

# Advisory Board First Meeting: 5-6<sup>th</sup> July 2016

The Hemsley, University Park, Nottingham

Board members in attendance:

- Ruth Craggs (Lecturer in Cultural and Historical Geography, King's College London)
- Jason Dittmer (Professor of Political Geography, University College London)
- Daniel Laqua (Senior Lecturer in History, Northumbria University)
- James Mansell (Assistant Professor in Cultural Studies, University of Nottingham)
- Fiona McConnell (Associate Professor in Human Geography, University of Oxford)

This two day meeting of the research team (PI Stephen Legg, CI Mike Heffernan and PDRA Jake Hodder) was divided into four sessions. The first allowed the team to remind the board members of the reason we put together the grant bid, how it evolved through the application process, and how the research had been developing over the first year. We then opened out into a discussion of the broader themes informing our work and the shared research interests of the board. In the second and third sessions the board members were given 30 minutes each to introduce elements of their ongoing work that speak to the core interests of the project which formed the basis for group discussion of their ongoing work and how it might inform our work on international conferences. In the final panel the team introduced a series of more pragmatic questions around carrying out and communicating research. The board members had received a report in advance containing information on the bid, the readings groups conducted so far, some of our outputs, and a series of thematic questions which we hoped would help structure the debate in the first session. The thematic questions were:

1. What are the most valuable frameworks with which to approach internationalism? How can we best explore its spatialities?
2. What are the most valuable frameworks with which to approach conferencing?
3. What are the major methodological challenges we face and how might we best overcome them?
4. How can we best face the challenges of pursuing performative and sensory research through the archive?

5. What can we take from, and what should we avoid in, traditional international relations and diplomatic history approaches to these topics?
6. What works can you recommend that have addressed issues of race, gender, and identity politics with regards to our period and topics?
7. How can we best incorporate analyses of the visual and the cartographic?
8. Which interwar debates, literatures and trends would it be most important for us to address to fully contextualise our case studies? How can we explore their temporalities and, especially, their futures? What of the role of experts, science, statistics and research?

## I.

Session I opened with the team outlining the conferences they would be studying and how their views on these sites had changed during the first year of the grant. Steve Legg outlined how his scoping trips to archives in New Delhi and London had highlighted the central significance to the Round Table Conferences of debates about federalism, the Princely States, and the differences between the British Government and the Government of India. This distinctly “imperial” conference was “international” in terms of the movement of peoples representing (at least) two nations, the international provenance of the constitutions held up as models at the meetings, and the internationalist spirit of the age that inspired many of the Indian delegates. Jake Hodder outlined the benefits and challenges of working with the online WEB DuBois papers in relation to the Pan-African Congresses, which was shown to be part of a new age of conferencing in which such events were understood as periodic and standardised. He outlined how the Congresses were part of a parallel, though strictly unofficial, diplomatic culture which sought to influence and mimic contemporary international conferences and groups, such as Versailles (1919) and the League of Nations (1921), by those who despite representing particular constituencies and interests, held no official democratic or diplomatic mandate. Mike Heffernan outlined the challenges of studying something inherently mobile and circulatory as internationalism when it “came to ground”, as studied through the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC) of the League of Nations. The necessity of framing this institution in pre-dating forms was made through the example of the International Institute of Agriculture which was founded in 1905 but ran alongside the League of Nations, sharing many of its aims and also its tensions (being sited in Rome throughout the fascist period). Daniel Laqua raised the question of (dis)continuity and the similarity of the interwar conferences to both social/technical and political conferences in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; Mike agreed, but suggested that the

interwar period witnessed an intensification of pre-existing patterns and their expansion to new political and geographical locations.

The discussion with the board members raised issues that strike to the heart of the theoretical and methodological work that lies ahead. Ruth Craggs pointed out the tradition in International Relations scholarship of judging conferences by their formal outcomes and consequences, rather than through addressing the complexities of the events themselves, with all their diverse and possibly intangible outputs. Daniel Laqua added that peace conferences in the interwar years can rarely be read as successful (!) but that does not mean that they didn't have significance impacts or that they can't offer us valuable insights into the periods and systems of which they were apart. What about "informal internationalisms" that resulted from these conferences? How might, Mike Heffernan asked, the techniques of Science and Technology Studies, used to study contemporary climate change conferences for instance, offer an alternative methodology for thinking about interwar conferences? Fiona McConnell reminded us that one reason for conferencing is that their social attractions and opportunity for travel, often to glamorous cosmopolitan sites, is itself appealing and self-perpetuating; although the full range of conference actors (translators, cleaners, caterers) would obviously have experienced the event quite differently.

Jason Dittmer used the example of the American Continental Congress (1774-1789), in which delegates from the 13 colonies met to form a basic model for what would become the American Congress. These events brought together the founding tenets of representative democracy with practices of diplomacy (travelling representatives from each state enjoying immunity from detention). How do the three sets of conferences that the team are investigating provoke us to think about representative democracy in different ways? Steve suggested that "India" was governed through representative princely and provincial states that were autocratic way before they were even partially democratic. Daniel Laqua encouraged us to think about international audiences for these international conferences; were the Pan-African Congresses keenly watched throughout Africa or was their audience more Euro-American? How much were the intellectual efforts of the League transmitted through global interest in celebrities such as Einstein or Le Corbusier? Was India really a model for how other colonies might be treated, or an exception somewhere between the white settler dominions and the "less civilised" colonies of Africa and Asia?

James Mansell addressed the interwar period from the perspective of sensory history; how was the conference itself positioned as a space of sensory renewal away from the everyday sensorium, in a way that could create new and better thinking away from the hustle and noise of the modern world? How might sensory equivalences create connections across nations (music, foods, colours)? How

might new sensory stimuli be used to create new sensory bases for subjecthood? How did the jazz music, associated with many Pan-African Congresses, affect their mood? What theatre, food, or music did the Round Table delegates consume during their three two-month stints in London? Which elements of the rich sensorium of Paris did the ICIC members enjoy? To what effect? How did conferences delegates alter the sense of the city and how did different communities react? E.g. not just “white” or “Indian” London to the RTCs but also black communities in the city reacting to a different non-white event in the city? How did the residents of Harlem react to the Pan-African elites during the Congress in 1927? And what sources can we use to trace the sensory in the historical? The following were suggested:

- Official sources: the staging, planned colour schemes etc of the conference
- Letters: of those in the city and those travelling to it
- Diaries: of those who formed cultural subsets in each city that may have responded to its bigger events; eg, the Bloomsbury set in London, who already had connections to internationalist debates (eg Leonard and Virginia Woolf).
- Newspapers: especially community or specialist papers such as those read by the South Asian diaspora in London, intellectual magazines in Paris, or black community news papers

## II & III

The following sessions involved discussions of board members’ work in relation to the project. Ruth Craggs presented her 2014 *Geoforum* paper “Hospitality in geopolitics and the making of Commonwealth international relations”, which studied forms of hospitality in London and, crucially, in Lusaka (expanding the range of our case studies, all of which take place in Europe or America). The discussion raised the issue of communicating the *atmosphere* of a conference and the significance of welcome and the embodied labour required (cleaning rooms, making sure social stigmas are banished or at least tempered). We were also encouraged to study the work that went on before conferences (erecting the set and even the infrastructure of the city), during (at retreats or fieldtrips) and afterwards (discussing, implementing, or delegates who would meet each other over their lifetime, through several careers and changes in political attitude) and in the spaces between and around the formal conferences sites (halls, corridors, cafes, bars, bedrooms). Ruth’s sensitive use of Derrida reminded us that forms of hospitality can be smothering and assimilative, just as seemingly aggressive forms of debate and questioning could be a way of welcoming a delegate as an equal.

Fiona McConnell introduced her ongoing work on the margins of international politics and on the practicing of diplomacy, particularly her work with the Unrepresented Nations People's Organisation and her planned work on "anticipatory socialisation" of not-yet states. Steve Legg raised the comparison with imperial notions of benevolent paternalism and trusteeship of colonies explicitly positioned as not yet mature enough for independence; a series of racial developmental hierarchies assumed by the League of Nations Mandates Committee. Daniel Laqua also raised the comparison of Woodrow Wilson's call for "self-determination" in Europe, but not in African and Asian colonies.

Jason Dittmer provided an outline of his *Diplomatic Materials* project, which uses assemblage theory to re-engage the study of states and international relations in new ways, focusing on three historical studies: the reconstruction of London's Foreign Office in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; shared practices of de/coding between the UK and USA espionage agencies; and practices of homogenisation between NATO states in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In discussion the significance of dining rooms to diplomatic assemblages was discussed, as the aristocrat able to host and feed was replaced by the civil servant and the state banquet. Daniel Laqua complemented this site based methodology with a summary of his work on sites of internationalism (Belgium as a nation that used internationalism to protect itself and survive in an era of hyper-nationalisms), agents of internationalism (activists and organisations including the Union of International Associations, as collated by the transnational intellectual cooperation collaborative <http://www.tic.ugent.be/>) and constituencies of internationalism (such as students, the future leaders of a possibly more international world). We discussed the amount of travel required for many of these activities and the agencies that promoted such mobility, and whether this mobility depended upon a particular elite, and whether such an elite focus is made inevitable by the range of actors motivating interwar internationalism. Might the elite of one state have one approach to internationalism while the people had another (a seeming reality in the Britain of "Brexit")?

James Mansell concluded the session with an introduction of his work on sensory history which raises the question of how to conduct a sensory history of the interwar? How did people make sense of new technologies of sound (the car, the radio) in a period still "shell shocked" from the noise of the First World War? How were environments intervened into to ameliorate this noise? If, following John Berger, we study ways of seeing, what about ways of hearing, touching, smelling; of sensing?

#### IV

Many of these themes were touched upon in the final session where we discussed the pragmatics of conducting and communicating this sort of research. These ranged from the best way to establish,

populate, and ensure a good readership for a blog, to thinking about workshops with non-academics and the best formats and topics for discussion. Examples of best practice for future reference included Toby Osborne's "Translating cultures: Diplomacy between the early modern and modern worlds" project (<https://www.dur.ac.uk/history/tdproject/>), Ruth's "Commonwealth Oral History Project" (<http://www.commonwealthoralhistories.org/>), Fiona and Jason's "Diplomatic Cultures" (<http://www.diplomaticcultures.com/>) project and the "Reluctant Internationalists" project at Birkbeck (<http://www.bbk.ac.uk/reluctantinternationalists/>). We were also reminded to seek out training opportunities and collaborations with, for instance, the Black Cultural Archives (<http://bcaheritage.org.uk/>), or the National Archives (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/training/>).

We concluded with a summary of our activities for the following year and how we would like the board to contribute. We will continue to correspond but the next meeting will be around this time next year.