92.

<sup>48</sup> Sluga, "'Global Austria'".

<sup>49</sup> Madeleine Herren, "'Outwardly ... an innocuous conference authority": National Socialism and the logistics of international information management', *German History* 20: 1, 2002, pp. 67–92, and 'Fascist internationalism', in Sluga and Clavin, eds, *Internationalisms*, pp. 191–212.

Mussolini's cabinet, replaced Nitobe as Under-Secretary-General and encouraged Italians at the League to undermine Drummond's authority.<sup>50</sup> Joseph Avenol, a French diplomat who became League Secretary-General in 1933, was in sympathy with the fascist turn—among his hallmark actions was removing women from any positions of relative power. Given the turn of events, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that international and national ideas and institutions were equally fungible. A body born of the desire to sustain peace and prevent the spread of Bolshevism had by the late 1930s become a different entity. Competing within it were expanding visions for the methods by which peace might be guaranteed, including humanitarianism and the defeat of inequality, even as controversy remained around the extent to which states should accept international scrutiny.

### What was the legacy of 1919?

The League's ultimate failure to prevent the depression, the rise of fascism or the Second World War, together with its own paradoxical tendencies, could have easily killed off the idea that international organizations were necessary to the world's political life. Instead, what is striking is that from the late 1930s, citizen groups advocated new conceptions of 'world government'. By 1942, the momentum had shifted to the United States, where 'One World' was the mantra of Wendell Willkie, a Republican presidential candidate. One World was then taken up by the man who won the presidency, the Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt, who recruited Willkie to spread the One World message on a world tour, promoting America as the leader of a new *world* order, and an alliance of 'United Nations' (now including Russia), fighting Germany, Italy and Japan.

On the calculus of the 'Overton window' theory,<sup>51</sup> in the mid-twentieth century the multilateral promise of intergovernmental organizations accrued more rather than less legitimacy. We know most about those countries where public opinion surveys were in growing use. In Britain, for example, surveys of attitudes towards 'world government' announced that being 'internationally minded' was a dominant trend; two out of three people liked the idea of world government, one in two thought it practical in the future, one in six thought it 'possibly practical during the twentieth century'.<sup>52</sup> The US government recorded similar inclinations. Of those surveyed, 60 per cent had heard or read about plans for an international organization, and 81 per cent agreed that America should join a world organization with the authority to police world peace.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*, p. 251; Elisabetta Tollardo, *Fascist Italy and the League of Nations, 1922–1935* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016).

<sup>51</sup> The Overton window theory refers to the ways in which the range (or window) of policies acceptable to the public shift over time.

<sup>52</sup> Mass-Observation, *Peace and the public: a study by Mass-Observation* (London: Longmans, Green, 1947), p. 39. The rest of the report was devoted to assessing 'how far ordinary people are prepared to go in sacrificing national sovereignty in the interests of world peace' (p. 47). The Mass-Observation surveys on which those conclusions were founded took place during the years 1946–8.

<sup>53</sup> James Speer II, 'Hans Morgenthau and the world state', *World Politics* 20: 2, 1968, p. 214. Speer cites a number of *Public Opinion Quarterly* surveys (respectively, volumes 10 [1946], 13 [1949], 15 [1951], 17 [1955] and 25 [1961]), on which these conclusions are based.

There was nothing inevitable about this mood. It depended on the activism of individuals and the interventions of national governments. To a significant extent the popular appeal of One World was primed by the State Department's own propaganda justifying American intervention in the Second World War. By 1945 the phenomenon was more pervasive as the experience of war intensified the desire for an antidote to the overlapping perils of racism and nationalism. In China—as in Main Street America—scholars, journalists and opinion leaders with long memories of the League prepared proposals, drafts and newspaper articles on a successor organization that could succeed where the League had failed. Some emphasized economic and social functions, or introducing a two-thirds majority vote on important questions.<sup>54</sup> Back in Vienna, Egon Ranshofen Wertheimer—formerly a League bureaucrat—penned his vision in a history of the League's International Secretariat, subtitled 'a great experiment in international administration'.<sup>55</sup>

By 1944, the beleaguered ILO—which had found refuge in Montreal from fascist threats—was expanding its brief by enshrining economic rights and equality as international obligations.<sup>56</sup> As in the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries, there was still talk of a unifying world language and a world currency, but also more specific ambitions. When Frank Lidgett McDougall—a British-born small-town Australian fruit farmer—dreamed of international economic governance, he imagined connecting dietary needs with food supply on a world scale, and measuring the value of food in terms of nutrition rather than market pricing. He also pictured in detail 'an international Bank to regulate balances of payment and to finance development, a Development Authority, an Agricultural Office, a Nutrition Office, an Office for the co-ordination of National Public Works, a Commodity Control Central Authority, a Central Committee on Commercial Policy and an Economic Intelligence Service'. FDR embraced McDougall's plan for a food and agricultural organization because it seemed to fulfil the Atlantic Charter's promise of 'freedom from want'. The actual FAO had a drastically reduced suite of offices and aims, although it continues to target world hunger through applied science and knowledge dissemination.<sup>57</sup>

The United Nations Conference on International Organization—the backdrop for the drafting of a UN Charter—brought together some of these ambitions, and more, in San Francisco in April 1945. Over months of deliberation, a curious global public watched on in movie theatres where newsreels presented reports of the proceedings and the colourful array of delegates from all over the world.<sup>58</sup> Hollywood studio chiefs, and actors such as Orson Welles, Lana Turner, Charles Boyer and Myrna Loy, devoted their services, setting a trend of celebrity sponsorship to which the UN returned with greater vigour at the end of the century

<sup>54</sup> Pan, 'National internationalism', pp. 170–90.

<sup>55</sup> Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*, pp. 128–30.

<sup>56</sup> See 'The international rights of labor enunciated by ILO conference [text of the "Declaration of Philadelphia"]', in *Victory Bulletin*, June 1944, [http://blue.lim.ilo.org/cariblex/pdfs/ILO\\_dec\\_philadelphia.pdf](http://blue.lim.ilo.org/cariblex/pdfs/ILO_dec_philadelphia.pdf). (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 13 Nov. 2018.)

<sup>57</sup> Sunil Amrith and Patricia Clavin, 'Feeding the world: connecting Asia and Europe', *Past and Present* 218: 8, 2013, pp. 70–97.

<sup>58</sup> Sluga, *Internationalism in the age of nationalism*, ch. 3.

under Kofi Annan. In 1949, the UN experimented with the appointment of a UN ambassador to Hollywood to negotiate free publicity in forthcoming films.<sup>59</sup> After the Allies dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the urgency of peace and disarmament attracted even more popular support for the new UN organization and its satellite bodies. Albert Einstein was among the high-profile figures who took to the streets in support of a world government empowered to solve conflicts between nations by judicial decision, and with oversight of weapons of mass destruction.

As in 1919, the organizational system put into place did not quite match the spectrum of political ambitions and institutional powers behind its creation. The mission of the UN and its constituent organizations is undeniably international in scope, yet, like the League, they are intended to represent member states and *not* to intervene in matters of domestic sovereignty. The world's international machinery (including the ICJ or 'World Court', and the more recent International Criminal Court) has no compulsory jurisdiction.<sup>60</sup> Then there is the geopolitical bias within the UN that privileges the Security Council with its permanent membership—the United States, Britain, France, Russia and China—frozen in Second World War time. Unlike the League Council, the UN Security Council permanent members can use their veto to influence politics: the structural price paid in 1945 for US and Soviet participation.

The final version of the UN Charter manifested the double face of institutionalized liberal democratic (international) politics. It now asserted rights and freedoms without distinction on the basis of sex or race, language or religion, and allowed for exceptionalism.<sup>61</sup> It enshrined the primacy of state sovereignty and replaced the League's emphasis on nationality rights with one on 'human rights'. As before, there was no agreement among delegates on what those rights entailed, or to what extent they could be enforced. However, the discursive, negotiating space these debates generated drew in NGOs, including feminist and anti-colonial associations (although few of them were heard in San Francisco).<sup>62</sup> As a lowly US delegate, Ralph Bunche was able to manoeuvre the Charter discussion of the transformation of the League mandates into UN trusteeships so as to extend the limited rights guaranteed to 'trusteeships' to *all* colonies. Historians revisiting the controversial Bretton Woods discussions that led to the creation of the IMF and the World Bank are recovering the seeds of neo-liberalist monetarism, and the extent of America's economic influence in the world being made. But in the early 1940s, these organizations seemed the paths to a different international future. The US delegate to Bretton Woods, Harry Dexter White, sought an IMF with

<sup>59</sup> Glenda Sluga, 'Hollywood, the UN and the long history of film communicating internationalism', in Heidi Tworek, Jonas Brendenbach and Martin Herzer, eds, *Communicating international organisations in the 19th and 20th centuries* (London: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>60</sup> Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer, 'The African Union and the International Criminal Court: counteracting the crisis', *International Affairs* 92: 6, Nov. 2016, pp. 1319–42.

<sup>61</sup> Deborah Stienstra, *Women's movements and international organizations* (London: St Martin's, 1994), p. 79.

<sup>62</sup> Marika Sherwood, "'There is no new deal for the blackman in San Francisco": African attempts to influence the founding conference of the United Nations, April–July, 1945', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 29: 1, 1996, pp. 71–94.



no conditional strings attached—the antithesis of the interwar Geneva Protocol. Britain’s John Maynard Keynes imagined the creation of an International Clearing Union, which would regulate currency exchange and trade using its own currency, the *bancor*, with any income generated being used for social reform.<sup>63</sup> Opportunity called in distinctive ways as entwined visions of the peaceful purpose of international governance and its economic means were embraced by Hollywood studio bosses with an eye to expanding their movie markets globally.<sup>64</sup> In the years that followed that first UN conference of 1945, it became difficult at times to separate out UN development objectives from the geopolitical template of an older imperial world—not least in the assumptions about where in the world international organizations could intervene, and where they could not, and the priorities of modernization.

Over the following decades, the tensions between imperial and anti-imperial imperatives coloured the development programmes initiated under the informal and formal influence of the UN and its various agencies, including its cultural and education arm, UNESCO.<sup>65</sup> UNESCO’s first Director-General, Julian Huxley, drew on his British imperial networks for staff and ideas. But Mahomed Bey Awad, a British-educated Egyptian geographer and the first head of UNESCO’s Social Sciences Department, used his position to press for more discussion of equity issues around wages and collective bargaining. Awad did not last long, but a similar approach was taken by his successor, the Swedish feminist Alva Myrdal, who advocated a Swedish model of ‘balanced modernization’. At stake, she believed, were world peace and social justice.<sup>66</sup> Myrdal oversaw the push at the UN and UNESCO to establish international benchmarks for housing, social welfare services, crime prevention, social care of immigrants and the status of women. When she left international work in 1956, it was because she felt the UN’s dominant modernization paradigm was too closely aligned to an American model that drew communities and countries into debt rather than improving the quality of life at a local level.

As earlier in the century, so after the Second World War the growing number of intergovernmental organizations, in a growing number of fields, all negotiated their roles in the context of the multivalent views of their member states, and the relations between them. As the UN grew more ‘global’, thanks to the influence of its expanding General Assembly, the dismantling of imperial legacies rose higher on the UN’s own ‘to do’ list. This same development meant that more economically and politically powerful members lost interest in what intergovernmental organizations could do. But the under-represented drew closer; the American civil rights and Australian indigenous rights movements both turned to

<sup>63</sup> Eric Helleiner, *Forgotten foundations of Bretton Woods: international development and the making of the postwar order* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014).

<sup>64</sup> Sluga, ‘Hollywood, the UN’, p. 150.

<sup>65</sup> Matthew Connelly, *A diplomatic revolution: Algeria’s fight for independence and the origins of the post-Cold War era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>66</sup> Glenda Sluga, ‘The human story of development: Alva Myrdal at the UN, 1949–1955’, in M. Frey, S. Kunkel and C. R. Unger, eds, *International organizations and development, 1945–1990* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 46–74.

the UN through the 1950s and 1960s to apply pressure back home.<sup>67</sup> Entangled in developments among its members, in the 1970s the UN saw the launch of perhaps the most radical of all its projects, the idea that it could oversee a ‘new international economic order’. The moment of the NIEO was shortlived, but along with the 1972 UN Human Environment conference, and the setting up of the UN Environmental Programme in Nairobi, it marked a more complex and representative international landscape, with all the tensions we might expect. Historians are now returning to the global 1970s to understand the roles of the IMF and new UN-linked bodies such as the WTO in shifting the momentum of international regulation in the direction of the interests of monetarist economies. Where once the ILO and EFO had sought to reconnect politics and economics, or even use international economic governance to institute social justice, now the WTO was in the ascendant, occupying what had been the ILO building in Geneva, and erasing all architectural evidence of a labour-focused past.<sup>68</sup>

In the 1990s, with the Cold War over, nationalist-fuelled violence in the broken federations of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia posed new challenges to the existing international order that put the UN once again at the centre of international thinking. The turn of the twenty-first century saw the invention of concepts that pushed the boundaries of international responsibility further into the domain of national sovereignty and returned to older themes of social justice. ‘Human security’ is the idea that international organizations should not only protect civilians in wartime, but also work to bring about an end to wars through economic intervention to relieve poverty and inequality; ‘Responsibility to Protect’ posits the significance of international intervention when populations are under physical threat, regardless of any state invitation. Around these conceptual shifts, a more complex, even ‘multiplex’, post-international ‘multipolar’ world order of international organizations has been taking shape, in which the G8 or the G20, or the private interests of the Davos World Economic Forum, or region-based trade agreements, occupy shifting positions on the map of a decentred and disrupted global political landscape.

### Imagined international communities?

Public opinion has always been crucial to the status of international organizations. At the end of the Cold War, the UN Programme Evaluation and Communications Research Unit (a modern version of the League’s less ambitious Information Section) surveyed knowledge awareness of the UN in 28 countries. It showed that

<sup>67</sup> John Mervyn Maynard, ‘Transcultural/transnational interaction and influences on aboriginal Australia’, in Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake, eds, *Connected worlds: history in transnational perspective* (Canberra: Australian National University e-Press, 2005), pp. 195–208; Fiona Paisley, ‘Mock justice: world conservation and Australian aborigines in interwar Switzerland’, *Transforming Cultures* (eJournal) 3: 1, 2008, <https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/TfC/article/view/685>; Carol Anderson, *Eyes off the prize: the United Nations and the African American struggle for human rights, 1944–1955* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>68</sup> Glenda Sluga, “‘Globalization,’ what is it good for?,” *Humanity* (online), 7 Nov. 2016, <http://humanityjournal.org/blog/globalization-what-is-it-good-for/>; Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: the end of empire and the birth of neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

in the early years, American public opinion towards the UN had exhibited ‘more positive evaluation than negative’. By the 1970s, poll ratings had plunged to ‘net negative’. Attitudes shifted slightly in a positive direction after 1989, but then even fewer people could name the Secretary-General or a UN agency.<sup>69</sup>

From the other side of 9/11 and the ‘war on terror’, it is difficult to conjure up a world order in which the Nansen passport—an early invention of the League of Nation’s Norwegian High Commissioner for Refugees—might find acceptance. In the interwar period, the Nansen passport allowed stateless individuals to move across national borders in search of refuge. We can no longer imagine the creation of ‘free cities’ overseen by internationally appointed high commissioners in contested territories as an attempt to assuage nationalism (as the League attempted).<sup>70</sup> We no longer have political debates about the realism of disarmament, as armament sales boom and nuclear stockpiling resumes. It has become harder, rather than easier, to imagine international solutions to the world-scale problems of inequality and the environment that challenge us now.

Even so, contemporary politics still harbours the instruments of an international public sphere put into place in the early twentieth century. For all the historical amnesia surrounding the *raison d’être* and workings of international organizations, it remains hard to imagine a world *without* the WHO coordinating responses to diseases without borders—even though populists are also finding reasons to attack its interventions. The ILO and the UN’s offices have overseen the expansion of gender and labour rights, and continue to be the places where common interests are calculated. These ‘talkshops’ have imitated, as they were intended to, nation-state forums of debate and discussion between the representatives of multiple interests, and have maintained bureaucracies that allow us to understand and interpret our world. UN bureaucracies continue the world-making work of data collection and dissemination, though little credit is given to the unglamorous Statistics Division of the UN’s Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

One of the oldest proponents of international organizations (founded in 1907), the Union of International Associations still produces a yearbook listing IGOs and indeed NGOs. As they multiply, these bodies traverse concerns similar to those of a century ago, although now, most notably, the environment, peacekeeping and human rights are at the forefront. The World Meteorological Organization (added as a specialized agency of the UN in 1950), the United Nations Environment Programme (1972) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (1988) have made the UN a critical broker of scientific information and policy on the environmental challenges threatening the security of states and individuals.<sup>71</sup> International law continues to have an extraordinary presence in national life, working through institutions of private and public arbitration—although states are increasingly challenging the authority or probity of conventions on refugee

<sup>69</sup> William J. Millard, ‘International public opinion of the United Nations: a comparative analysis’, *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 5: 1, 1993, pp. 92–9 at p. 93.

<sup>70</sup> See Sluga, *Internationalism in the age of nationalism*, ch. 2.

<sup>71</sup> Glenda Sluga, ‘Capitalists and climate’, *Humanity* (online), 6 Nov. 2017, <http://humanityjournal.org/blog/capitalists-and-climate/>.

rights and human rights, as well as those on climate change, or the uneven local consequences of multilateral trade agreements and commercial legislation.

What came first, the international or the national imperative? The point is that these have long been mutually reinforcing, to the extent that the impact of the international is inextricable from how national states establish their reputations and negotiate their own policies. It is a point well rehearsed by states in search of national status—for China, the accumulation of UNESCO World Heritage Sites continues a longer early-twentieth-century practice of leveraging international organizations in the search for global legitimacy. We currently have fewer social and political histories of the UN than of the League, but what we know draws a dense picture of twentieth-century international life—despite the equally significant recurring pattern of the disillusionment and disengagement of individuals involved with these organizations.<sup>72</sup> Like histories of national bodies, historical analyses of international organizations tell us not only that there are no perfect institutions, but that their designation as ‘international’ has been crucial to what they have added to political life. And yet the authority and legitimacy of international organizations seem to be daily called into question precisely because they are *international*.

## Conclusions

These days once again exude a palpable sense of crisis, with even the most basic tenet of international politics invented two centuries ago—multilateralism itself—seemingly under threat. When it comes to echoes of 1919, the early twenty-first century resonates with the pervasive tones of a civilizational war, pitting so-called globalists and internationalists against nationalists.<sup>73</sup> In the circumstances, what does this new history with its close examinations of the lives of individuals and institutions add to our understanding of the present?

At a basic level, this history reinforces the conclusions of a more ‘abstract’ existing International Relations literature in making a case for the value of international organizations as the foundations of modern multilateralism and international society. It captures the difference international organizations have made, not only in the realms of norms and ideas, but also as sites of politics, as part of the fabric of modern political culture. It collects the evidence of those ‘other’ voices we rarely hear in national histories: the relatively disfranchised individuals and groups who sought out an international public sphere to put their cases for representation or change in their own national states. In the current circumstances of a dearth of international memory, it is worth historicizing and remembering those lived strands of the international past, the shifting horizon of expectations that marked out what international organizations should aim to be, and what they are for. This new history also reminds us that at least one legacy of 1919 has been the enduring impact of national states and nationalisms in the making of

<sup>72</sup> Clavin, *Securing the world economy*, p. 7.

<sup>73</sup> Glenda Sluga, ‘Patriotes, mondialistes and sites of international memory’, *Humanity* (online), 6 April 2016, <http://humanityjournal.org/blog/patriotes-mondialistes-and-sites-of-international-memory/>.

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international agendas. Seen from this perspective, international organizations are sites of *national* memory, the markers of the limits of our contemporary political imaginaries. They prompt us to remember just how wide and diverse the horizon of political expectations for the nation once was.

When we start to orientate our future around this understanding of our international past, the question might be: do we need a completely different vision of international organizations if we are to have a future?

