Imagining Internationalism

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Historians have had a difficult time in the last century imagining an international history, because of a long history of dependence on national histories for chronological frameworks and content. The nexus between the development of history as a modern discipline and the modern project of nation-building is now well known, and widely explored. The irony is of course that international history, albeit as the history of relations between states, and of diplomacy, is as much a part of the genealogy of the historical profession and its practices. In its old forms as the study of foreign policies and empires, it crossed the borders back and forth between the study of race and the agency of nations. In its new forms (and this new international history is still being defined), it tends to excavate the pasts of race and nation as ideas usually from the perspective of constructivism and of the recently reinvented vogue for transnational and global studies.[1] Increasingly, it is also paying attention to the history of internationalism, a field that has for a long time been left to the margins of pacifism studies.

The history of internationalism has been, almost inevitably, entangled in the changing status and forms of international history. In the last few years, because of this new interest in the transnational and global, it has become easier to seek out the significance both of the international as a political space, and of internationalism as an ideology that overlapped with, even as it ran counter to, the history of nations and nationalism. At a time when there is extensive

contemporary awareness of the gathering social, political and economic forces of globalisation, supplemented by the 'transnational' turn in historical scholarship, the history of internationalism is emerging as a seductive focus of international history. In particular, it seeks to resuscitate forms of experience and thinking that have transcended the assumption that the political borders of nations determine the nature of experiences, ideas, or politics. It involves the history of the international as an imagined community.

The history of internationalism

Throughout the twentieth century, internationalism was a term that evoked an Enlightenment conception of universalism and human community. From the late 1890s onwards, internationalism was also commonly described as having its own 'objective status', as real as the objective markers of nations and nationalisms, and similarly built up through the technological capacity for closer communication, and the creation of new political and social institutions, Many of these were involved in standardising forms of social organization that mirrored national endeavours in the same period, such as the universalisation of regulations for health, postage, transport. Internationalism, like nationalism, was even understood as an inner condition, an emotional or psychological force.

The history of internationalism, like that of nationalism, is neither a story of even progress or decline. Rather, we can graph peaks and troughs in the status of both ideologies, whether as objects of study, or as the tools of intense political claim-making, or as the focus of social and cultural display. Ironically, or perhaps even understandably, the 1940s were years of heightened reflection and consciousness in regard to the relevance and even inevitability of a human community of 'international' proportions. The early years of the United Nations, I want to suggest, represent a curiously utopian moment bracketed by the end of the Second World War and the onset of the Cold War. The relevant point here too is that, as with the nation, what one might imagine as conceptions of international community varied, even across this one decade, according to place, politics, even the person.

The UN and mid-twentieth century internationalism

The UN was created in 1945, through a meeting in San Francisco that lasted from April to June. It was attended by 282 delegates from 51 countries who brought with them teams that together numbered 1500 people (the American team alone added up to 174), and led to the drafting of the UN Charter. The 'United Nations' had been the term for the alliance fighting against German- and Japanese-led forces. It was only decided upon as the name of the new international organisation that was to rise out of the ashes of war in 1945 at the United Nations Conference on International Organization (UNCIO) in San Francisco. The final location of the UN was, similarly, only belatedly, and half-heartedly, headquartered in New York. (The other options had included Lisbon, Paris, Geneva, London, and San Francisco.) In other words, there was no inevitable or fixed vision of the look, let alone content, of this new internationalism. The processes of defining the UN, its proceedings and agenda, were similarly the products of serendipity and of course the relative force of various of the national delegates who comprised its international fora. But even in that case there were other assumptions operating, particularly about the necessity of having individuals rather than states represented at the new UN. That states won out was the consequence of debate and choice, and even disillusionment, but not of inevitability. In this early period, there were many other paths that the institution might have taken in terms of how it was structured. These were mainly to do with the minimization of national powers, and the creation of new international norms for individual rights, not just in respect of abstract principles (such as the Declaration of Human Rights would outline), but also in terms of practical mobility across national borders. There was even an acknowledgement that animals might have the same intrinsic rights as humans, and that these required incorporation into any universal declaration or convention on rights. These different ways of imagining international institutions were articulated through broad social and popular movements – and most concretely through letter writing. There is an interesting social history of this early period and of the kind of support for

the UN that built up popularly, the mass of letters that it inspired (traceable in national, local, university, as well as international archives) and the kind of idealism the UN's creation generated in the mid-1940s around the specific language of 'one world', 'world citizenship', 'world community', along with 'world consciousness'.

Historians have paid almost no attention to this social history. Instead, they have tended to focus on the ideological origins of the Organisation. In this respect too their approach has tended to be national, emphasizing for example the role of American statesmen (specifically Franklin Delano Roosevelt), and American values (such as the social and economic expectations established by the New Deal). Alternatively, there has recently sprung up a counter- or anti-history, that emphasises the elements of the UN that linked it to the earlier part of the twentieth century. In these cases, it is not just the League of Nations that stands as a crucial antecedent to the UN, but empire. Historians have begun to locate internationalism in an earlier imperial view of the world. There is much to support this kind of view, from the shape of the UN's structure to the individuals who crossed over from the imperial bureaucracies of Britain, France, Portugal and Spain (in particular) into the bureaucracies of international institutions, and who had a voice through their presence on national delegations. In what follows I will look at individuals involved in the adventure that was mid-twentieth century internationalism who represent the numerous dimensions of the question of empire as it unfolded internationally.

The future of empire was certainly high on the international agenda in the 1940s, and the UN Charter addressed this question through its provisions on trusteeship. Yet in many ways the UN's brand spanking new Department of Trusteeship and the Trusteeship Council (the replacements for the League's mandate version of colonialism) offer a really useful example of the contradictions intrinsic to the new world order: of the intersecting elements of the two accounts, of the UN as the product of imperial powers and values, and as evidence of continuity with a longer history of international ideas and internationalist ideologies.

Trusteeship was the concept that replaced mandates. It also

exhibited many of the contradictions intrinsic to the new world order. As defined by the UN Charter, trusteeship offered up the possibility of international oversight of all colonies, even as it carefully delimited the capacity of the new organisation to compel colonial powers either to hand over mandates or other territories, or to intervene in its operations. (Trust territories included only the leftover mandates, and colonies of vanquished powers in the new war; all other colonies were euphemistically identified as 'Non-Self-Governing Territories': NSGT.)

The individuals in charge of the administration of Trusteeship at the UN were hardly British imperialists. The *bon vivant* Victor Hoo, Assistant Secretary for Trusteeship and Information from NSGT. was a Kuomintang Chinese Diplomat, and Ralph Bunche, Director of Trusteeship reporting to Hoo, was an African-American political scientist who, in the interwar, published *A World View of Race*, a Marxist view of race. In African-American historiography, Bunche is designated as the architect of the more liberal aspects of the UN's version of trusteeship – that is, he secretly handed to an Australian diplomat, possibly Evatt, the material with which to provoke the disinclined post-Roosevelt government and the British. Bunche's NSGT counterpart was Wilfred Benson, a Fabian (British left), an International Labour Organization (ILO) veteran, and the coiner of the term 'under-developed'.

Both divisions of Trusteeship (Benson's and Bunche's) were caught in a maelstrom of tensions between representatives of the imperial status quo in the Trusteeship Council, and bureaucratic versions of anti-colonialism. For example, the Chief of the Africa section in the Department of Trusteeship worked to undermine what he saw as Benson's anti-British internationalism. This was the self-identified 'internationalist', Adelaide born and bred Walter Crocker. He had studied at Oxford and Stanford, worked in the British Colonial Service, written a critique of British rule in Nigeria, and after the war ended up as Chief of the Africa bureau for the Department of Trusteeship. Within a few years he left the UN, disgusted by its democratic tinge and by having to work for Wilfred Benson, a more progressive Fabian internationalist, and the black American Director

of Trusteeship, Ralph Bunche. Crocker particularly begrudged Bunche's 1950 Nobel Peace prize. Crocker disliked not just the new modern internationalism, but also the fact that working for the UN meant living in New York, a city marked by the mixing of races and classes.[2] Upon leaving the UN, he found refuge in the Australian National University, as the first Chair in International Relations, and then in the Australian diplomatic service, and finally as Lieutenant Governor of South Australia.

By contrast, the first Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Julian Huxley, represents fairly well the demeanour of the progressive, anti-racist, anti-colonialist Fabian, who saw the British empire as a useful preliminary tool on the evolutionary road to one world. Huxley was a naturalist or zoologist by profession – and there were many jokes about the parallels between his job as Director of London Zoo, from which he was ejected, and his subsequent arrival at UNESCO. Huxley brought with him to UNESCO not only a life dedicated to the dissemination of Darwinism and what he called 'scientific humanism', but also networks that linked him and the new organisation to the Fabian Colonial Advisory Board, the British Colonial Service and the World Population movement.[3] Huxley hired British colonial experts, and put UNESCO money into British development programs in the colonies, including British trust territories – programs which had greatly expanded under the impetus of the threat of UN oversight.

These strands of colonial and international influence came together in UNESCO's 'Fundamental Education' [FE] program,[4] which borrowed from the 1940s British Colonial Office not only its language, but also its welfare and development emphasis (in particular, the 1940 British Colonial Development and Welfare Act). Huxley's version of Fundamental Education anticipated the UN's more gradual engagement with the phenomenon known as 'Technical Assistance' (or Development), which delivered First World experts (often of Colonial lineage) to technologically and economically 'backward' colonial and post-colonial states.

The imperial motif in this story is not just a matter of hindsight.

Stephen Spender, Huxley's own friend, personally recruited to UNESCO by him, portrayed him as having 'amongst his distraught secretaries and flying papers, rather the air of the hero of a play which takes place in a house situated in the tropics – the white man in the midst of nature struggling to put in order a world of jungles to be cleared'.[5] Huxley's memoirs suggest that the man who is still known as an advocate for anti-racism brought to UNESCO an unfailing sense of the significance of the colour line, as he famously reiterated in the 1960s on the imposition he felt in the 1940s at being made to recruit a black man onto the staff.

The story of mid-twentieth-century internationalism also includes that 'black man', the Haitian educationalist Emmanuel Gabriel, an open enthusiast of the UN's institutional cosmopolitanism. Gabriel remains one of the forgotten figures of the UN, his thoughts and life more difficult to trace than the omniscient, establishment Huxley. Fluent in Creole, French, Spanish, 'fair' in English, and with knowledge of Latin, this Haitian 'creole schoolmaster', as Huxley preferred to describe him, had studied at New York's Columbia Teachers' College through the 1930s and, postwar, at the University of London's Institute of Education.[6]

It was during this time, early in 1946, that Gabriel attended the UNESCO Preparatory Commission meeting in London, in much the same auditing capacity that Huxley had attended earlier international meetings on the formation of a postwar educational body. In each case, that informal attendance had led to the opportunity of employment in the new organization. Gabriel lasted at UNESCO for slightly longer than Huxley as a Program Specialist in Fundamental Education, but was employed three grades lower than the norm on a temporary, month to month basis. Each man too developed a reputation for his cosmopolitanism. Huxley became renowned for his cocktail parties and charades. Gabriel's popularity as a rhumba partner at UNESCO parties once caused officials to threaten to open a special division of Choreography with the Haitian educator at its head.

In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, the influence and importance of Haiti in the international sphere were out of all proportion to its physical size. The history of Haiti as the first black

society to repel European colonialism and slavery, in the wake of the French revolution, had long wielded cultural and political status, particularly among colonised populations. By the time Gabriel found himself at UNESCO, Haiti was a republic forged of another 'revolution' with substantially left-wing social objectives; in this revolution progressivist 'noirists' had taken power away from an American-influenced 'mulati' class. As this new Haitian society was delving into its revolutionary past and tradition of *liberté, egalité, fraternité* to produce a new constitution (emphasising social and economic rights), its state representatives, including Émile St. Lot, were a vocal presence on the committee drafting the Universal Charter of Human Rights (a document whose history has too often been written as the national history of the United States).

The critic Edmund Wilson, who met Gabriel during a post-war visit to Haiti, described him as one of a generation of Haitians 'young enough not to be prisoned in the Francophile culture of the nineteenth century', who wanted to do something for their country. Regardless of their field, these 'serious' persons were 'working to diminish the disabling differences between the illiterate and the educated classes, by teaching the peasantry to read and write, or by instructing them in agricultural methods, or by extirpating the diseases that prey on them, or by studying their folk-lore and cults in order to understand them better'.[7]

Gabriel's story intersects with that of internationalism by virtue of his employment in UNESCO, in its flagship Fundamental Education program. UNESCO started out with three 'Fundamental Education' pilot projects, two of which were in East Africa, and in China. China went nowhere, because of regime change. East Africa was a case of UNESCO tacking itself on to a colonial initiative in Tanganyika, the infamous groundnut scheme begun in 1946.[8] The project aimed to clear 3.25 million acres of jungle and plant groundnuts, employing modern agricultural machinery and methods. It was also intended that the project, run in conjunction with UNESCO, would ward off the expected criticism of the UN Trusteeship Division that Britain, as trustee of the territory since the end of the First World War (when it had been taken over as a mandate from the defeated Germans),

had neglected the well-being of its inhabitants. Britain would organise the economic venture in the interests of its own economy; UNESCO would bring education and modernisation for the benefit of the local population into the picture. But the scheme ended with barely a quarter of the anticipated land cleared and most rendered a 'dustbowl', at a cost (to the UK) of 36 million pounds, and an untallied amount for UNESCO, and the disruption of locally-based cultural practices and social uses of the same land.[9] The third project was in Haiti. And it was Gabriel who directed UNESCO's attentions to its possibilities.[10]

Even Huxley acknowledged that Gabriel's appointment led to one of the more important of UNESCO's Fundamental Education initiatives, the Haiti Marbial Valley project. Gabriel himself was keen to use UNESCO to draw attention to the high rate of illiteracy in Haiti, and to the generally 'pitiful' conditions of villagers and city slum-dwellers of that small nation, and to use Fundamental Education 'to make contact with the people, enlist their good will, convince them to adopt methods of hygiene and agriculture, improve their techniques in arts and crafts and develop principles of good citizenship, all of which are essential if the standards of the country are to be raised'. Gabriel – who constantly fought for equal conditions within the organization, unsuccessfully – repeatedly invoked UNESCO's good work on behalf of tous les citoyens du monde.

The Marbial project was only one of UNESCO's great failures in this period, although Gabriel's own contribution, a series of Creole readers, gave him for a short time a world-wide reputation that put him in the International 'Who's Who'. Since then he has disappeared. We can find him in the UNESCO archive, however, writing to Huxley in 1948 in lament: 'I would never understand that Unesco give priority to applications from outsiders while neglecting to take advantage of the services of people who have been trained in doing Unesco's work.'[11] The 'outsiders' of course were the rising class of North American and European social scientists, particularly anthropologists, whose star was keenly hitched to the new modernising mission of institutionalised internationalism. The status of Haitians such as Gabriel (but not only him; here I think of the Haitian delegation

to the League, the Haitians who pushed through the most radical clauses of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for example) suffered a parallel decline in their capacity to act as international or world citizens.

Among those experts was one Alva Myrdal, a Swedish feminist and social psychologist, who came to the UN in 1949 to take up a temporary one-year posting as top-ranking Director of Social Affairs in the UN complex in New York at Lake Success (an old armaments factory on Long Island). Consequently, she became the highest-ranking woman, and the only woman really in its managerial class. (After that she ended up at UNESCO from 1950–56, as the Director of Social Sciences.) If Gabriel imagined internationalism as a set of institutions and practices that increased his opportunities as an actor in the world, and augured the redress of economic and social inequities of colonialism, Myrdal imagined it as part of the evolving history of economic and social democracy, on the Swedish model.

From Myrdal's perspective, social welfarism (as she and her husband Gunnar had designed it) had led Sweden out of its backward rural past to its modern egalitarian urban present. Her aim in the UN was to apply that model to 'the great historic drama of decolonization' and what she termed 'the struggle for development of the underprivileged parts of the world'.[12] She would describe her typical day when the UN was in session, in the Economic and Social Council 'just glued to my seat in order to demonstrate the interest of the Department of Social Affairs in the development of under-developed countries'.[13] In the 1950s, Myrdal pushed for the vision of UNESCO as an agent for internationalism 'tangible to common people', noting that 'nothing is more tangible than international fertilization of social and economic improvements.' There was no point dreaming about a political one world, she argued; rather, common goals and cooperation in social affairs would make 'for true home feeling in one world'.

That was until Christmas 1953, when Myrdal went on a mission to India to observe and promote UNESCO's contribution to local technical assistance programs. Within months she was voicing her

disillusionment.[14] Not only did the technical assistance planned at desks in Paris often not match the reality on the ground, or anticipate local and 'indigenous' efforts, but under the auspices of the UN, development had become an experimental field for outsiders enforcing American-endowed 'community development schemes' which carried dependence on capital outlay. What she abhorred most was the emphasis on economics at the expense of the effects on community, and the 'one way traffic of cultural influence' epitomised by these schemes (many of them driven by the Ford Foundation as much as by the UN).[15]

By the time Myrdal had left UNESCO in 1956, the 'one world' ambitions of the UN – whether as a state of mind or political project – had been given away, sold off against the internal threat of McCarthyism and Cold War Politics. By then, there was a long and growing list of abandoned international ambitions and imagined internationalisms. It would take a much longer essay and a number of ARC grants to explore the extent to which world government and world citizenship were a shared language in the mid-twentieth century, or to comprehend the extent of their implications in different parts of the world, not just amongst the political and intellectual elites equally at home in New York and London. There are clues enough in the archives of the UN and UNESCO, as well as in the stories one can trace across the pages of contemporary memoirs of the competing interests that the popularity of the idea of an international forum and community generated, and the persistent fears of the consequences of the new international forum and the language of world citizenship and one world.

Here, speaking in January 1947, is the former resistance fighter and member of the International Rights of Man organisation, Henri Laugier. In the post-war period he was the Assistant Director-General of the UN's Department of Social Affairs. Opening the First session of the new UN's Commission on Human Rights, Laugier began by describing a

> great wave of confidence and hope [that] has run through the whole world, whether we want it or not, approve it or not, whether we wish or regret it, [so that] what has happened is that for all individuals and for

all groups in the world who consider themselves as victims of violations of the Rights of man, a sort of right of appeal has emerged from the individuals and these groups to the authority representative of the supreme will of the peoples, to the United Nations with its Assembly and its Councils.[16]

While Laugier's claims might seem overblown, they capture the general tenor of democratisation that underwrote the creation of the new UN, and found expression in concepts such as 'world consciousness', 'world citizenship' and 'world community'.

Here also in January 1947 is Margery Perham, a member of the Fabian Colonial Bureau, and Reader in Colonial Administration, writing to Walter Crocker at his UN desk to complain about the new international organisation and what it augured for the future:

> I must say my British gorge rises against the malicious depreciation of all colonial achievements by Ukrainians, Haitian and South America small fry. I wish I could think it did not matter, but I fear it does with American opinion, and U.S. negroes shouting out on platforms and in the press all round your assembly rooms and offices. What say you? Creech-Jones [Britain's Labour government minister for colonies] whom I see a good deal, is 100% sincere in his belief in self-government policy, so are we in our teaching of the Colonial Service. It has taken us nearly two centuries to work up to our present standard of restraint and liberalism. I do not say we are efficient yet, or, always wise and our publicity work is absurd, and I daresay there is some exploitation and some colour snobbery, going on still. But you see I am getting conservative in my late middle-age.[17]

Inevitably, there was more than one interpretation and expectation of the possibilities offered by the language of world citizenship. Most particular was the democratising prospect of this idea of citizenship, not necessarily in terms of a single form of citizenship, but of equal access and opportunity of representation, now offered through an international forum. What the UN offered was a more potent international public sphere for debating and evaluating competing images of political, social and economic equality. Contemporaries were more than aware of the potential of the UN and its agencies for legitimating new social and economic, as well as moral, international norms and expectations. I add social and economic, because a

significant proportion of debate about rights in this period circulated around expectations of social and economic equality, not just political. And not everyone was happy.

Notes

1   That this nineteenth-century nation-based scholarly paradigm might still be with us, is evident in the Australian Research Council 'Field of Research' classifications, which offer the modern 21st-century historian attempting to identify their work for the funding purposes of the DEST the options of national and (one assumes for purposes of brevity) regional assignations, or 'Historical Studies not elsewhere classified'.

2   Crocker was a great admirer of Margery Perham, discussed at the end of this essay.

3   See G. Sluga, 'Unesco and the (One) World of Julian Huxley', *Journal of World History*, Special Issue: Cosmopolitanism in World History, 21, 3 (September 2010): 393–418.

4   Joanne Pemberton provides a useful genealogy of their twentieth-century usage and variety of meanings of world citizenship and One World-ism in *Global Metaphors: Modernity and the Quest for One World*, London, 2001. See in particular p. 121 ff.

5   Stephen Spender, 'Julian Huxley: A Profile', *Vogue*, January 1949, pp. 63, 80, 96.

6   During this time Gabriel, the son of a Port-au-Prince businessman, was rising in the Haitian education bureaucracy and putting his skills to work on the problem of illiteracy. One Haitian newspaper described him thus: 'He was especially interested in the way the English used the schools for social services and the means of promoting technical education … as well as a love of the arts'.

7   Edmund Wilson, *Red, black, blond and olive: Studies in four civilizations: Zuni, Haiti, Soviet Russia, Israel*, Oxford, 1956, pp. 95–96.

8   John Bowers, 'Fundamental Education', *Unesco Courier* 1.i (February 1948): 5. Phillip Jones has traced the influence of this idea of education through Bowers; see *International Policies for Third World Education: UNESCO, Literacy and Development*, London, 1988. Bowers was brought into UNESCO by Huxley.

9   While there are numerous assessments of this project in national histories of the British empire, and of Tanganyika, there is no scholarly study of UNESCO's role or its failure's impact on UNESCO. See Cyril Ehrlich, 'Some Antecedents of Development Planning in Tanganyika', *Journal of Development Studies* 23 (April 1966): 254–67; among the follies of

this 'model failure' were its lack of local consultation, even with the Tanganyikan administration and a focus on development as physical capital expenditure. This was a view of development quite different from that of UNESCO.

10 During the war, Gabriel had been involved in a campaign conducted by the Haitian government to invent a simplifed orthography for the local Creole, drawing in American and other literacy experts for the task.

11 UNESCO Archives, Paris. Personnel Files, Gabriel.

12 'A personal note' in *The Game of Disarmament*, Manchester, 1977, p. xxv.

13 Labour Movement Archives, Stockholm, AMb, 3.1.3: 4, ARA, Alva Myrdal Diary, sent to Mr. Henri Laugier from Mrs. Alva Myrdal, 1 March 1950.

14 UNESCO Archives, Paris. SS/Memo.53/3251, 3 February 1953. To: The Acting Director-General, From: Alva Myrdal, Director Department of Social Sciences. Subject: Report on Mission to India and Egypt. Official visit to the Minister of Education, and miscellaneous activities.

15 UNESCO Archives, Paris, X07.83, Folder: 'Missions of Myrdal'. As described by the historian Timothy Mitchell, during the 1950s technical assistance came to represent a 'new politics based on technical expertise' which 'would organize post-war international relations around a politics of techno-economic development'. See Tim Mitchell, 'Can the Mosquito Speak?' in *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2002, pp. 19–53, at p. 41.

16 UN Department of Public Information Press Division, Press release PM/273 27 January 1947. Laugier was the former President of the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, a Resistance figure and a professor of Physiology.

17 Crocker Papers, University of Adelaide, Perham to Crocker, 19 March 1947, from the Institute of Colonial Studies, Letters to or from Africa, 1947–1949 Series 5, Box II i.i.