The two World Wars have long been studied from a national perspective. With the exception of the history of wartime diplomacy, which has a long tradition, each nation involved in these conflicts has developed its own narrative. Wars are studied as national experiences leaving their legacies in a specific way on each society, government and parliament. Even battlefields tend to be nationalised, each historiography concentrating on its own dead and its own military contribution on the ground.

More recently, however, the transnational turn in history has prompted many historians to look beyond their national frontiers and to study wars as international experiences. Thus, battlefields have been reinterpreted as spaces where soldiers were fighting not only against each other but also alongside each other, sharing experiences, exchanging information and voicing the same grievances. Even more important for our purpose is the emphasis put on the flow of political and social exchanges that took place during the wars. Indeed, each belligerent had to adapt to its enemies, which meant observing them in order to learn from their respective experiences, experiments and policies. In this sense, wars undeniably promoted the circulation of knowledge and expertise, and gain from being studied as periods of particularly intense transnational exchanges. With this perspective in mind, international organisations become particularly relevant fields of research, in that they encourage, give shape to and depend on these international exchanges.

Nevertheless, the role and place of international organisations in wartime and more specifically during the Second World War has generally been overlooked. This should not come as a surprise. Given that the League of Nations (LoN) and associated organisations such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) were cre-

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ated at the end of the First World War to maintain peace, most studies devoted to international organisations during the Second World War have focused on their supposed failure, trying to explain why the LoN peacekeeping mission was aborted, and how this failure led to its disappearance.4

Since the articles in this issue do not limit their perspective to the LoN’s diplomatic mandate, but consider instead its dynamic and complex role as a platform facilitating social and cultural exchanges, they reveal that international organisations were able to survive the war, providing human and technical resources to national governments during the war, but also striving to keep alive the international spirit they used to promote. Focusing on the Save the Children International Union, Joëlle Droux describes the difficulty of developing any effective international humanitarian aid in Europe during the war. Nevertheless, this organisation was able to maintain its activity by changing its mode of action. Building on its wartime experience, the organisation could even reorganise itself and set new priorities in the perspective of peacetime reconstruction programmes. Sandrine Kott describes how the ILO survived the war by moving to Montreal. This move clearly affected its social mandate marked by a shift from a protectionist to a productivity-oriented conception of social policy. Ludovic Tournès and Corinne A. Pernet emphasise the role played by several actors involved in the LoN technical sections (the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation and the Economic Financial and Transit Department) for the consolidation of the newly emerging United Nations (UN) system. They both stress the influence of US private actors in this process (the powerful Rockefeller Foundation in the case of Tournès). All the papers describe how the experience and know-how accumulated in international organisations during the interwar period would subsequently permeate the UN system either in its intergovernmental agencies or in the newly founded NGOs gravitating around them. The UN itself was an organisation originally born as a wartime alliance in January 1942.5 In particular, Tournès emphasises how, through the Rockefeller Foundation, former actors of the LoN-constellation became involved in the first UN technical body: the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA), the largest ever international relief organisation, which began working in November 1943.

The methodological and heuristic inputs of these four articles can be outlined along three main interpretative lines. First, by focusing on wartime as a period of intense crisis, the four articles shed new light on the international organisations themselves. Second, these articles use international organisations as platforms from


which the authors study and discuss the recomposition of the so-called «new world order» which emerged during and after the Second World War. Third, this point of entry also prompts a discussion on the nature and use of what was by then called «internationalism».

1. In contrast to the dominant approach in Anglo-American political science, all the articles here stress the plasticity and flexibility of international organisations, their ability to adapt to new contexts and their resilience to crisis. This important result stems from some methodological choices adopted in this issue. First, a broad definition of international organisations has been used. Private (the Rockefeller Foundation), non-governmental (Save the Children International Union) as well as intergovernmental organisations (ILO, LoN, UN) are taken into account. This is no coincidence. The underlying logic behind this choice is to consider each international organisation as an element of a wider network of closely connected organisations. Historians know that there has always been what was later coined as a «Third UN» and that international organisations rely on a dense network of private associations and foundations that provide them with expertise and resources. This inclusive definition of international organisations is linked to a second historiographical choice. Recently, historians have largely refocused their research on the secretariats and the technical sections of international agencies, on their role as producers of expertise rather than on their direct political influence and efficiency in «global governance». The heuristic aim behind this methodological shift is to understand how and to what extent international bodies were able, on the one hand, to help internationalise discourses and, on the other, to implement or encourage processes of internationalisation in various fields.

To highlight and interpret these processes, the contributors to this issue follow actors within and around the organisations. As each article demonstrates, these actors became crucial in times of crisis. By playing the invaluable role of intermediaries between national and international scenes, they could help rescue international bodies. The role of Arthur Sweetser was decisive in moving the technical section of the LoN to the US. The same can be said of John Winant for the ILO. James Shotwell was instrumental in promoting the role of the International Committee for Intel-

6 For a critical perspective on this expression see U. Engel / M. Midell (eds.), World Orders Revisited, Leipzig 2010.
7 For a critical presentation of these approaches see the special issue of Critique international 53 (2011) 4. «Le changement dans les organisations internationales», in particular the introduction: O. Nay / F. Petiteville, «Elements pour une sociologie du changement dans les organisations internationales», 9–20.
8 We follow here the plastic definition proposed by Madeleine Herren in Geschichte der internationalen Organisationen, Darmstadt 2009, 6.
9 The following historiographical article is a useful point of reference in this regard: S. Pedersen, «Back to the League of Nations», in: The American Historical Review 112 (2007) 4, 1091–1117. Since then many articles and books have been written along these lines.
lectual Cooperation (ICIC), as was Georges Thélin, who drew on his previous experience as an ILO official in his new position as head of the Save the Children International Union from 1939 onwards. In wartime, even more than in times of peace, international organisations seemed to function as institutionalised networks of actors. The survival of international organisations depended upon their officials, experts and representatives’ ability to access and mobilise extraordinary resources on the international and national scenes. In that regard, the role of non-European individual and collective actors was essential for the survival of these organisations. This leads us to our second point: what do international organisations tell us about the Second World War as an international geopolitical experience?

2. One of the most obvious – but largely expected – findings of this issue is the shift in the balance of power from Europe to North America during the Second World War. In order to survive, international organisations had to move to the Americas or to become integrated into American networks. Meanwhile, they adapted their practices and discourses to their new host country. ILO officials who used to promote social insurance began to praise the social security model launched by Roosevelt. But this was much more than just a lexical change. Because they were administered jointly by workers and employers, social insurance schemes had the strong support of the reformist trade union movement and the Socialist International. Thus this lexical change also revealed the weakening of the reformist trade union movement which, largely rooted in Europe, lost its basis during the war. On the other hand, and even more tellingly, knowledge produced by international experts was quickly integrated or used by American actors and even «naturalised» as long as this knowledge suited them. In this way, most of the new international paradigms became Americanised even if they were not produced by American actors. This process was facilitated by the fact that the shift was already well underway from the 1920s onward. Through official representation, such as in the ILO and/or through private or semi-official actors such as in the LoN, the USA was already very much present in official international organisations and, thanks to their expertise and their financial power, US actors had already exerted a considerable influence on the methods as well as on the setting of agendas. As each article indicates, US actors tended to favour technical solutions and economic projects over broad political discussion and to downplay intellectual and social issues. The examples of the ILO and the Intellectual Cooperation Organisation show clearly how priorities were shifting under the growing influence of American as well as British individuals in the 1940s.

For the cartography of these networks see the very useful database set up by historians of the research project «Networking the International System» at the University of Heidelberg. Cluster of Excellence «Asia and Europe in a Global Context», under the leadership of Madeleine Herren. http://www.lonsea.de/pub.
Nevertheless, these two cases also shed light on the role played by several Latin American countries. Already active in the LoN during the interwar period, they were also able to play a role in intellectual cooperation and were adamant in claiming for technical assistance rather than international regulations and conventions. This could partially fit in with the aims of some US actors; therefore international organisations became places where actors from the American continent could meet, discuss and come to agreements. After having functioned mainly as regional European organisations, international organisations tended to play an important role in Pan-American relations and projects.

3. Examining international organisations during the war bring us to reflect, finally, upon the very nature and function of this institutionalised internationalism. The Second World War was not just a fight between two camps or two ideologies; it was also a fight between two or even three competing internationalisms. The first was based on liberal values and on freedom and led by a Euro-Atlantic alliance, the second was led by Nazi Germany and emphasised the hierarchy of races and nations and the third one embodied by the Soviet Union and promoting communist conceptions of economic and social equality. Since the 1920s, the Nazis, as well as the fascists, showed a marked interest in international organisations, which they saw as propaganda tools and as a world power structure. The articles highlight their attempt to use the existing international organisations for their own purposes. They confiscated the international organisations’ buildings located in the cities that they occupied, moved their archives to Berlin and even tried to set up a new ILO. Furthermore, they published an alternative international labour review. In that context, the survival of the international organisations also depended on their engagement in warfare on the side of the allies. It was not just about proclaiming their commitment to liberal and democratic values as in the case of the ILO, the Economic and Financial Organisation (EFO) or the ICIC, but also about fighting the war. International organisations would become instrumental in strengthening the wartime alliance, in developing counter-propaganda and in using their European networks to provide information about – or even to spy on – the enemy. Above all, as early as 1939, they began to develop plans for the time after the war, which were the expression of the liberal internationalism that they embodied.

All this reminds us that the internationalism promoted by the LoN system was first and foremost the result, the expression and the affirmation of the role played after the First World War by a few hegemonic powers located in Western Europe and in North America. In return, «liberal internationalism» was a way of legitimising this hegemony and contributed to its strength. Many recent contributions on the mandate system of the LoN remind us that the international system was built on colonial premises. However, it was also directed against the alternative internationalism of the time: the Communist International and the revolutionary solution that
it promoted. This was particularly obvious in the case of the ILO which proposed reformist solutions on a tripartite basis. In its aim as well as in its structure it could be described as a kind of first Cold War organisation. In that regard, with the entry of the Soviet Union into the UN as a war alliance, the Second World War would also give birth to a growing competition between two international discourses and universalisms which would have to coexist inside international organisations during the Cold War. Studying the coexistence and even the cross-fertilisation of these competing internationalisms within international organisations during the Cold War would open up a new set of fruitful questions about decolonisation, international trade, development, and many other related topics.

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