

# H-Diplo FORUM 2022-1

## H-Diplo Discussion Forum on Histories of Global Order, March 2022

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Christy Thornton, Johns Hopkins University

Lydia Walker, Leiden University

Global order is a hot topic. Using *Foreign Affairs* as a barometer, scholars and practitioners are concerned about the state of the current global order and how it evolves and responds to challenges. The most recent issues include articles on China and a new world order, the challenge of illiberalism to the liberal international order, and digital order.<sup>1</sup> There have also been many reviews on H-Diplo of studies of global orders. Commentators, politicians, and pundits regularly turn to history to understand the nature of the current global order, to reinforce its legitimacy, and to bolster predictions about the consequences of change or collapse. Despite the seeming utility of history, political scientists and experts in other disciplines have been more visibly engaged in public discussions and policy consultations than historians.

The marginalization of historians is puzzling. Historians have written a lot about global order/world order for a long time. A few recent examples are Or Rosenboim's *The Emergence of Globalism*, Adom Getachew's *Worldmaking after Empire*, and Duncan Bell's edited collection, *Victorian Visions of Global Order*.<sup>2</sup> These three studies explain what people understood global order/world order to mean as an idea and as a political project. The authors' definitions of global order/world order demonstrate that these concepts are specific to time, place, and individual, and that many varieties of order co-exist and

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Economy, "Xi Jinping's New World Order: Can China Remake the International System?" Alexander Cooley and Daniel H. Nexon, "The Real Crisis of Global Order: Illiberalism on the Rise," and Joseph S. Nye Jr., "The End of Cyber-Anarchy: How to Build a New Digital Order," all in *Foreign Affairs* 101:1 (January-February 2022); Michael Bleckley, "Enemies of My Enemy: How Fear of China is Forging a New World Order," *Foreign Affairs* 101:2 (March-April 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Getachew is a political theorist but has written a thoroughly historical work. Or Rosenboim, *The Emergence of Globalism: Visions of World Order in Britain and the United States, 1939-1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); Duncan Bell, ed., *Victorian Visions of Global Order: Empire and International Relations in Nineteenth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

compete. Perhaps because of their contingency and complexity, or perhaps because not all visions of order materialized, contemporary discussions do not include deep historical insights. But as these authors show, their studies are relevant to contemporary discussions and challenges.

In 2020, Dan Gorman and Francine McKenzie planned a workshop for scholars (mostly historians) to discuss the history of global orders in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Because we were unable to meet in person, we had several conversations remotely in the summer of 2021. Our conversations were loosely-organized and gave participants the chance to discuss their own research, past and present. Below are some reflections on questions that we kept coming back to: how do we conceive of and define global order, who are the actors, how do we study global orders, and what other disciplines do we read, with a few final thoughts about why history matters to the on-going debate about the current global order. We hope that this discussion forum of a small group of international historians might be useful to students and scholars working on the subject of the global order. By disseminating historical knowledge and thinking, we also hope that public discussions about the global order might be more sincerely historically-informed. If you want to share your thoughts on history and global order, please write to us directly. Dan and Francine plan to organize a new workshop (in hybrid form and interdisciplinary) that relates the history of global orders to contemporary discussions and public policy. If you are interested in taking part, let us know: Dan - [dporman@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:dporman@uwaterloo.ca) and Francine – [fmckenzi@uwo.ca](mailto:fmckenzi@uwo.ca).

### Participants:

**Dan Gorman** (co-convenor/co-editor) is Professor of History in the Department of History at the University of Waterloo. His research focuses on the British empire, modern Britain, international relations and the history of global governance. His most recent book is *International Cooperation in the Early Twentieth Century* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

**Bonny Ibhawoh** is Professor of History in the Department of History and the Center for Peace Studies at McMaster University. His research focuses on global human rights, peace/conflict studies, legal and imperial history. His most recent book is *Human Rights in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

**Jamie Martin** is Assistant Professor in the Department of History and School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University. His research focuses on the history of capitalism, empire and international order. His forthcoming book is *The Meddlers: Sovereignty, Empire and the Birth of Global Economic Governance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022).

**Francine McKenzie** (co-convenor, co-editor) is Professor of History in the Department of History at the University of Western Ontario. Her research focuses on the history of global trade, international institutions, peace, and Canada in the world. Her most recent book is *GATT and Global Order in the Postwar Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

**Alanna O'Malley** is Associate Professor in the Institute for History at Leiden University. Her research focuses on the United Nations, the Global South, Congo, and the Cold War. Her most recent book is *The Diplomacy of Decolonisation: America, Britain and the United Nations during the Congo Crisis, 1960-64* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018).

**Tiziana Stella** is Executive Director of The Streit Council. Her research focuses on the history of US foreign policy, federalism, democracy, international order and world organization. Her forthcoming book is *Clarence Streit and the Genesis of the Present World Order*.

**Christy Thornton** is Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at Johns Hopkins University. Her research focuses on global inequality and development, Latin American political economy, and labor and social movements. Her most recent book is *Revolution in Development: Mexico and the Governance of the Global Economy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021).

**Lydia Walker**, is a Postdoctoral Researcher in the Institute of History at Leiden University. Her research focuses on insurgent movements and institutions of international order during decolonization and the Cold War. Her forthcoming book is *States-in-Waiting: Global Decolonization and Its Discontents* (Cambridge University Press).

*Discussion Forum:*

**The term ‘global order’ is used alongside international order, world order, global governance, and international community. Define ‘global order’ in relation to your research? Do you use a different expression?**

**Thornton:** For me, the idea of the ‘global order’ is really the thing that animates the historical actors in my first book, *Revolution in Development*.<sup>3</sup> While they certainly drew from what’s often called the ‘revolutionary nationalism’ of the Mexican revolution, they also understood that the fate of their country could be determined, in key ways, by the larger international economic and financial systems into which they were inserted. So they thought very strategically about the kinds of rules and institutions that might be required to govern that global order—to constrain, for example, the power of private banks and multinational corporations to engage in speculative, exploitative practices that had few benefits for the Mexican people. Given Mexico’s long struggles with Wall Street Bankers and oil interests especially, Mexican officials knew from bitter experience that domestic regulatory frameworks like that embodied in the Mexican constitution’s Article 27 were necessary, but not sufficient—to face down the pressure of organized capital, new global rules and organizations were necessary. But capitalists understood these Mexican challenges as real threats from the earliest days, and they therefore repeatedly mobilized and organized to block the few concessions that Mexican officials won from their counterparts in the US government. Groups like the National Association to Protect American Rights in Mexico, the National Association of Manufacturers, and the National Foreign Trade Council, therefore *also* organized to ensure that the global order remained friendly to their interests. The idea of ‘global order,’ then, provides a useful shorthand for the object of this protracted struggle—the thing about which economists, diplomats, capitalists, and political leaders argued and fought.

**McKenzie:** In my recent book, *GATT and Global Order in the Postwar Era*,<sup>4</sup> I realized that I was writing about global order belatedly and by a process of elimination. At first, I thought I was writing about geopolitics and international relations, but I realized that these terms/concepts raised expectations, especially connected to realism, that didn’t jibe with my historical approach and didn’t capture the ‘thing’ that GATT was a product of, that played out within the history of the organization, and that it sustained. ‘International community’ or ‘international society’ conjure up interesting possibilities about how to think about international spaces, actors and behaviour, but my study has too many governments and policymakers and not enough civil society actors to justify the use of community or society. GATT was part of the global governance system, but governance was the external result of an underlying set of norms, expectations and dynamics. The ‘order’ part of ‘global order’ was especially apposite to my study because it hints at coercion and injustice and I saw this in the GATT’s institutional design and international consequences. When the GATT was established after the Second World War, order was negotiated and imposed; there was a hierarchy; there were rules, norms, and regular processes; there was resistance and transgression; and there was, sometimes to my surprise, considerable support for what the organization represented. My use of ‘global’ is not in line with the conception of global history that erases or transcends nations as actors and spaces. ‘International’ also works, but global was truer to my determination to include many states, large, medium and small, developed and developing, industrial and agricultural, exporters and importers, democratic, socialist and authoritarian.

**Stella:** I explore ideas of international federation in the planning and outcome of the Second World War postwar order. For me these terms are best historicized when considered alongside ‘world organization.’ ‘World order’ replicates the terminology of my primary sources. When people spoke of world order, they meant an ‘orderly world,’ the specific outcome

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<sup>3</sup> Christy Thornton, *Revolution in Development: Mexico and the Governance of the Global Economy* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Francine McKenzie, *GATT and Global Order in the Postwar Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

of a world organized through some kind of international machinery and ‘the world order,’ the system of existing hierarchies in a still prevalent anarchic world system. In federalist prescriptions, ‘the world order’ was not separate from world organization. ‘Order,’ in the federalist discourse did not hint ‘at coercion *and* injustice,’ as in Francine’s work. World organization would subsume the function that a democratic state had in domestic politics, where coercion was the enforcement of legitimate law. Without this *systemic* change in world organization, the anarchic nature of the world system would continue to generate *superimposed* coercion and injustice, and be an obstacle to further emancipation. This analysis coincided with that of early realists, such as Fredrick Schuman and Carl Friedrich, who spoke of *Weltinnenpolitik*, with *Politik* meaning politics, not policy.<sup>5</sup>

In federalist discourse the term ‘world community’ is central to the debate on the role that supra-sectional loyalty and consent play in the dynamics of creation and survival of international federation. It helped articulate the paradox that progressive realists faced, starting in the mid-1930s, when reneging the institutionally conservative faith in a Westphalian system. To quote Hans Morgenthau from *Politics Among Nations*, “There can be no permanent international peace without a state coextensive with the confines of the political world.” He went on to say that “a world community must antedate a world state.”<sup>6</sup> It is indicative that the concept of a ‘world community’ seems to have been replaced by ‘international community.’ ‘Global order’ came into use later, concomitantly with ‘global governance,’ a term that describes the handling of interdependence through international institutions and networks that circumvent the federalist *sine-qua-nons* of accountability and democratic legitimacy.

**Ibhawoh:** My approach to the notion of Global Order and Global Governance is linked to my research interest in critical human rights studies. The postcolonial contestations of the Western-inspired “universal” human rights agenda mirrored contestations of an old imperial world order and emergent post-imperial Global Order. My approach to the notion of Global Order therefore centres on deconstructing both key terms – ‘Global’ and ‘Order.’ Who defines the global? What regions of the world are included or excluded from this definition of the global? How do centres and peripheries, metropolises and colonies/post-colonies figure the definition and ordering of the global? Then there is the related question. Whose definition of ‘Order?’ Is this an aspiration for an inclusive universal order or order contingent on some disorder in? The point is that we need to rethink conventional understandings of global order and global governance.

I am interested in the discourse of the ‘post-colonial global order,’ specifically the efforts by newly independent African and Asian states to renegotiate the emergent international human rights system within a more globally representative UN. My window into this is the debate over the right to development as a legitimate human right within an international human right system that prioritized Western interest in civil and political rights over “Third World” interests in economic and social rights, and solidarity rights.

The New International Economic Order (NEIO) and right to development as advanced by “Third World” intellectuals and political leaders calls for alternative structural changes in global governance. Like Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL), Third World Approaches to Global Governance (TWAGG) calls for a radical transformation of the existing global governance and argue that international organisations like the Group of Seven (G7), Group of Twenty (G20), the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are often driven by global powers where developing countries either have a weak voice or no access altogether.

**Martin:** In the interwar period and with specific reference to the global economy, I think there was less of a sense of a coherent and holistic world economy undergirded by political projects of “global order-ing,” such as those of the British

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Frederick L. Schuman and George D. Brodsky, *Design for Power: The Struggle for the World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941) and Carl J. Friedrich, *Foreign Policy in the Making: The Search for a New Balance of Power* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1938).

<sup>6</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1948): 398, 407.

Empire and the League of Nations it largely dominated, than would become common later. Instead, what I look in my book, *The Meddlers: Sovereignty, Empire, and the Birth of Global Economic Governance*,<sup>7</sup> is how a series of mostly *ad hoc* efforts to deal with specific crises or respond to the demands of interest groups led to the elaboration of a series of new practices and powers we can collectively recognize today as those of an early form of global economic governance. These would later be adapted, expanded, and put to new uses under a form of US hegemony we might more clearly associate with a considered project of superintending a truly global political order under US domination.

**Was there resistance to order? Were there alternatives? Was there order at all?**

**Thornton:** This is such an important question, and I want to argue strongly that we cannot understand any given ‘order’ without understanding how it has been shaped, over time, by resistance to it. In my book, I address this through use of the great anthropologist William Roseberry’s gloss on Antonio Gramsci’s definition of hegemony. Gramsci argued that understanding the hegemony of a dominant class also required paying close attention to the actions of subaltern classes, to “their active or possible affiliation to the dominant political formations, their attempts to influence the programmes of these formations in order to press claims of their own, and the consequences of these attempts in determining processes of decomposition, renovation, or neo-formation.”<sup>8</sup> Roseberry reads this to mean, then, that we can’t understand hegemony without centering not consent, but rather “contention, struggle, and argument.”<sup>9</sup> Orders, then, are never given or fixed—they are, in fact, processes of struggle unfolding over time. Only by uncovering that struggle can we accurately diagnose how power has been exercised and how order has been won.

**Walker:** The boundaries of a system of global order - whether we are talking about the ‘liberal international order’ that can function as code for the United States’ power projection/hegemony, or the postwar international order of the United Nations that came to encase sovereignty into the nation-state rather than imperial form, or both - are defined by those they exclude. In my manuscript, *States-in-Waiting*,<sup>10</sup> I show that many of these ‘resistors,’ who were minority or indigenous nationalist claimants in South Asia and Southern Africa, were seeking to belong to a system that did not consider them legitimately national. Resistors are peoples and groups that fall into the amorphous category of ‘non-state actor.’ Indeed, terrorist organizations and humanitarian non-governmental organizations both fall into this category. In my work, in order to use more capacious and less ideologically loaded terms, I talk about nationalist claimants and transnational advocates, which are groups and individuals that cross the boundaries of an international system that is predicated upon state membership, even when their goal may be to join it.

**O’Malley:** One of the central ideas that we are working on in my new project on the invisible history of the UN and the Global South is the notion that order is contested and changes over time.<sup>11</sup> For too long, the debate about global order has assigned Western powers the position of establishing the rules and procedures of global order and defended their maintenance of these hierarchies and inequalities of power due to the necessity to maintain an orderly system. Not only has

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<sup>7</sup> Jamie Martin, *The Meddlers: Sovereignty, Empire, and the Birth of Global Economic Governance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2022).

<sup>8</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, Edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971) 52.

<sup>9</sup> William Roseberry, “Hegemony and the Language of Contention,” in *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*, edited by Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 360.

<sup>10</sup> Lydia Walker, *States-in-Waiting: Global Decolonization and Its Discontents*, forthcoming.

<sup>11</sup> For more information on this project, go to: <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/research/research-projects/humanities/the-invisible-history-of-the-united-nations-and-the-global-south-invisihist#tab-1>.

this cast the role of Global South actors into the position of rebels or resisters, but it provided a causal explanation for the continuance of racism and a host of other inequities that were perpetuated in the name of 'global order.' Our starting point is to take apart this notion of order as inherently stabilizing to show that the inequalities it rendered set the stage for conflict and confrontation, rather than peace. Secondly, we diversify the role of Global South actors by analyzing their varied forms of agency, not just in resisting the system, but also in constructing it, reinterpreting it on their own terms, and crucially through the UN system, institutionalizing their own causes in order to reshape it from within. In highlighting the different forms of agency of these actors, we seek to move the debate about Global Order away from the binary discussion about whether or not the Global South merely resisted or participated in the liberal international order but rather we seek to understand how they changed global order, how they themselves were resisted by Western actors, how they experienced that order often in illiberal ways and most importantly, what other types of order they developed or proliferated through the system.

**McKenzie:** I agree that resistance and contestation are essential aspects of global order. As Christy, Lydia, and Alanna have all suggested, resistance arises because some people/groups/states/regions are excluded or marginalized. Resistance draws our attention to how 'orders' work, who benefits and who is harmed or disadvantaged. In my work on GATT, I concluded that resistance was constructive. The officials, organizations, and states that supported the status quo with respect to a freer trade system cast the countries that resisted as subversive, unconstructive, or ill-suited to the order. But those who resisted were motivated by the desire to make GATT work better, to live up to its own standard of universal relevance and to make freer trade more widely and equitably beneficial. There was a one-sidedness in what was seen as resistance - or non-compliance, subversion - at the time and in scholarly evaluations and what was seen as a legitimate complaint about GATT, its mandate, operations, and principles. All members resisted at some time and on some issue, but not all countries were categorized as resisters.

**Martin:** I'm interested not only in how powerful actors themselves attempted to impose order on a very diverse and often chaotic world, but also how they responded in often haphazard ways to material and financial constraints and incentives. Doing so has involved me looking at the resistance these efforts faced from a broad range of actors - whether social movements, political parties, or even Wall Street bankers. So take, for example, the problem of a coordinated global deflation of commodity prices, of the kind that was common in the 1920s and 1930s. This inspired members of the British Colonial Office to think more and more of very disparate parts of the empire as being linked through the transmission of prices, often with potentially explosive political results, and encouraged them to develop new mechanisms to collectively regulate prices both within the empire and in cooperation with other sovereign actors. But this act of 'ordering' was a response to fluctuations in a globally-extended system that was poorly understood and of course extremely difficult to control. And attempting to govern commodity prices led to repeated clashes with a broad range of actors that resisted these efforts - such as private companies, smallholding agricultural producers, and colonial governments. Similarly, I've found other projects of global governance during this era to often be more rearguard, partial, and heavily-resisted responses to massive collective action problems than premeditated attempts to impose some kind of overarching order on the world.

**Stella:** Federalists rejected traditional notions of hierarchy in the global order. Federalist visions were 'the' alternative model for world organization in the 1940s, the only other option considered by the planners in terms of structure. Rather than an order based on the equality of nation-states, they advocated for an international order based on individual equality. This was a radical transformation that went beyond other proposals for democratizing foreign policy because it allowed direct individual agency in the policies and government of world organization. Often federalists have been lumped together with other internationalists, but their vision was in many ways antithetical. They shared the goals of peace, freedom, equality, and human rights, but disagreed that these goals could be realized if world organization took the form of cooperation among nation-states. A core element of this alternative order was that it was alterable by means other than war or the threat of war, a longstanding priority among progressive internationalists who saw international enforcement and arbitration as unjust and inadequate in moments of crisis and shifting global order.

**Who/what are the main actors in your work? How does this inform our understanding of global order?**

**Walker:** In *States-in-Waiting*, I focus on claimants (Nagas from Northeast India, Hereros from Southern Africa, as well Northern Rhodesian/Zambian nationalists, and even the counterrevolutionary nationalist claim of Katanga in Southeastern Congo) and a network of advocates drawn from the global anti-apartheid, US Civil Rights, and Indian Sarvodaya movements. Elsewhere I have focused on the nationalist claim of Tibet and its commodification within anti-Communist civil society advocacy networks in the US and India. These claimants and advocates are working through the interstices, the unregulated spaces, of the international order of the United Nations because they are focused on political questions that state governments may not want to officially address. The claimants themselves are from regions in what we now call the Global South, a term that I consider a descriptor of a set of power relationships rather than a literal geography.

**Stella:** My work explores the complex constituency that took part in the attempt during the Second World War to replace the anarchic nature of the Westphalian state-centric international system. Some of the principal actors were Clarence Streit, the American movement Federal Union, Inc., and the vast spectrum of pressure groups, organizations, and individuals behind this effort. Despite its leading role in drawing the lines of contention over the structure of world organization, federalists were dismissed as ‘perfectionist,’ ‘utopian,’ ‘idealist,’ or later confined to the role of ‘ideal type.’ As a result, this constituency has been almost invisible in our historiographies. Another reason why this constituency is unnoticed is because its preferences in the debate on intervention became irrelevant, once US foreign policy-makers magnified the priority of joining the war over (and separated from) that of the organization of peace. In reality the two debates that shaped the US position on postwar order – the first on the issues of engagement and participation in the war, the second on world organization – pivoted around different dividing lines. By following the work of the actors I explore, it became evident that the core issues that originally shaped thoughts and positions on world organization cut across the lines of the first debate, and generated different alignments.

**Martin:** The actors that I focus on in my book, *The Meddlers*, are largely split into two categories. The first, whom I call the ‘architects’ of the first wave of international economic institutions, come from a very small overlapping network of British, Western European, and US officials, bankers, and international civil servants. The second set of actors I look at are those who resisted their designs. This group is more heterogeneous and includes the representatives of various business (whether chemical companies, mining firms, or investment banks), political parties of left and right, nationalist movements like the Guomindang in China, civil society groups, and a handful of authoritarian political figures and far-right movements from Greece to Germany. It is in the interaction of these public/private architects of new international institutions and the many public/private opponents of their designs that I tell the story of how institutions of global economic governance first emerged after World War I and attempted to legitimate their more interventionist powers.

### **Was the post-1945 period and the ‘UN-system’ a new iteration of global order?**

**Walker:** When answering this question in public, I often like to present two maps and layer them on top of each other. The first is from 1930 made by the Hungarian map maker Alexander Radó (who worked for the Soviet Union) titled “Oppressed Peoples of the World,” which maps disenfranchised peoples in what we now call the Global South based on ethnicity. The second is a 1962 US Central Intelligence Agency map that depicts the ‘newly independent nations since 1945’ (who were new members of the United Nations) and their neat boundaries in blue, and elides in white the differences between places that were still colonies and their ruling metropolises. Placing the US empire’s 1962 world view of decolonization over that of proletarian disenfranchisement from 1930 shows that oppressed peoples remain in independent states at the same time that international-legal recognition has formalized and clarified their territorial placement. The categories and frameworks, the ‘ordering,’ of the postwar UN system may have been new, but the issues and peoples they encased were certainly not.

**O’Malley:** Certainly the post-1945 period opened up the idea of what global order meant and signified to nations and states around the world. For many in search of recognition, the ultimate form of legitimacy came with UN membership. Curiously, despite the power inequalities built into the UN system in its structure and procedures, the Charter was interpreted almost immediately as providing provision for the acquisition of sovereignty, human rights, and later different forms of liberation. While it took a long time for ‘the’ global order itself to change, what is striking about the post-1945

period is that order was assumed to be malleable and it was no longer simply a static system of states. The UN provided the method and the means to bring dynamism to global order as it offered a pathway for alternative claims about territoriality, sovereignty, and rights. However, it is important not to be positivist about the UN overall. Change was incremental at best as most developments took place outside the organization and were funneled through its channels and mechanisms only gradually. What is important to emphasize however, is that the potential for changing global order was not only built into the Charter but was recognized, if not fully realized, by disparate actors.

**Stella:** I agree with Alanna's comment that incremental change and potential for change were built into the Charter, a result of the advocacy from federalist-oriented negotiators. Ultimately, however, there was not a new beginning in 1945. The UN-system reinstated the model of cooperation among sovereign nation-state adopted earlier by the League of Nations; it did not replace power politics of the past. Where there was discontinuity was in the fact that in 1943-45 the choice of reinstating the league model was made with full awareness that it would confine world organization to a secondary role first, and potential irrelevance later. This had not been the case with the League of Nation. The fundamentally unalterable nature of the UN structure did not offer routes substantially different from the past to those challenging the existing global order. Partial change of power politics occurred instead in the transatlantic sub-system of global order, to the degree that it incorporated federalist perspectives. This sub-system was better able to adapt to shifts of power internationally and maintain democracy internally. Ultimately, however, challenges to hegemony at the global level brought back a surge of autocratic regimes and a crisis of world organization, as in the interwar period. I think this is the main takeaway for today: a weak, rules-based, world organization can't sustain democracy. It is interesting that democracy worldwide is back to its 1989 levels, mainly confined to the transatlantic area, but it is backsliding there too.

#### **What methodological challenges do you encounter in your work?**

**Thornton:** In my work, the most important challenge is the enormous condescension of historical actors from the Global North toward their counterparts in the South—and the way that condescension has been directly imported into our historiographies and theoretical frameworks. For a long time, for example, we labored under the assumption that Global South actors simply didn't matter for the conceptualization and creation of international institutions, because we had Northern officials arguing that they didn't. In my book, I quote Dean Acheson arguing that the Latin American countries invited to Bretton Woods "will just sit there until they vote." A British Treasury official seems to agree, arguing that the Latin Americans—who made up 18 of the 44 nations represented—were there merely to 'sign in the place for the signature.'<sup>12</sup> What resulted was scholarship that reproduced this dismissal, not bothering to ask why so many Latin American nations were invited in the first place, or how they approached the meeting, what they wanted from it, and what they argued there. In order to answer those questions, however, I had to go well beyond the conference proceedings and public pronouncements, deep into not only the US and UK planning documents, but the Mexican planning documents as well—where, as I mentioned above, I found much less consensus and acquiescence and a great deal more contention and struggle. By triangulating between the public pronouncements and private correspondence of US and UK officials, the public stance of the Mexican and other Latin American officials, and the behind-the-scenes preparatory work undertaken by Mexican economists and diplomats, I could get a much fuller picture of not only what the Mexicans wanted as they approached a meeting like Bretton Woods—or San Francisco, or Havana, or the Non-Aligned conferences, or UNCTAD III—but also how their interventions mattered and shaped these institutions, despite the disavowals of their Northern counterparts. It's a methodology, however, that requires getting really deep into a single case, so getting a broader global understanding of how these interventions mattered probably requires the work of a scholarly collective, not a single researcher!

**Gorman:** Christy's comments about the benefits of moving beyond conference proceedings and public pronouncements to identify and analyze the 'behind-the-scenes' work done by historical actors accords with some of the challenges I have faced in writing about the ways in which international institutions have contributed to the construction of international orders in the twentieth century. International orders are made by people, of course, whether through their work in institutions, their

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<sup>12</sup> Thornton, *Revolution in Development*, 80.



writing and speeches, their participation in activist or protest movements, and the many other political activities in which they take part. Yet as Christy notes, the 'public face' of these activities can hide more than it reveals, and indeed sometimes replicates entrenched biases and inequities in the international system. To meet this challenge, much of the recent work I have done on aspects of the early history of the UN has been based on archival material created by international civil servants themselves (diaries, memoirs, 'grey literature' produced in the day-to-day undertaking of their jobs, and so forth). I have been inspired by the work of historians like Karen Gram-Skoldager,<sup>13</sup> Glenda Sluga,<sup>14</sup> and Isabella Löhr<sup>15</sup> to think about how such sources, and a focus on the lived experiences of international actors, can help us understand how international orders have been made 'from the inside-out.' These sources provide a powerful complement to the traditional, and still valuable, sources of international history. They reveal how and why international civil servants pursued the careers that they did, how they saw their vocation and place in the world, and the many ways in which relationships defined, and often determined, international political decisions and norms.

**McKenzie:** I am going to make a case for the importance of conference proceedings. Recently, I have been reading conference records from the 1940s about the creation of the UN and some of the specialist organizations, including the Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Health Organization, the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and UNESCO. These proceedings can be thousands of pages long, have no index, and no guide about how documents are organized; it's tempting to set them aside. But they contain the 'voices' of representatives of countries that are typically written over or written out of histories about the construction of the UN-system. In formal speeches, proposals for revision or amendments, and discussions in sub-committees, they articulated their interests, perspectives, experiences and priorities. Even if they were not 'leaders' at these conferences, their voices were heard and they influenced the form, operations and purpose of these organizations. In cases where their ideas were not included in charters and articles of agreement, they were not irrelevant or forgotten. They were part of the institutional foundation and they influenced the norms and culture of the organization and the global order. Whatever sources we use, I don't think we can credibly tell the history of the UN-system, and of global order more broadly, without understanding it as a multiverse.<sup>16</sup>

**Stella:** In my work, I deal with two sets of challenges: lack of specific scholarship and lack of historiography with categories of analysis relevant to my inquiry. I address this first by carving out – through qualitative and quantitative parameters – the contours of a new 'space' in which an intellectual history of federalist paradigms could exist in its own right. I incorporate perspectives and concepts across disciplines, especially history, IR, and philosophy. It was also necessary to change the periodization to move past the condescension of past and current historiographical and theoretical frameworks. These continue to interpret the surge of interest in federalism during the Second World War as an historical anomaly, a negligible phenomenon of advocacy on the outskirts of a battleground of ideas about world organization and order. In my case, changing the narrative was not only a matter of digging deeper and wider into the sources, but required new categories of analysis to detect aspects of relevance that are discordant with mainstream historiography. Ultimately this added a further dimension that shows that the isolationist/internationalist divide is inadequate to explain what was really at stake in the Second World War in terms of global order.

**What disciplines beyond history do you read? What do they bring to your work?**

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<sup>13</sup> Karen Gram-Skjoldager, Haakon Ikonomou, and Torsten Kahlert, eds, *Organizing the 20th-Century World: International Organizations and the Emergence of International Public Administration, 1920-1960s* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

<sup>14</sup> Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Isabella Löhr, 'Lives Beyond Borders, or: How to Trace Global Biographies, 1880–1950,' *Comparative* 23 (2013), H. 6, 6-20.

<sup>16</sup> Patricia Clavin described the League of Nations as a multiverse. Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920-1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7.

**O'Malley:** I have found that international relations literature, especially constructivism has been useful in thinking about how the UN works. Lately I've also found historical sociology very helpful in understanding the 'behind the scenes' processes of international organizations that others have alluded to above.

**Martin:** I frequently read the work of political scientists working in the field of international political economy.

**Stella:** IR historiography has been helpful through its reevaluation of the discipline's anachronistic application of the idealism/realism paradigm, a misuse that in turn spilled over into the anarchy/sovereignty discourse, which is central to my work. I also read political theory, international relations -- theory and history, formal modeling, game theory, future studies and the science of global risks.

**McKenzie:** Specifically, I have been influenced by Arturo Escobar's work on development and the pluriverse – this work speaks to some of the themes that have arisen in this forum about order, resistance, alternatives, condescension and hegemony.<sup>17</sup> Two specific readings that I find useful and assign to my students are: John M. Hobson, "Re-embedding the Global Color Line within post-1945 International Theory"<sup>18</sup> and Alastair Iain Johnston, "China in a World of Orders: Rethinking Compliance and Challenge in Beijing's International Relations."<sup>19</sup>

### **How does thinking historically change or improve our understanding of the global order today?**

**Ibhawoh:** There is certainly a history deficit in the scholarship on global order and global governance which tends to be presentist in perspective and analysis, and tends towards reading history backwards.

**Gorman:** As a broad generalization, I think there can also be a tendency by actors outside of scholarly historical circles to think about history in terms of 'usable pasts.' As Bonny suggests, this type of thinking encourages presentism, and obscures (intentionally or otherwise) the specificity of past actors and circumstances. That said, scholars 'thinking historically' in other disciplines, such as historical institutionalists in IR, help point to connections between past and present. They also demonstrate how 'thinking in time' informs theoretical approaches to contemporary global order challenges.

**O'Malley:** I would agree with Bonny that most scholarship on global order and global governance lacks historical context and analysis. In addition, I think more needs to be added on historicizing the 'Global South' as one of the main protagonists resisting and shaping the global system. There is quite a lot of political science literature which analyses this group, but less is known about the historical evolution of the postcolonial world and how and in what ways these different types of actors perceived the global order. Particularly absent are the different visions of global order that they promulgated and what became of these alternative versions. Certainly the whole debate about Global Order is far too often considered to mean the liberal international order which further crowds out different conceptions of the international system.

**Stella:** If ever there was a time to stress the public and civic responsibility of historians, it is now. Challenges to the global order have escalated beyond theoretical exercises and world organization has suddenly become an issue that the public cares

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<sup>17</sup> Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: the Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1995) and *Designs for the Pluriverse: radical interdependence, autonomy, and the making of worlds* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

<sup>18</sup> John M. Hobson, "Re-embedding the Global Color Line within post-1945 International Theory," in *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line*, edited by Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda, and Robbie Shilliam (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015): 93-109.

<sup>19</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, "China in a World of Orders: Rethinking Compliance and Challenge in Beijing's International Relations," *International Security* 44:2 (Fall 2019): 9-60.

about. Public attention is on whether it can ensure peaceful transition in moments of crisis. I strongly believe that historians can contribute uniquely to the discussion of the future of the global order. For example, the structural limitations of the rules-based international order, the problematic democracy vs autocracy framing, and the inadequacy of international law go back to questions explored in depth in the debate on world organization that preceded the creation of the UN. That debate also indicates that problems now explored separately in the anarchy/sovereignty discourse, the discourse on democracy and that on war and peace can be better understood as aspects of interlocking issues. Two examples are the debates on endless wars and the future of the liberal international order. In the analysis of US foreign policy likewise there are two parallel discourses, one focusing on its global dimensions, the other on transatlantic aspects. The historical roots of this dissociation can be better explained by looking at how the conceptualization of a democratic core of world organization was coopted by postwar planners as a strategy to reinforce world order.

**McKenzie:** History confers legitimacy on current ideas, interpretations and policies. It's one way the past can be usable (or weaponized – as we see in Russian President Vladimir Putin's "justification" for attacking Ukraine), and it is often based on an ahistorical reading of the past. I am skeptical of the lessons of history; it isn't obvious that circumstances of a particular time, place, and situation can be superimposed on other times, places or situations. But understanding the past as complex, contingent, and with long-term implications, helps us to understand how we have arrived at this moment, recognize our assumptions, and see how things that are unspoken – structures, practices, norms – persist.