Toward an Historical Geography of International Conferencing

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(From Legg, S., Heffernan, M., Hodder, J. and Thorpe, B. J. (Eds.) (2021) Placing Internationalism: International Conferences and the Making of the Modern World, Bloomsbury, London: https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/placing-internationalism-9781350247185/)

Introduction

Historians of international conferencing confront some thorny definitional challenges. It is by no means obvious what constitutes an 'international conference' given that both words – 'international' and 'conference' – are equally ambiguous. Should the category include bi-lateral conferences involving representatives from just two nation-states? If not, how many nation-states need to be represented for a conference to qualify as an 'international' event? And are conferences that involve delegates from different countries who explicitly reject national affiliations 'international' in any meaningful sense?

These problems are compounded by the complexities of the term 'conference'. This word is often used interchangeably with traditional political and ecclesiastical alternatives such as 'congress', 'assembly', 'senate', 'diet' or 'synod' and has recently jostled alongside intriguing examples of semantic change such as 'summit' and 'retreat'. This imprecision, and the attempts to bring clarity by applying strict definitions, has had important political consequences. Harold Nicolson argued that the reason Germany was excluded from the negotiations at Paris in 1919 lay in the initial tacit understanding that a 'conference' comprising representatives of the Allied forces would be followed by a larger 'congress' of all belligerents as well as neutral parties. As the conference progressed, this distinction gradually collapsed, along with the prospect of any

second stage being organised that would include German involvement. Whether through cynicism or, as Nicolson argued, convenience and bureaucratic momentum, the conference had simply become the congress.[1]

In thinking of conferencing as a process, we adopt an inclusive approach that does not seek to impose any divisions between conferences, congresses and so on. Rather, this approach pays close attention to the production of knowledge about conferences. Journal papers, monographs and newspaper articles worked to invent, reproduce and subvert distinctions between types of international meetings while also contributing towards histories of conferencing itself. In this chapter, we provide a critical commentary which incorporates the canonical version of conference history while also pushing out in two directions. First, we reflect on the context in which conference histories were written, and the ways in which they were coloured by the intentions of the author. And second, we seek to encompass recent literature that expands our understanding of what and who conferencing involved. We thus provide both a history and a blueprint for the study of international conferencing.

This chapter proceeds in two parts. The first traces two different histories of the modern international conference: an older tradition of diplomatic conferences organised to settle territorial disputes, and a newer form of periodic conferencing, emerging in the mid-nineteenth century and initially associated with scientific, technical and commercial conferences. This latter model sought to cultivate a wider international public sphere within which the process of internationalisation might be managed. As the frequency and scale of both of these forms of conferencing increased through the later decades of the nineteenth century, so the distinction between them began to blur.

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[1] H. Nicolson, *Peacemaking 1919: Being Reminiscences of the Paris Peace Conference* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1933), p. 97-99

The second part examines how these earlier forms of international conference converged during the Paris Peace Conference in 1919-20. Although the novelty of the Paris Peace Conference has often been overstated, it nonetheless inspired a period of prodigious conferencing in the years which followed. In the twentieth century the international conference matured into the preeminent political instrument of global governance. Conference rules and procedures became codified in the emerging discipline of international relations and conferences involved an increasingly diverse range of actors, such as non-governmental organisations. Conferences became important forums for defining the terms of internationalism and agreeing the rules and conventions by which it would be governed. What emerged was a distinctive understanding of internationalism as simultaneously a scientific and a political practice, a fusion enabled by conference spaces themselves which brought together politicians, diplomats, academics and activists. Whereas pre-existing national and imperial systems of governance were legitimated by scientific analysis conducted at one remove from their implementation, internationalism involved ambitious programmes that combined scientific analysis, large-scale educational reform and the establishment of new rules and conventions by which international governance could be operationalised. The international conference became, we argue, the defining arena of modern internationalism precisely because it was simultaneously a space of scientific analysis and a forum for political action; a place where internationalism was both studied and implemented.

The scale, frequency and focus of international conferences expanded dramatically during the 1920s just as political theorists, pioneering scholars of international relations and historians of diplomacy began to study how international organisations, notably the League of Nations, might codify conferencing rules and procedures as the basis for international governance. However, the rapid growth of conferences also spoke to a broader range of internationalist projects, especially outside of Europe, where the geopolitical orthodoxies of League and Empire were being challenged from multiple directions. We show how the conference method was not restricted to liberal advocates of the League of Nations who

considered internationalism in terms of the interactions between pre-existing, ideally democratic nation-states or as a means of securing free trade within and between colonial empires. The international conference was also the preferred method for social and political movements which sought to develop and implement alternative forms of internationalism – anti-colonialist, feminist, socialist, anarchist and even fascist. For each of these constituencies, the international conference became a key mechanism to seek publicity and legitimacy.

Pre-Histories of the Modern Conference

As the scale and frequency of international conferences grew dramatically in the twentieth century, contemporary writers sought to identify a longer history from which modern conferencing had emerged. Nicolson, for instance, claimed diplomacy, which he defined as the 'management of international relations by negotiation', was first formulated as a political practice in the ancient world. The semi-annual ancient Greek councils of the Amphictyonic League provided the original template for the modern international conference, Nicolson claimed, and were still being invoked well into the nineteenth century. Simón Bolivár's doomed attempt to forge a permanent alliance of new Latin American republics at the 1826 Congress of Panama was described at the time, and is still sometimes known, as the Amphictyonic Congress.[2]

International diplomacy collapsed in the medieval period, argued Nicolson, but re-emerged in Renaissance Italy when something approaching a modern system of embassies and ambassadors developed to facilitate the kinds of international exchange famously described in the early sixteenth century by Niccolò Macchiavelli.[3] What might now be defined as international

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[2] See, for an excellent commentary, S. Collier, 'Nationality, nationalism, and supranationalism in the writings of Simón Bolívar', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 63 (1983), 37-64.
[3] H. Nicolson, *Diplomacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939) 15, 26. See also J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003 [1975]); J.G.A. Pocock, 'The Machiavellian moment revisited: a study in

conferences waxed and waned in a similar sequence, claimed Nicolson, until periodic meetings of emperors, kings and courtly advisers finally became important instruments of statecraft in the early-modern era. Nicolson's contemporaries, better attuned to ecclesiastical interactions, traced the origins of the international conference to the medieval era that he had dismissed. Norman L. Hill described the pre-Tridentine ecumenical councils of the Roman Catholic Church as foundational 'international congresses working toward the establishment of a uniform law for the civilized world', while Alfred Zimmern cited the 'account given by an ecclesiastical historian of the manoeuvring between the parties at the Congress of Arras in 1435 [which] reads almost like a description of contemporary happenings'.[4]

Later generations of historians have added to these early histories of international conferences, emphasising their symbolic propaganda value in promoting new relationships between rival monarchs, usually for the benefit of fractious and scheming courts. The extraordinary events of the Field of Cloth of Gold, a three-week festival in June 1520 in Balinghem in what was then the English Pale of Calais, are often described in these terms. As an international conference it was part pageant, part political summit and featured dozens of English and French nobles desperately seeking to out-spend one another on food, clothing and music in hundreds of richly decorated tents. These were ostensibly to celebrate the new bond of friendship between Henry VIII of England and Francis I of France, established by the Anglo-French Treaty of 1514, but also served to reinforce the domestic authority of both monarchs.[5]

A key event identified in virtually all histories of international conferences, however, was the 1648 Congress of Westphalia, convened in the two neighbouring cities of Münster and

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history and ideology', *Journal of Modern History*, 53 (1981) 49-72; and Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought. Vol. 1: The Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1998 [1978])

[4] N. L. Hill, *The Public International Conference, Its Function, Organization, and Procedure* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1929), 1; A. Zimmern, *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law, 1918-1935* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1936), p. 33, citing M. Creighton, *A History of the Papacy from the Great Schism to the Sack of R0me*, vol. II (London: Longmans, Green & Co.; 1897), 293.

[5] For a brilliant account, see G. Richardson, *The Field of Cloth of Gold* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

Osnabrück to negotiate peace terms at the end of the Thirty Years' War. It was held to be the first major international conference that possessed characteristics resonant of contemporary conferencing, most notably its apparent formalisation of state sovereignty as the political grid through which such conferences operated.[6] Even by 1919, the Congress of Westphalia was still seen by some to offer a useful template for how to manage diplomatic protocol and procedure at a major international gathering.[7]

Post-Westphalia, peace conferences displayed increasing complexity and sophistication in their proceedings, often venturing into topics that laid outside of post-conflict territorial negotiation. The locations of such conferences often became metonyms for the political regimes they ushered in. Hill's list of the 'most important' post-Westphalian peace conferences is typical:[8]

1648 – Westphalia	**1772** – Fokchany; Bucharest
1659 – Pyrenees	**1779** – Teschen
1668 – Aix-la-Chapelle	**1797** – Rastadt
1679 – Nijmegen	**1802** – Amiens
1697 – Ryswick	**1815** – Vienna
1699 – Carlowitz	**1856** – Paris
1719 – Utrecht	**1878** – Berlin
1721 – Chambray	**1905** – Portsmouth
1728 – Soissons	**1912-13** – London
1748 – Breda; Aix-la-Chapelle	**1919** – Paris

These early international conferences shared several common themes. They were elite gatherings of monarchs, aristocrats and statesmen with limited reach to wider publics. As the American scholar of international relations Frederick Sherwood Dunn noted, 'Political life was

[6] See, for important discussions of an enormous literature, A. Osiander, 'Sovereignty, international relations and the Westphalian myth', *International Organization* 55: 251-87; and D. Croxton, *Westphalia: The Last Christian Peace* (London: Palgrave).
[7] K. Colegrove, 'Diplomatic procedure preliminary to the Congress of Westphalia', *The American Journal of International Law*, 13:3 (1919), 450–482
[8] Hill, *The Public International Conference*, p. 4.

organized, not horizontally, but vertically, and the various political units that grew out of the ruins of the feudal system touched each other only at the top'.[9] As such, most early international conferences were a mixture of formalised discussions, resolutions and treaties with much ceremonial pomp and display. They were also reactive events, convened in response to crises and limited, in most cases, to issues of war and peace that reflected the restricted domain of international affairs. The ever-changing location and cast of actors prevented experience in the techniques of conferencing from being passed on; as Zimmern lamented, 'to read the proceedings of a pre-[WWI] Conference of the usual improvised type is to discover that its members were moving about in "worlds unrealised", encountering obstacle after obstacle and circumventing them as best they could with little help either from general rules or, in most cases, from particular experience'.[10] The penetration of internationalism into daily life changed significantly during the nineteenth century, a consequence of increasingly integrated modern capitalist economies, a growing middle class and the emergence of mass media serving a predominantly literate public. The new internationalism also reflected technological innovations in travel and communication, notably the invention of the steamship in 1807, the steam locomotive in 1825, and the development of the electric telegraph by Gauss, Weber and Morse between 1830 and 1850. As people and states became increasingly interconnected, the international conference emerged as a key and less overtly geopolitical mechanism through which ongoing processes of internationalisation might be managed. Conferencing did not develop, therefore, from an abstract political science or a fundamental law of international integration. It emerged in a spontaneous and haphazard manner driven by economic and political needs and the growing demands of international life.[11]

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[9] F. S. Dunn, *The Practice and Procedure of International Conferences* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1929), 7.
[10] Zimmern, *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law*, 37
[11] On this see, Dunn, *The Practice and Procedure of International Conferences*, 6.

International conferences that sought to improve interactions in science, commerce and technology, domains deemed to be driven by inherently global forces beyond the control of nation-states, were at the forefront of the new wave of nineteenth-century internationalism. Delegates to scientific or commercial conferences often represented their academic disciplines and fields of technical expertise rather than their nation-states, and their deliberations provided an ostensibly apolitical, scientific model of enlightened international governance.[12] Internationalisation was embraced with particular ease and enthusiasm by representatives of mathematical sciences, including physics and statistics, whose common language of numbers and symbols, rather than national languages, seemed ideally suited to international exchange.[13] Such internationalisation was a process facilitated almost entirely by regular international conferences organised in major cities around the world, even by those disciplines, such as geography, that were strongly associated with the national and imperial aspirations of the great powers.[14]

In many cases, international scientific agreements were urgently required for commercial reasons, including establishing global standards in the measurement of time and space. For example, long-standing disputes about the prime meridian were finally reconciled (more or less) at the 1884 International Meridian Conference in Washington DC.[15] Global standards in other

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[12] See the essays in a theme issue by W. Feuerhahn and P. Rabault-Feuerhahn (eds), 'La fabrique international de la science: les congrès scientifiques de 1865 à 1945', *Revue Germanique Internationale* 12 (2010) 1-258; and A. Rasmussen, 'Jalons pour une histoire des congrès internationaux au XIXe siècle: régulation scientifique et propaganda intellectuelle', *Relations Internationales* 62 (1990) 115-133. For related context, see M. H. Geyer and J. Paulmann (eds) *The Mechanics of Internationalism: Culture, Society, and Politics from the 1840s to the First World War* (Oxford: OUP 2001); M. Herren, *Hintertüren zur Macht: Internationalismus und modernisierungsorientierte Außenpolitik in Belgien, der Schweiz und den USA 1865-1914* (Munich: Oldebourg 2000); G. Somsen, 'A history of universalism: conceptions of the internationality of science from the Enlightenment to the Cold War', *Minerva* 46 (2009), 361-379; and, especially, R. Fox, *Science Without Frontiers: Cosmopolitanism and National Interests in the World of Learning, 1870-1940* (Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Press, 2016).

[13] See N. Randeraad, 'The International Statistical Congress (1853-1876): knowledge transfers and their limits', *European History Quarterly* 41: 50-65. On language and science, see M. Gordin, *Scientific Babel: The Language of Science from the Fall of Latin to the Rise of English* (London: Profile Books 2014).

[14] See M.-C. Robic, A.-M. Briend and M. Rössler (eds) *Géographes Face au Monde: l'Union Géographique Internationale et les Congrès Internationaux de Géographie/Geographers and the World: The International Geographical Union and the International Geographical Congresses* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996).

[15] C. W. J. Withers, *Zero Degrees: Geographies of the Prime Meridian* (Harvard: Harvard University Press 2017).

spheres were also agreed at late nineteenth-century international conferences to ease global commercial exchange. The Universal Postal Union (UPU), established at the Treaty of Bern of 1874, provided an early model for international governance facilitated by periodic conferences. The UPU eventually became a single, centrally organised international association that welcomed delegates from the great powers alongside representatives of non-European and colonial states, including British India, a signatory to the foundational conference of the International Telegraphic Union (ITC) in Vienna in 1868.[16] By 1891, there were 58 UPU member states, eight classed as colonies and 15 as semi-sovereign members. Scientific-technical international conferences were, therefore, innovative spaces in which colonial and non-state groups could participate and gain a measure of official recognition: as Ellen Ravndal argues, '[by] joining IOs [International Organisations] and implementing their agreements on postal services, telegraphs, customs tariffs, patents and sanitary measures, a state could prove to the world (and its domestic constituency) that it was doing what "modern" states were supposed to do'.[17]

Unknown before the 1850s, scientific-cum-political international conferences rapidly outnumbered diplomatic conferences that continued the earlier Westphalian tradition. For Dunn, the new international conferences, by seeking to engage technical and scientific topics of direct relevance to the lives of ordinary people, were more important – and democratic – than traditional diplomatic conferences because they promoted the international sphere as the realm of science and expertise. That version of internationalism constituted:

> an application of international government to daily life, continuously, at the instant moment, and directly in contact with the ultimate units of international life, the

[16] See Dunn, *The Practice and Procedure of International Conferences*, 152-3; and, for more detail, F. Lyall, *International Communications: The International Telecommunication Union and the Universal Postal Union* (London: Routledge, 2011). On colonial India and the ITU, see E. Ravndal, 'From an inclusive to an exclusive international order: membership of international organisations from the 19th to the 20th century', *STANCE Working Paper Series* 8 (2016), 11. For more on the role of international conferences in this area, see R. R. John, 'Projecting power overseas: U.S. postal policy and international standard-setting at the 1863 Paris Postal Conference', *Journal of Policy History*, 27 (2015), 416-438.
[17] E. Ravndal, 'Acting like a state: non-European membership of international organizations in the nineteenth century', in J. Bartelson et al (eds.), *De-Centering State Making: Comparative and International Perspectives* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2018), pp. 175-196, 176.

> citizens and subjects of the nations engaged in international intercourse of one sort or another. Other forms of international government, notably arbitration, operate upon international life intermittently, retrospectively, and indirectly, through the national units. The former, it need hardly be said, is much more useful where it is feasible.[18]

Similarly, the historian Mark Mazower argues that international institutions, and the conferencing method they embraced, arose from:

> scientific visions of an internationally organized world. Across a range of new professions—statistics, engineering, geography, bibliography, public health—men [sic] emerged who did not want to do away with the state but to take it over, to replace aristocracy with a professionalized meritocracy, to push aside the well-connected amateurs and bring in new cadres of educated and rational elites.[19]

As such, the later decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the co-existence of two distinct forms of international conferencing. The first was a continuation of traditional forms of international political diplomacy based on the Westphalian system, while the second promoted a newer and less obviously political version of internationalism within which regular scientific and technical conferences functioned as legislative governing bodies implementing policies of global governance. This highlights how nationalism and internationalism were mutually sustaining ideologies in this period, both dominated by an emergent industrial class whose values and interests were expressed by an expanding mass media and who could travel internationally ever more quickly and cheaply. Across much of fin-de-siècle Europe, North America and the 'settler' colonies, a new public sphere emerged, perhaps best described by the German word *Öffentlichkeit*, that was simultaneously national, imperial and international.[20]

The distinction between these two forms of pre-twentieth-century international conferences fed the popular idea that internationalisation was a predominantly natural, rather than political, process. However, these distinctions often blurred in practice. Large diplomatic

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[18] Dunn, *The Practice and Procedure of International Conferences*, 139, quoting Pitman B. Potter, a specialist in international law from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.
[19] Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea*, 95.
[20] J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press 1989 [1962]), Valeska Huber and Jürgen Osterhammel (Eds), *Global Publics: Their Power and Their Limits, 1870-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

conferences not only attempted to resolve political tensions following periods of warfare, but also sought to regulate international affairs and establish ground rules for international governance. For example, representatives at the Congress of Vienna in 1814-1815 grappled with the territorial disputes arising from the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars through the creation of a permanent 'Concert of Europe', a 'congress system' of regular diplomatic summits between representatives of the five great European powers: Prussia, Russia, Britain, France and Austria.[21] But resolutions were also passed in Vienna on the free navigation of 'international' rivers, notably the Rhine and the Danube; on the new rules governing who could claim diplomatic status; and on the Atlantic slave trade, all of which were based on general principles for the governance of the international community at large. The Congress of Vienna, therefore, marked a key moment on the gradual transition from a Westphalian model of the international conference, dominated by representatives of rival royal courts seeking to protect their interests, and the modern international conference as a system of ongoing international governance. The Congress can be viewed, in Dunn's phrase, as 'a kind of universal parliamentary assembly acting on behalf of Europe as a single community'.[22] The 1884 Congress of Berlin, which sought to resolve tensions between Russia and the Ottoman Empire and to seek international agreement on how best to divide the land resources of the African continent (see the visual interplay of cartography and

[21] The pervasive influence of the Congress of Vienna on later international conferences and geopolitical strategists is evident in pages of C. K. Webster, *The Congress of Vienna, 1814-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1919) which, like Satow's report, was commissioned by Prothero's Historical Section in the British Foreign Office during the First World War; H. Nicolson, *The Congress of Vienna: A Study of Allied Unity 1812-1822* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1946) in which the Congress formed the basis for a commentary on the post-1945 world order envisaged by the author; and H. Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace, 1812-1822* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999 [1954]). On the Congress itself, see Vick, *The Congress of Vienna*. On the pioneering use of Prussian statistical expertise at the Congress, see B. de Graaf, 'Second-tier diplomacy: Hans von Gagern and William I in their quest for an alternative European order, 1813-1818', *Journal of Modern European History*, 12 (2014), 546-565, especially p. 558.

[22] Dunn, *The Practice and Procedure of International Conferences*, p. 55. For a thoughtful analysis of the impact on these early attempts to internationalise the natural world, specifically Europe's great rivers, see J. Yao, '"Conquest of barbarism": the Danube Commission, international order and the control of nature as a Standard of Civilisation', *European Journal of International Relations* 25 (2019) 335-359.

diplomacy in figure 1.1), involved a similar fusion of traditional territorial geopolitics and modern international governance.[23]

[Figure 1.1 here]

Figure 0.1. Adalbert von Rößler, 'Die Kongokonferenz in Berlin'. From *Über Land und Meer. Allgemeine Illustrirte Zeitung*, 53:14 (Oct 1884-1885), 308: see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_Conference#/media/File:Kongokonferenz.jpg

Modern International Conferences

The 1919-1920 Paris Peace Conference was another key moment in the emergence of modern conferencing. It was a product of the convergent traditions of diplomatic conferencing and scientific-technical conferencing outlined above but involved an unprecedented complexity of organisation. Twenty-seven states participated; the British delegation alone comprised around 400 people and the American contingent was almost as large. Unlike previous gatherings, most of those who attended were not professional diplomats, but prime ministers and foreign ministers assisted by an unusually large number of scientific advisors and technical experts in a way which, as Hill argues, 'put the technician in a far more conspicuous place than he had

[23] See S. Förster, W. J. Mommsen and R. E. Robinson, *Bismarck, Europe and Africa: The Berlin Africa Conference 18843-1885 and the Onset of Partition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); J. MacKenzie, *The Partition of Africa, 1880-1900 and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Methuen, 1983). For commentaries on specific aspects of this event, see P. Brantlinger, 'Victorians and Africans: the genealogy of the myth of the dark continent', *Critical Inquiry*, 12 (1985), 166-203; J. Darwin, 'Imperialism and the Victorians: the dynamics of territorial expansion', *English Historical Review*, 112 (1997), 614-642. On the legal consequences, see A. Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004), 90-100; M. Craven, 'Between law and history: the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 and the logic and free trade', *London Review of International Law*, 3:1 (2015), 31-59; and for comments on the influence of the United States of America and the recognition of new sovereign bodies, see C. Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum* (New York: Telos Press Ltd, 2003 [1950]), 214-226.

attained before'.[24] Many at the time viewed the event as marking the dawn of a new era of international cooperation and governance, exemplified by the creation of the League of Nations in 1920, which took the modern international conference as its *modus operandi*. Contemporaries wrote of the Paris Peace Conference as the culmination of a long history of diplomatic conferences, paying particular note to the Congresses of Westphalia and Vienna as models for what was now being undertaken in the French capital.

The focus on the distant past lent an air of tradition to what were, in some cases, radically new forms of politics, whilst paradoxically also underplaying its continuities with events of the more immediate past. With the horrors of war so fresh, it suited all those participating to see 1919 as a historical break that would make a reality of H. G. Wells' prophecy that the First World War would be 'the war to end all wars'. Accordingly, contemporary commentators were reluctant to acknowledge the more recent history of international conferences from which the Paris Peace Conference emerged. Reflections on the practical insights drawn from the Congresses of Westphalia or Vienna should be met with some degree of caution. Comparisons to the great diplomatic conferences of the past reflected organisers' hopes that Paris would also come to be understood as an event which gave rise to a period of post-war prosperity and calm, rather than its more immediate precursors which had failed to quell rising tensions, most notably the Hague Peace Conferences (1899 and 1907).

Besides its size and complexity, the Paris Peace Conference was not the radical break its organisers anticipated. As recent research has shown, the Hague Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907 foreshadowed many of the debates and decisions often associated with the Paris Peace Conferences, and it is likely that the third Hague conference, scheduled for 1915 but cancelled after the outbreak of the First World War, would have provided additional political inspiration. Certainly the articles, clauses and declarations of the Hague Conventions profoundly shaped the

[24] Hill, *The Public International Conference*, p. 40; c.f. also 104-5.

ideas of international governance and international law promoted in Paris in 1919-20, and furthermore the conferences themselves provided an organisational template for the Paris negotiations. As Maartje Abbenhuis argues, 'the 1907 Hague Peace Conference constituted the first time almost all of the world's governments negotiated their concerns in a multilateral setting. In so doing, they initiated a revolutionary trend in global organisation and transnational interaction'.[25] Whilst appreciation of these conferences is often overshadowed by the war which followed, they played a critical role in establishing the 'international sphere' as a political and judicial scale of governance. The Hague system of global governance was a model for those meeting in Paris in 1919 and the League of Nations system which they created. Moreover, several aspects which emerged as part of the Hague system, such as the Permanent Court of Arbitration, continued to play a role in the new international order.[26]

Notwithstanding these points, the Paris Peace Conference was a key moment in the development of international conferencing in at least three respects. First, as we have already seen, 1919 marked a significant shift in how conferencing was approached as an object of study in its own right, closely tied to the establishment of the new field of International Relations. Starting with Satow's *Handbook* on conferencing prepared for the Paris Peace Conference and continuing in the works by the likes of Dunn, Hill, Nicolson and Zimmern in the interwar period, as well as postwar authors like Karl Schweig and Johan Kaufmann, conferencing became not just a pragmatic means of preserving peace, but an instrument to unlock a new, international future. [27] As another analyst of conference method, the British civil servant Maurice Hankey, said in 1920,

[25] M. Abbenhuis, 'Introduction: Unbridled promise? The Hague's peace conferences and their legacies', in M. Abbenhuis, C. E. Barber and A. R. Higgins (eds) *War, Peace and International Order? The Legacies of the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907* (London: Routledge, 2017), 1-11, 2.

[26] For more on the Hague Peace Conferences see, M. Abbenhuis, C. E. Barber and A. R. Higgins (eds) *War, Peace and International Order? The Legacies of the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907* (London: Routledge, 2017); M. Abbenhuis *The Hague Conferences and International Politics, 1898-1915* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018); I. Clark, *International Legitimacy and World Society* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007).

[27] K. F. Schweig, *Wie Organisiere ich einen Kongress?* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1957); K. F. Schweig, *The Organization of an International Congress*, trans. J. Cortell & H. Marx (New York: Atpac Tours, 1966); J. Kaufmann, *Conference Diplomacy: An Introductory Analysis* (Leyden: A.W. Sijthoff / Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oceana Publications; 1968)

the best hope of averting future war lay in 'the judicious development of diplomacy by conference'.[28]

Second was the Paris Peace Conference's establishment of the League of Nations as the primary piece of political architecture around which a new scale of political action could be built. From its foundation, the central aim of the League of Nations was to change the way in which diplomacy was conducted, ridding it of the self-interest and secrecy that was blamed for the outbreak of war, and ushering in a new age of enlightened global governance. While it is important not to overstate the extent to which the League's methods were entirely new, it is important to appreciate the extent to which they *felt* new and therefore were approached with an imagination and vigour that was different to that which had preceded it. International conferences became emblematic of the 'new diplomacy' and quantitatively mushroomed in number, while qualitatively becoming more self-consciously professional and 'modern' than had previously been the case.

Third were the reverberations that carried international conferencing beyond the bounds of the League. The Paris Peace Conference offered remarkable access to non-state groups, from peace and women's groups to anti-colonial activists.[29] More international non-governmental organizations were founded in 1919 than in any previous year, and over the course of the 1920s twice as many were founded as in the entire nineteenth century.[30] This emergent international public sphere produced important advocates of the international conference, but it was by no means limited to the brand of internationalism embodied by the League of Nations or United

[28] M. Hankey, 'Diplomacy by conference', paper read at British Institute of International Affairs on 2 November 1920, printed in *The Round Table: A Quarterly Review of the politics of the British Empire* 11 (1920-1921), 287-311, 310

[29] For example, see J. Hodder, 'The elusive history of the Pan-African Congress, 1919-1929' *History Workshop Journal* (forthcoming); E. Kuhlman 'The 'Women's International League for Peace and Freedom' and Reconciliation after the Great War' in A.S. Fell and I. Sharp (eds) *The Women's Movement in Wartime* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 227-243.

[30] T. Davies, *NGOs: A New History of Transnational Civil Society* (London: Hurst and Company, 2013), pp. 77–106.

Nations. For international relations scholar Fred Halliday, internationalism had at least three major competing forms.[31] League-style 'liberal internationalism' assumed that societies and individuals cooperate across borders on equal terms. 'Hegemonic internationalism' represented world integration on asymmetric, unequal terms, such as forms of empire and imperialism. 'Radical or revolutionary internationalism', meanwhile, encompassed a diverse range of ideologies from Marx's proletarian internationalism to radical republican, anarchistic, revolutionary, and Islamic internationalism. These forms of internationalism were not only differentiated by their political ideologies but also their degree of formality and structure. In this section, we consider modern international conferences successively according to Halliday's three modes of internationalism.

Liberal International Conferencing

Alfred Zimmern opened his 1936 account of the political history of the League of Nations by suggesting that the best way of approaching the study of the League was to think of it as a *method* rather than an institution.[32] By this, he meant the way in which it put into practice the tenets of the so-called 'new diplomacy', prioritising transparency over secrecy, participation over exclusion, and scientific cooperation over military alliances.[33] It was hoped that these foundational principles would entrench a new way of enacting relations between states, which would make it less likely that disagreements would result in war. This was perhaps best exemplified by the League's great set pieces: the Council meetings that would respond to developments in world politics, and the annual General Assembly at Geneva, a highly public event to which the world's press was invited to report on the League's activities. These activities all

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[31] F. Halliday, 'Three concepts of internationalism', *International Affairs*, 64 (1988), 187-198.
[32] Zimmern, *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law*, 1
[33] Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea*, 116.

took place in Geneva, where the League was housed first in the Palais Wilson (which had been hastily converted from its previous existence as the Hôtel National), and then from 1937 in the purpose-built Palais des Nations. The new presence of the League, combined with a local internationalist tradition embodied by the *Salle de la Réformation*, the large conference hall built in 1866 which hosted the League's General Assemblies throughout the 1920s, led to the popularisation of the notion of *l'esprit de Genève*, by which Geneva became firmly associated with the new era of internationalism.[34]

However, these very public set pieces were dwarfed in number by the myriad smaller conferences and meetings held with increasing regularity, predominantly in Geneva, but also elsewhere, either in established conference cities (Paris, London), cities located in small or comparatively neutral states (Brussels, Warsaw), or on occasion beyond Europe (Lima, Bangkok).[35] There was a steady increase in meetings held under the auspices of the League from 23 in 1920 to over 100 in 1926, a rise that pointed to the increasing size and responsibilities of the League's Secretariat and its various advisory bodies.[36] As the League insider William Rappard put it, the progressive multiplication and specialisation of these committees and conferences were the 'structural expression of a world need': that of a 'great administrative agency' able to administer non-partisan expertise, primarily through the convocation of conferences.[37] The League's founding principles were becoming interpreted more broadly, as tenets not just for avoiding war, but for guiding cooperation in peacetime. This made possible the re-routing into the international sphere of all sort of affairs, many of which were less overtly political and more 'technical' in character. These included regulating communication and transit through

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[34] Robert de Traz, *L'esprit de Genève* (Paris: B. Grasset, 1929); M. Herren, 'Geneva, 1919–1945: the spatialities of public internationalism and global networks' in H. Jöns, P. Meusburger & M. Heffernan (eds.) *Mobilities of Knowledge* (Cham: Springer, 2017), pp. 211-226

[35] Data formerly available via The League of Nations Photo Archives at Indiana University, http://www.indiana.edu/~league/conferencedata.htm; much of the same data is now available through the still-active LONSEA database at the University of Heidelberg, http://www.lonsea.de/

[36] W. E. Rappard, 'The evolution of the League of Nations', *The American Political Science Review*, 21:4 (Nov 1927), 792-826, 817

[37] Rappard, 'Evolution of the League of Nations', 818

agreements on postal, telegraph, submarine, cable and radio services; railway, car and air traffic; and navigation on international rivers, sounds, straights, and in international waters. In commerce and industry, conferences were held on patents and trademarks, copyrights, tariffs, customs arrangements, commercial arbitration, imports, exports, and unfair business practices. Issues of public health figured prominently in international conferences, including those on the control of plagues, quarantine procedures, notification of epidemics, standardisation of drug formulae and relief from disasters. Regarding labour, conferences were held on questions of hours, night work, unemployment, child labour, sickness insurance and workers' compensation; in terms of agriculture, on the preservation of birds, containment of agricultural disease (such as phylloxera), and standardised agricultural statistics; and taking in welfare, the traffic of obscene publications, liquor, drugs, arms, women and children and slavery were all discussed, operating under the sign of a newly internationalist cartography (see figure 1.2).[38] In short, nearly every branch of government activity had been internationalised.

[Figure 1.2 here]

Figure 0.2. The League of Nations Commission on Opium and Other Narcotic Drugs, in session at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, 1939. Source: United Nations Archives at Geneva: http://ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/transnational-movements-and-organisations/en/mediainfo/commission-on-opium-and-other-narcotic-drugs-1939

The cast of characters involved with international conferences changed too. While Prime and Foreign Ministers increasingly came to Geneva for Council sessions and the General Assembly, the majority of conferences and committees were filled with technical experts trained

[38] Dunn, *The Practice and Procedure of International Conferences*, 142-143

in the emerging 'science' of international relations.[39] Nor were they quite so male-dominated: Article 7 of the League of Nations Covenant had pointedly specified that that 'All positions under or in connection with the League, including the Secretariat, shall be open equally to men and women'.[40] The League's secretary-general for its first 13 years, Eric Drummond, believed women to be 'very successful at such [international] conferences', and the presence of women was certainly seen as indicative of the modernity of the organisation's new political practice.[41] To be sure, gender equality was imperfectly implemented, with women overrepresented among secretaries and in 'central services' and underrepresented in the higher grades, but this situation nevertheless contrasted starkly with most Foreign Offices' simple refusal to countenance the idea of women occupying high positions.[42] The League also professed a commitment to having a representative staff in terms of nationality, though the Eurocentric criteria by which appointments were made tended to render non-Europeans less qualified, and filtered them into positions in which they were valued for their regional knowledge or language skills.[43] Those from colonial dependencies, aside from the special case of India, were entirely absent.[44]

Meanwhile, there was a parallel growth of international conferences affiliated with the ever-increasing assortment of international and non-governmental organisations, many of whom

[39] Rappard, Evolution of the League of Nations, 805

[40] Covenant of the League of Nations, Article 7, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp; see M. Herren, 'Gender and international relations through the lens of the League of Nations (1919-1945)' in G. Sluga & C. James (eds.), *Women, Diplomacy and International Politics Since 1500* (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 182-201

[41] Minutes of the Fifth Meeting of the Appointments Committee held on 8 May 1926, 9, in LNA, Box S955, Appointment Committee, file 2; quoted in K. Dykmann, 'How international was the Secretariat of the League of Nations?', *The International History Review*, 37:4 (2015), 721-744, 734

[42] Herren, 'Gender and international relations through the lens of the League of Nations'; M. Piguet, 'Gender Distribution in The League of Nations: The Start of a Revolution?', *The Invention of International Bureaucracy* blog (16 Mar 2017): https://projects.au.dk/inventingbureaucracy/blog/show/artikel/gender-distribution-in-the-league-of-nations-the-start-of-a-revolution/

[43] Dykmann, 'How international was the Secretariat of the League of Nations?'

[44] S. Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). S. Legg, 'An international anomaly? Sovereignty, the League of Nations and India's princely geographies', *Journal of Historical Geography* **43** (2014), 96-110.

transferred their seats to Geneva during the 1920s to be closer to the League.[45] Indeed, upon the League's move to the new Palais des Nations in 1937, their old premises at the Palais Wilson were rapidly filled by thirty different international organisations, from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the International Council of Women and the International Labour Organization to the World Alliance for International Friendship Through the Churches, the World Association for Reform of the Calendar and the Universal Esperantist Association.[46] This move from the homes of their secretaries to a non-residential office building constituted a major step towards toward the professionalisation of international organisations.[47] Their meetings tended to be nimbler in decision-making and more tightly defined in their topic of study. They gained legitimacy through close observation of increasingly formalised conferencing procedures and, often, through their affiliation with the League of Nations.

With the rapid growth of conferencing, concerns surrounding codification and rules became increasingly pronounced. Here, the League also played a key role. As one of the most prolific conference organising bodies, the League offered both a template for international conference procedure as well as a forum to formalise the norms and procedures of international conferences in international law. Like conference analysts from Satow on, the League's experts sought to identify common characteristics from the haphazard growth of international conferencing over the preceding century. In 1925 the League's Committee of Experts, concerned with the codification of international law, listed conference procedure as a desirable field of international regulation. A questionnaire produced in 1926 identified 'A certain number of

[45] B. Auberer, T. Holste & C. E. Liebisch, 'Situating internationalism 1919–1940s', *New Global Studies*, 10:3 (2016), 201-216; G. Sluga, 'Remembering 1919: international organizations and the future of international order', *International Affairs* 95 (2019), 25-43

[46] Q. Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), p. 56-57

[47] Herren, 'Geneva, 1919–1945', 217

practices [which] have grown up and these reappear at each conference and are handed on from one to the other'.[48]

Yet the League's members were divided on the issue of codification. The importance of conferencing as a mode of international governance suggested the need for codification and yet the success of conferencing historically could be partly explained by its flexibility as a method which was largely unencumbered by formal rules and procedures. While 14 members were in favour, and a further five with reservations, seven opposed efforts to create a conferencing code, including Germany, Japan, the United States of America, India and the British Empire.[49] The latter felt that procedure should be left to delegates, with historical precedent offered as an example or model rather than code. This reflected a familiar experience of the League's work where education and normalisation work often succeeded whilst law and codification failed.[50] While the British Empire was shaping League policy, the conference form and imperialism were also reshaping each other in a host of forms and spaces.

Colonial, Imperial and Commonwealth Conferencing

Exhibitions and world fairs tracked and complemented the emergence of international conferences.[51] While prioritizing commerce and trade, these events celebrated internationalism as a cultural and political aspiration, beginning with the triumphant 1851 Great Exhibition in London, and were especially significant in bringing together the imperial and international

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[48] 'Questionnaire no. 5.—procedure of international conferences and procedure for the conclusion and drafting of treaties', *American Journal of International Law* **20** (1926), 204-221, 207
[49] 'Annex: analyses of replies received from governments to questionnaires nos. 1 to 7', *American Journal of International Law* **22** (1928), 5-38, 21-25
[50] S. Legg, '"The life of individuals as well as of nations": international law and the League of Nations' anti-trafficking governmentalities, *Leiden Journal of International Law*, 25 (2012), 647-664
[51] W. Van Acker & C. Verbruggen, 'World's fairs in perspectives. The aggregation of modern times and spaces at the beginning of the twentieth century (Ghent 1913)' in N. Teughels & P. Scholliers (eds.), *A Taste of Progress: Food at International and World Exhibitions in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 11-33; D. Laqua, *The Age of Internationalism and Belgium, 1880-1930: Peace, Progress and Prestige,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015).

imaginations. The *Exposition Coloniale Internationale*, originally planned to commemorate the 1930 centenary of the French conquest of the Ottoman Regency of Algiers, attracted nine million visitors to newly created pavilions and exhibition spaces in the Bois de Vincennes, to the east of central Paris, in the summer and autumn of 1931. This was a forum for international debates about the future of European colonial empires, and more than 3,000 reports were published by the French government before and during the Exposition on every conceivable aspect of colonial management. More than 100 congresses were organised in the French capital to coincide with the Exposition, including the 13th International Geographical Congress, many of which made use of the salons and amphitheatres in the exotically frescoed Palais de la Porte Dorée, today the home of the *Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration*. The racism and self-importance of the Palais and its decoration were mocked at the time by a surrealist counter exhibition, backed by the Comintern-funded Ligue anti-impérialiste and featuring works by André Breton and Louis Aragon.[52]

The *Exposition Coloniale* featured meticulously re-created buildings, landscapes and environments from across the French empire, including a perfect replica of Angkor Wat, and had a lasting impact on the city's cultural and intellectual environment, inspiring new fashions in music, the arts and cuisine.[53] Inspired by British debates about the possibilities of imperial reform, the Exposition hosted a colonial economic conference from December 1934 to April 1935 in an

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[52] P.A. Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Representation and Architecture at the 1931 Colonial Exposition, Paris* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000); C. Hodeir and M. Pierre, *L'Exposition Coloniale* (Paris: Édition Complexe, 1991); H. Lebovics, *True France: The Wars Over Cultural Identity, 1900-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); A. C. T. Geppert, *Fleeting Cities: Imperial Expositions in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010) 179-200, including a fascinating map on p. 197 showing the origins of school groups that visited the exposition. On the 1931 IGC, see H. Clout, 'Geographers in their ivory tower: academic geography and popular geography in Paris 1931', *Geografiska Annaler B: Human Geography*, 87:1 (2005), 15-29; and H. Clout, 'French geographers under international gaze: regional excursions for the XIIIth International Geographical Congress, 1931', *Belgeo*, 1-2 (2012), 1-15.

[53] See, for example, L. Janes, *Colonial Food in Interwar Paris: The Taste of Empire* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016) 127-160.

ultimately futile attempt to convert the grand cultural and intellectual ideals invoked in 1931 into concrete commercial realities.[54]

The British themselves had a long tradition of using conferences to orchestrate the empire and negotiate evolving demands for constitutional reform. From the mid-nineteenth century, imperialism was transformed by the emerging norms of internationalism and international conferences. Following the 'Sepoy Mutiny' of 1857-58 in India and the 'Morant Bay Rebellion' of 1865 in Jamaica, theories of racial difference hardened across British colonies whilst in majority-white 'settler colonies' progress was made towards self-government.[55] Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand were the largest of the 'Dominions' and demanded a voice in the conduct of imperial politics which, in turn, was reimagined as a form of international confederation.[56] For Daniel Gorman this began a process of 'imperial internationalism', defined as the international life of the dominions *within* the British Empire.[57] The progress of this internationalisation centred on 'colonial', and later 'imperial', conferences. The 1887 Colonial Conference in London was the first of twelve, by 1937, such conferences, nearly all of which were convened in London.[58]

By the interwar years the British Empire was remade in the image of internationalism, and what Alfred Zimmern dubbed the 'Third British Empire' was forged.[59] In under ten years the United Kingdom was re-ordered and an Irish Dominion established, a new Middle Eastern empire

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[54] S. Saul, 'Les pouvoirs publics métropolitains face à la depression: la Conférence Économique de la France Métropolitaine et d'Outre-Mer (1934-5)', *French Colonial History*, 12 (2011), 167-191; J. Marseille, *Empire Colonial et Capitalisme Français: Histoire d'un Divorce* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2005).
[55] T. R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); C. Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002)
[56] L. Sundaram, 'India and the imperial conference—I: a retrospective', *The Asiatic Review*, 26 (1930), 369-373
[57] D. Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)
[58] J. Kendle, *The Colonial and Imperial Conferences, 1887-1911: A Study in Imperial Organization* (London: Longmans, 1967)
[59] A. Zimmern, *The Third British Empire: Being a Course of Lectures Delivered at Columbia University, New York* (2nd ed., rev.) (London: Humphrey Milford/Oxford University Press, 1927)

amassed, free trade ideology questioned, the Government of India restructured and the constitutional status of the white dominions redefined.[60] The dominions and India secured international recognition (through the League of Nations and elsewhere) but without settling the question of their sovereign status.[61] Like the broader domain of internationalism, conferencing was a key mechanism in managing the ongoing process of internationalisation of Empire. The periodic Imperial Conferences from 1923 were modelled as consultative forums, with foreign policy set by dominion governments themselves. The position was affirmed at the 1926 conference, which produced the Balfour Declaration, whereby dominions were defined as autonomous communities united as '… members of the British Commonwealth of Nations'.[62] At the 1930 Imperial Conference the dominions were granted legislative equality, which was formalised in the Statute of Westminster the following year. The Commonwealth had no permanent parliament or chamber in London but was organised through the practice of conferencing. As the Canadian multi-term prime minister William Lyon Mackenzie King put it in 1941:

> It is true we have not, sitting in London continuously, a visible Imperial War Cabinet or Council. But we have, what is much more important, though invisible, a continuing conference of the Cabinets of Commonwealth.[63]

India had been represented at the Imperial Conferences since 1921, but only by the Secretary of State for India and, later, a few selected delegates.[64] Dozens of Indian delegates were, however, invited to London for the Round Table Conference, which sat in three sittings between 1930 and 1932.[65] Neither a traditional 'imperial' nor an 'international' conference, the

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[60] J. Darwin, 'A third British Empire? The dominion idea in imperial politics' in J. Brown & W. R. Louis (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume: IV: The Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 64–87

[61] N. Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience: Volume Two: From British to Multiracial Commonwealth* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 5.

[62] Mansergh, *From British to Multiracial Commonwealth*, 27.

[63] Quoted in Mansergh, *From British to Multiracial Commonwealth*, 2.

[64] Sundaram, 'India and the imperial conference—I: a retrospective'

[65] R. J. Moore, *The Crisis of Indian Unity, 1917-1940* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974); C. Bridge, *Holding India to the Empire: the British Conservative Party and the 1935 Constitution* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1986)

meeting sought to determine the constitutional future of India within the Empire.[66] The conference format presented benefits to the hosts, especially because the British and colonial Indian governments had selected the delegates. When Gandhi himself proved unable to resolve the impasse between Hindu and Muslim delegates at the second conference session (he suggested that they had been selected so as to be incompatible), the British could absolve themselves of blame. Likewise, they could claim to be respecting demands by Indian feminists for representation when selecting two conservative women, one Hindu and one Muslim, who didn't back Indian nationalist claims for full adult franchise.[67] Indian women's groups, meanwhile, were campaigning for a wider female franchise at both national congresses (such as the All India Women's Congress, AIWC) and international conferences (such as the 1931 All-Asian Women's Conference in Lahore).[68]

During the Second World War colonial and imperial conferences were refashioned into British Commonwealth Conferences. While meetings in 1944 and 1945 remained dominated by Dominion representatives, the independence and accession to the Commonwealth of India, Pakistan and Ceylon between 1947 and 1948 forced a negotiation of the terms of membership of both the association and its conferences.[69] The London Declaration of 1949 allowed members to have their own head of state, and to be a republic, facilitating an ever expanding membership as other colonies won their freedom, rising from eight in 1949, to 21 in 1965, 33 in 1977, and 50 in 1990.

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[66] Legg, Stephen. 'Imperial Internationalism: The Round Table Conference and the Making of India in London, 1930-32.' *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, 11 (2020), 32-53.

[67] S. Mukherjee, *Indian Suffragettes: Female Identities and Transnational Networks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 211

[68] S. Mukherjee, 'The All-Asian Women's Conference 1931: Indian women and their leadership of a pan-Asian feminist organisation', *Women's History Review*, 26 (2017), 363-381

[69] S. Mole, '"Seminars for statesmen": the evolution of the Commonwealth summit', *The Round Table*, 93 (2004), 533-546

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGMs) increased in size correspondingly, from 11 representatives at London in 1960 to 21 in 1965, 31 at Singapore in 1971, 42 in Melbourne in 1981 and 47 in Harare in 1991.[70] As Ruth Craggs has shown, these events offered a prominent platform for post-colonial voices. The Singaporean premier Lee Kuan Yew used the 1971 CHOGM, for example, to mark out the developmental vision of his fledgling and vulnerable state, while the British Prime Minister Edward Heath was rounded upon for his determination to sell arms to South Africa.[71] Margaret Thatcher fared little better at Lusaka in 1979, dancing to the tune (literally) of the seasoned Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda.[72] These meetings were a product not just of imperial conferencing but of a tradition that emerged from spaces designed exactly to challenge imperial sovereignty.

Anti-Colonial, Non-Aligned and Activist Conferencing

A plethora of international blueprints for remaking the world in the aftermath of the First World War lay beyond the boundaries of liberal or imperial forms of internationalism. Amongst those Raza, Roy and Zachariah list were pacifist, pan-Islamist and pan-Africanist, Aryanist, anti-imperialist, suffragist, romanticist, feminist, temperance, eugenic and fascist internationalisms: 'Their divergent ends and objectives were held together, if temporarily, by a euphoria for the vastness and integratedness of the world and the desire and optimism to remake it and shape the future of humanity.'[73] Likewise, Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin stress the diversity of voices in twentieth-century internationalism, drawing attention to the 'uneasy alliances and unlikely fellow travellers across the conceptual borders of nationalism and internationalism, and a

[70] Mole, 'Seminars for statesmen', 535

[71] R. Craggs, 'Postcolonial geographies, decolonization, and the performance of geopolitics at Commonwealth conferences', *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 35 (2014), 39–55

[72] R. Craggs, 'Hospitality in geopolitics and the making of Commonwealth international relations', *Geoforum*, 52 (2014), 90-100

[73] M. A. Raza, F. Roy, & B. Zachariah, 'Preface' in M. A. Raza, F. Roy, & B. Zachariah (eds.), *The Internationalist Moment: South Asia, Worlds, and World Views, 1917-39* (London; New Delhi: SAGE, 2015), vii

broader spectrum of international thought and action'.[74] Their edited collection features chapters on religious, socialist, feminist, capitalist, fascist, and indigenous internationalisms. These approaches emphasise the rich diversity of movements, governments and conditions that lay claim to the title 'international'. Prompted by Halliday, here we trace 'radical internationalism' through anti-colonial, non-aligned and activist conferencing, acknowledging that these radical politics expressed themselves through a conference format forged in the liberal tradition.

From the outset, anti-colonial activists used conferences to co-ordinate international networks and legitimise political claims. As Hakim Adi has shown in the case of Pan-Africanism, periodic conferences became key feature of anti-colonial politics from the start of the twentieth century.[75] Progressive race reformers organised the 1900 Pan-African Conference, 1911 Universal Races Congress, and 1919-1927 Pan-African Congresses;[76] more radical Pan-Africanists such as Marcus Garvey became associated with the spectacular UNIA conventions in the 1920s; and some of the most powerful anti-colonial voices emerged out of the Communist International ('Comintern'). At the Comintern's foundational First Congress in 1919, the Nikolai Bukharin-drafted congress 'Platform' declared its support for 'exploited colonial peoples in their struggles against imperialism'.[77] This translated into covert financing of movements such as the League Against Imperialism, itself established at a conference in Brussels in 1927.[78] These conferences connected wider anti-imperialist networks. For example, Jawaharlal Nehru, the rising star of the Indian National Congress, attended the founding congress of the League Against Imperialism in

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[74] G. Sluga & P. Clavin, 'Rethinking the history of internationalism' in G. Sluga & P. Clavin (eds.), *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 11

[75] H. Adi, *Pan-Africanism: A History* (London: Bloomsbury); H. Adi, 'Pan-Africanism and communism: the Comintern, the 'Negro Question' and the First International Conference of Negro Workers, Hamburg 1930', *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal*, 1 (2008), 237-254

[76] S. C. Dunstan, 'Conflicts of interest: the 1919 Pan-African Congress and the Wilsonian moment', *Callaloo*, 39 (2016), 133-150

[77] 'Platform of the Communist International adopted by the first congress' in J. Degras (ed.), *The Communist International 1919-1943: Documents, vol. 1: 1919-1922*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 17-24, p. 23

[78] V. Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York & London: The New Press, 2007), pp. 16-30

Brussels, drawn by its aim to forge a 'real' (i.e. racially inclusive and progressive) League of Nations.[79] Solidarity between proletarian and anticolonial struggles was called for, with particular emphasis on delegates from China, India and Mexico. These conferences took on a new role in the post-war period as anti-imperial sentiment solidified into a concrete political programme of decolonisation. The Fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester in 1945 is widely hailed for its role in spurring liberation movements across the continent and served as one the most important crucibles for training many of the future leaders of post-colonial Africa.[80] Meanwhile at the 1956 First Meeting of Black Writers and Artists in Paris, Francophone intellectuals met to examine the relationship between negritude and pan-Africanism.

Regional conferences became a favoured means of anti-colonial and new post-colonial leaders to meet. For example, the Asian Relations Conference (ARC), which took place in Delhi in April 1947 just four months before India's independence, is being re-considered as an important space of anti-imperial integration and unity which has long been overshadowed by the more famous Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung in 1955.[81] The meeting marked the emergence of the non-alignment movement, at which the term 'third world' entered political discourse.[82] Unlike the focus of later conferences on heads of state, the ARC included delegations from organisations and institutions as well as national representatives; as Vineet Thakur has argued, 'the text and texture of the Conference needs to be situated in the liminal moment between the "internationalist" and "inter-national" eras'.[83] The opening conference sessions were conducted

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[79] M. L. Louro, *Comrades Against Imperialism: Nehru, India, and Interwar Internationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). On the difficulties the League faced in sustaining itself, and the role of Berlin as an organisational hub, see F. Petersson, 'Hub of the anti-imperialist movement: The League Against Imperialism and Berlin, 1927–1933', *Interventions*, 16 (2014), 49-71

[80] H. Adi & M. Sherwood, *The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress Revisited* (London: New Beacon Books, 1995)

[81] C. Stolte, '"The Asiatic hour": new perspectives on the Asian relations conference, New Delhi, 1947' in N. Miskovic, H. Fischer-Tiné & N. Boskovska (eds.), *The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 75-93

[82] V. Thakur, 'An Asian Drama: The Asian Relations Conference, 1947', *The International History Review*, 41 (2019), 673-695

[83] Thakur, 'An Asian Drama', 17

in front of a map of Asia, showing its infrastructural unity, which was flanked by continental and regional statistics relating to areas and populations (figure 1.3).

[Figure 1.3 here]

Figure 0.3. Smt. Vijay Lakshmi Pandit reading out the message that had come from, 'a great Chinese friend', Dr Tai Chi-táo, at the Asian Relations Conference, 24 March 1947. From the collection of Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML): https://artsandculture.google.com/culturalinstitute/beta/asset/asian-relations-conference-23-march-2-april-1947/VAHr0JS3ic09rA

The ARC also incorporated a 'Status of Women and Women's Movement' group, which voted in favour of reviving the All-Asian Women's Conference, which had last met in Lahore in 1931.[84] It came to be held in Beijing in 1949, under the auspices of the Women's International Democratic Foundation, and was followed by further feminist conferences which expanded the remit to include more African delegates, taking place in Colombo in 1958 and Cairo in 1961. Unlike the forms of feminist internationalism of the early 1930s described by Sumita Mukherjee, these organisations resisted the imperial feminist tones of western women's organisations.[85] Instead they strove for global South-South union and drew together leftist feminists who had been radicalised by anticolonial, antifascist and cross-class social reform movements.

Elisabeth Armstrong has shown that international women's anti-imperialist meetings pre-dated Bandung by some years.[86] A growing body of work has charted the rich diversity of

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[84] E. Armstrong, 'Before Bandung: the anti-imperialist women's movement in Asia and the Women's International Democratic Federation', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 41 (2016), 305-331
[85] Mukherjee, 'The All-Asian Women's Conference 1931'
[86] Armstrong, 'Before Bandung', 307.

meetings and ideologies that were emerging across territories as they negotiated decolonisation, just as post-war powers attempted to bifurcate the world into capitalist and communist blocs. These works resist both the Cold War narrative of the 1940s to 1960s and the idea that the Bandung conference stood alone in its refutation of Cold War politics. This literature draws attention to other conferences across the Afro-Asiatic world, to a broader range of activists, intellectuals, cultural figures, and political leaders and to the changing social dynamics and material realities of internationalism.[87]

This work involves engaging with minor and dispersed archives to tell the stories of forgotten conferences.[88] Rachel Leow has studied the events of the 1952 Beijing Asia-Pacific Peace Conference, which was organised by the China Peace Council in response to ongoing military activity and hostility in the region.[89] Despite drawing 470 peace activists from nearly 50 countries, the gathering is absent from histories of world peace movements in part because it was held outside the West, and in part due to presumptions that it was a front for Soviet foreign policy. Leow shows that the conference ought instead to be viewed as part of a diverse set of reactions to the Cold War in a decolonial context, facilitating new forms of mobility, interaction between state and non-state actors, and experiments with the urban as a stage for international conferencing. Similarly, Su-Lin Lewis has recounted how the Asian Socialist Conference, at its meetings in Rangoon 1953 and Bombay 1956 (see figure 1.4 for the stage of the opening session, conducted before a map of Asia including regional icons), drafted plans for the post-colonial state that would cater for the welfare of all, while protecting individual freedoms, the press, and the existence of political parties.[90] This vision ultimately floundered in the years that followed as

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[87] S. L. Lewis and C. Stolte, 'Other Bandungs: Afro-Asian Internationalisms in the Early Cold War', *Journal of World History*, 30 (2019), 1-19
[88] J. Hodder, M. Heffernan and S. Legg, 'The archival geographies of twentieth century internationalism: nation, empire, race', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 71 (2021), 1-11.
[89] R. Leow, 'A missing peace: the Asia-Pacific Peace Conference in Beijing, 1952 and the emotional making of third world internationalism', *Journal of World History*, 30 (2019), 21-53
[90] S. L. Lewis, 'Asian socialism and the forgotten architects of post-colonial freedom, 1952–1956', *Journal of World History*, 30:1-2 (2019), 55-88

the nation-state became the dominant political form driven by a regional turn to military dictatorship. These events also explain why such conference meetings are absent from the historiography of international conferences.

[Figure 1.4 here]

Figure 0.4. U Hla Aung, Genda Sing, U Ba Swe and Soerjomo Koesoemo Wijono presiding at the 2nd Asian Socialist Conference in Bombay, 1 November 1956. Photographer: Arno Scholz. International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam), IISG BG B5/348-9: see https://access.iisg.amsterdam/iiif/image/30051000561156__pictoright/full/max/0/default.jpg

Even large, state-organised conferences of Asian-African representatives have faded from view, including the 'Conference of Asian Countries for the Relaxation of International Tension' which took place in New Delhi 11 days before the Bandung meeting.[91] In contrast to tightly stage-managed theatrical summits, this was a public event, attended by large crowds, as part of an effort to build bottom-up mass support for decolonization and nuclear disarmament. The Indian Prime Minister, Jawarhalal Nehru, as a co-convenor of the Bandung conference, could not be seen to publicly support a rival conference, but nevertheless entertained leaders from Egypt and Vietnam privately.

These conferences have been overshadowed by the Afro-Asian Conference held in Bandung in 1955. The conference was a landmark gathering of 29 African and Asian states, many newly independent, who met in order to promote economic and cultural cooperation. It was at Bandung that the principles for the eventual creation of the non-aligned movement were first

[91] C. Stolte, '"The people's Bandung": local anti-imperialists on an Afro-Asian stage', *Journal of World History*, 30 (2019), 125-156

laid out.[92] Yet the appeal of Bandung reflects the conference's symbolism, as expressive of a moment of rising post-colonial confidence; a shared refutation of colonialism in the global south; and a rejection of Cold War geopolitical narratives, encapsulated in what became known as the 'Bandung Spirit', a term popularised by Roeslan Abdulgani, the Secretary-General of the Conference.[93] For scholars, therefore, Bandung has become a central point of orientation which cuts across Cold war history, decolonization, international relations, and postcolonial studies. As Christopher J. Lee has argued, the 'attraction of Bandung as an event is its capacity to bring these subjects into conversation with one another, presenting a historical moment and site generative of intersecting vantage points and their storied outcomes'.[94] Like Vienna or Versailles before it, Bandung has become shorthand for both a discrete diplomatic conference and long-standing historical processes.

Early accounts of the Congress, including the African American writer Richard Wright's famous first-hand account, read Bandung through a metropole-colony lens, focusing on the realignment of colonial relations in the 1950s.[95] More recent work, however, has emphasised connections within the global South and the difficulties they faced as anti-colonialism confronted the political realities of nation-building. As Lee argues, 'Bandung contained both the residual romance of revolution, as well as the *realpolitik* of a new world order in the making'.[96] Recent scholarship has sought to challenge the mythology of Bandung. Scholars such as Su Lin Lewis and Carolien Stolte have decentred the conference by situating it within the wider constellation of Afro-Asian internationalisms which were a key feature of the early Cold War years.[97] Others offer

[92] N. Miskovic, H. Fischer-Tiné & N. Boskovska (eds.), *The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War: Delhi-Bandung-Belgrade* (London: Routledge, 2014); S. S. Tan, & A. Acharya (eds.), *Bandung Revisited: The Legacy of the 1955 Asian-African Conference for International Order* (Singapore: Nus Press, 2008)
[93] R. Abdulgani, *Bandung Spirit: Moving on the Tide of History* (Djakarta, Prapantja, 1964)
[94] C. J. Lee, 'Introduction' in C. J. Lee (ed.), *Making a World After Empire: Bandung and its Political Afterlives* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010), 3
[95] R. Wright, *The Color Curtain: a Report on the Bandung Conference* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1956)
[96] Lee, 'Introduction', 3
[97] Lewis, & Stolte, 'Other Bandungs'

a closer, critical reading of the conference itself. Naoko Shimazu examines the conference as a theatrical performance wherein both the cast and stage were scripted in very particular ways, and a recent edited volume has shown how the political possibilities of Bandung were less certain than the state-centrism of both the event and its later readings suggest.[98] Its editors argue that as Bandung grappled with the uncertainties of the modern world order, these debates were mixed with a heady 'utopian dimension of peoples across the world actively reimaging, changing and prefiguring' that order.[99] The significance of Bandung was hotly contested at the time and since, and its ambiguous status reflects that of the conferencing method itself. For some, the conference marked the arrival of African and Asian states as powerful actors on the world stage, whereas for others the liberal conferencing form visibly symbolised the ongoing legacies of European imperialism.

Conclusion

The flow of the narrative that we have drawn reflects something of the trajectory of how international conferences have been treated in the historical scholarship. Interwar scholars collated a history in which conferencing happened through, and thereby reinforced, a Westphalian system of sovereign states. However, this major-key conservatism had a minor-key radical edge: conferences were where new systems were formalised, a worldmaking potential that was explicitly drawn through to the new realities of the interwar, in which conferencing would be foregrounded and accelerated as the means through which a new internationalism could be implemented, whether liberal, imperial or radical at heart. Over the years, underlying tendencies in the historiography toward presentism and Eurocentrism filtered out conferences

[98] Shimazu, 'Diplomacy as theatre'
[99] L. Eslava, M. Fakhri & V. Nesiah, 'The spirit of Bandung' in L. Eslava, M. Fakhri & V. Nesiah (eds.), *Bandung, Global History and International Law: Critical Pasts and Pending Futures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 3

held outside the 'West', or conferences held in the name of causes that had ended in failure, or conferences that did not fit with overarching narratives about the past. The present current, with which we swim, seeks to redress this filtering by de-privileging interstate conferences as the quintessential form of conferencing, and instead opening out the scope of enquiry to a wider range of conferences, refocusing on what was previously held to be historical marginalia.

This is not just a matter of what we look at, but the methodologies employed. As the Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective have proposed, in order to ask new questions researchers need to adopt new practices, including collaborative and collective research, working across multiple archives (including those in the Global South). By doing so, they argue, we can move from seeing Bandung as a single event to seeing a broader 'Bandung moment' formed by a multiplicity of networks and actors.[100] They draw upon a broader turn in the study of international history from inter-state relations, analysed by way of documents found in national diplomatic archives, to a self-consciously transnational approach.[101] In this book, we apply these imperatives to the study of international conferencing, arguing that there is a broader need to move from analyses of conferences as momentous events to conferencing as a process comprised of a constellation of people and events, ideas and ideologies. We therefore present the historical geography of international conferencing between and beyond Versailles and Bandung by turning away from these twin pillars and looking instead to what less well-known events can tell us about the practice of conferencing, and what studies of conferencing can tell us about more geographically and politically diffuse forms of internationalism.

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[100] Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective 'Manifesto: networks of decolonization in Asia and Africa', *Radical History Review*, 131 (2018), 176-182

[101] Hodder et al, 'The archival geographies of twentieth century internationalism'