Developing Civilisation?
Imperial Internationalism at the League of Nations (1920s-1930s)

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Résumé

« Développer la civilisation ? L'internationalisme impérial à la Société des Nations (années 1920-1930) »

Après la Première Guerre mondiale, le processus d'internationalisation des affaires coloniales s'intensifie et entraîne le renouvellement de l'imaginaire politique impérial et une volonté de transformer les discours et les pratiques de la domination coloniale. La Société des Nations, ses institutions spécialisées ainsi que leurs nombreuses commissions s'engagent dans l'élaboration et l'institutionnalisation de concepts, de doctrines, de normes et de politiques ayant pour objectif de redéfinir la gouvernance coloniale. Les débats portent sur la conception de nouveaux « standards de civilisation », mis en place plus *de jure* que *de facto*. Le sens et les implications du devoir de tutelle et de « civilisation », la définition du « bon » gouvernement colonial, la question de la race ou encore celle de l'esclavage se trouvent notamment au cœur des polémiques. En se basant sur l'étude détaillée des rencontres des Commissions des mandats et de l'esclavage de la Société de Nations, ainsi que sur celles du Comité d'experts sur le travail indigène de l'Organisation Internationale du Travail, le présent article analyse la portée et les multiples manifestations de cet « internationalisme impérial », en particulier en Afrique. Il met plus particulièrement l'accent sur les intersections entre les projets internationalistes et impériaux, ainsi que sur les institutions et les acteurs individuels qui les portent.

Mots-clés : Société des Nations ; impérialisme ; internationalisme ; mission civilisatrice ; Afrique coloniale.

Abstract

« Developing Civilisation? Imperial Internationalism at the League of Nations (1920s-1930s) »

In the aftermath of the World War One, the internationalization of imperial and colonial affairs intensified, entailing the renewal of modalities of imperial political imagination and the tentative transformation of idioms and repertoires of colonial rule. The League of Nations, its specialized agencies and their numerous commissions engaged in the elaboration and institutionalization of new concepts, doctrines, norms and policies of imperial and colonial governance. Renewed standards of imperial civilization were debated and, more de jure than de facto, established. Passionate arguments about the meaning and the obligations of trusteeship and "civilization occurred. "Good [colonial] government" was outlined. The boundaries of the "colour line" were disputed, and tentatively renegotiated. The "conditions analogous to slavery" were identified, questioned, and contested by some. Focusing on modalities of imperial internationalism –the intersection of imperial and internationalist languages and projects, promoted by numerous individuals and institutions, national and transnational–, this article uses the meetings of the Mandates and the Slavery Commissions of the League of Nations and those of the Committee of Experts on Native Labor of the International Labor Organization, in the 1920s and 1930s, as observatories of these dynamics of intervention, especially in Africa.

Keywords : League of Nations ; Imperialism ; Internationalism ; Civilization ; Colonial Africa.

The post-World War One period[1] was a critical moment in the internationalization of imperial and colonial affairs, reinforcing but also transforming older historical dynamics.[2] The latter were marked, among other things, by attempts "to reform society and politics by way of transnational co-operation" and to internationally regulate particular topics of dispute, such as slavery or liquor trade, which had clear colonial associations.[3] The post-war period saw the rejuvenation of imperial political imagination and policy intervention. It was also shaped by the profusion of arguments about the need to enhance the institutionalization of increasingly more effective, modalities of international supervision over colonial or dependent territories, and accountability regarding their administration. The constitution, and institutional evolution of the League of Nations (LoN) were a decisive element in this development. The internationalization of colonialism, that is the relative dislocation, surely limited, convoluted and far from straightforward, of "political issues and functions" focused on colonial spaces from the "national" or "imperial" domains into the international sphere, was significantly fostered by the LoN constitution. This process should not be reduced to the experiments carried out by the mandates system, despite the fact that the political and legal specificities of the latter offered more suitable conditions for international supervision and normative regulation than those existing in relation to colonial territories. Notwithstanding numerous discrepancies between theory and practice, the internationalization of social policies regarding mandated territories was significant.[4] And despite the existence of "colonial clauses" –legal expedients resulting from political and cultural judgements that impeded the extension of particular international standards and norms to specific dependent territories, given their "local conditions"–, the same happened in relation to colonial societies. The arguments and the projects advocating the

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[2] For a collection of texts that address the process of internationalization of imperial and colonial affairs in a wider chronology, see Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo and José Pedro Monteiro (eds.), *Internationalism, Imperialism and the Formation of the Contemporary World*, London, Palgrave, 2017.
[3] Martin H. Geyer and Johannes Paulmann (eds.), *The Mechanics of Internationalism: Culture, Society, and Politics from the 1840s to the First World War*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 3. See also Suzanne Miers, *Britain and the Ending of the Slave Trade*, London, Longman, 1975, p. 169-314, and « Slavery and the Slave Trade as International Issues », *Slavery and Abolition*, vol. 19, 1998, p. 16-37; Pierre Singaravélou, "Les stratégies d'internationalisation du débat colonial et la construction transnationale d'une science de la colonisation à la fin du XIXᵉ siècle", *Monde(s)*, n° 1, 2012, p. 135-157.
[4] Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 4-5. On the mandates system, see Véronique Dimier, " 'L'internationalisation' du débat colonial. Rivalités franco-britanniques autour de la commission permanente des mandats", *Outre-mers*, vol. 89, n° 2, 2002, p. 333-360; Nadine Méouchy *et al.* (eds.), *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspectives,* Leiden, Brill, 2004; Daniel Gorman, "Liberal Internationalism, the League of Nations Union, and the Mandates System", *Canadian Journal of History*, vol. 40, n° 3, 2005, p. 499-477; Susan Pedersen, "The Meaning of the Mandates System: An Argument", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, vol. 32, 2006, p. 560-582; Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 32-114; and Michael Callahan, *Mandates and Empires. The League of Nations and Africa, 1914-1931*, Brighton, Sussex Academic Press, 2008.

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internationalization of social and economic policies reached, and impacted upon, the metropolitan and colonial societies in significant ways. The attempt to legitimize colonial policies vis-à-vis internationalized standards and their reformative potential is just one example.[5]

The variegated role played by the LoN's specialized agencies, dealing with diverse subjects and entailing different experts and expertise, and distinct power relations, must continue to be properly acknowledged. This article claims that the transformative and reformist dynamics the LoN originated, including into colonial territories firmly protected by colonial powers, must be duly (re)assessed.[6] In general, international bodies were perhaps "more important for the precedents they set than for the actions they took," but the range of consequences of this process is still to be fully understood.[7] All the social and political spaces that formed the LoN's institutional galaxy provided important forums in which idioms and repertoires of colonial rule were discussed, fostering comparative assessments and critical judgements.[8] Arguments about appropriate forms of legal and socio-political organization and administration; morally justifiable and legally authorized modalities of labour and tax exaction; desirable and reachable standards of nutrition, education or health; or legitimate levels of social and racial differentiation and discrimination abounded. Exchanges about how international institutions, and their officials, could or should interfere in these developments flourished. At the same time, imperial formations strove to control their scope and their consequences, sometimes coalescing, forming imperial and colonial ententes trying to shape the evolution of

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[5] Susan Zimmermann, " 'Special Circumstances' in Geneva: The ILO and the World of Non-Metropolitan Labour in the Interwar Years", *in* Jasmien Van Daele *et al.* (eds.), *ILO histories: Essays on the International Labour Organization and its Impact on the World during the Twentieth Century*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2010, p. 221-250.

[6] In relation to many areas, the historical role of the regime of the LoN has been reappreciated in the past years, to much historiographical advantage. Much still needs to be done to recover the scope and the diversity of the impact of this regime in the historical trajectories of colonialism. For some major references, in different topics, that compel us to rethinking the historical significance of the LoN see, among others, Jo-Anne Pemberton, "New Worlds for Old: The League of Nations in the Age of Electricity", *Review of International Studies*, vol. 28, n° 2, 2002, p. 311-336; Patricia Clavin and Jens Wilhelm Wessels, "Transnationalism and the League of Nations: Understanding the Work of Its Economic and Financial Organisation", *Contemporary European History*, vol. 14, n° 4, 2005, p. 465-492; Andrew Webster, "From Versailles to Geneva: The Many Forms of Interwar Disarmament", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 29, n° 2, 2006, p. 225-246; Susan Pedersen, "Back to the League of Nations", *The American Historical Review*, vol. 112, 2007, p. 1091-1117; Yann Decorzant, *La Société des Nations et la naissance d'une conception de la régulation économique internationale*, Brussels, Peter Lang, 2011; Daniel Laqua, "Transnational Intellectual Cooperation, the League of Nations, and the Problem of Order", *Journal of Global History*, vol. 6, n° 2, 2011, p. 223-247; Thomas Richard Davies, "A 'Great Experiment' of the League of Nations Era: International Nongovernmental Organizations, Global Governance, and Democracy Beyond the State", *Global Governance*, vol. 18, 2012, p. 405-423; Daniel Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012; Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations 1920-1946*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013; Martyn Housden, *The League of Nations and the Organization of Peace*, London, Routledge, 2014.

[7] Frederick Cooper, "Review: Britain and the Ending of the Slave Trade", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, vol. 10, n° 3, 1977, p. 504.

[8] For the analysis of international organisations as "social spaces", see Sandrine Kott, "Towards a Social History of International Organisations: The ILO and the Internationalisation of Western Social Expertise (1919-1949)", dans Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo and José Pedro Monteiro (eds.), *Internationalism, Imperialism and the Formation of the Contemporary World, op. cit.*, p. 33-57.

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international politics and policies, sometimes competing, aiming at imperial differentiation and hierarchization.[9]

In the first case, the tentative formation of common positions, frequently invoking the rhetoric of "special circumstances" and pushing for "colonial clauses," was facilitated by debates and negotiations outside the LoN, in bilateral conversations but also using the opportunities provided by the meetings of the interimperial international organization, the International Colonial Institute (ICI), a crucial actor in both the internationalization of colonialism and the regulation of its historical unfolding.[10] In the second case, comparison between various colonial *modi operandi* was turned into a political tool, aiming at national differentiation. Nationalist impetuses used internationalist spaces to thrive. In both cases, the LoN's institutional galaxy enabled renewed strategies of imperial and colonial legitimation, and political preservation, which emphasized their political, social, economic and moral value and utility, in a period in which their questioning was reaching new levels.[11] The discussions about the *sacred trust* or the contested references to the racial problem and the *colour line* were just two examples of these issues.[12] Additionally, all these dynamics entailed the development of more or less novel forms of information-gathering, production, transfer and evaluation, including the intensification of the use of (comparable) statistics.[13]

The arguments about the "standards of international morality" related to colonial realities, which pervaded the late nineteenth-century, gained new impetus and a novel institutional reality.[14] The political, legal, economic, "moral" and religious landscapes that characterized the developments that led to the Berlin Africa

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[9] For questions of administration see Veronique Dimier, *Le discours idéologique de la méthode coloniale chez les Français et les Britanniques: de l'entre-deux guerres à la décolonisation, 1920-1960*, Bordeaux, Institut d'études politiques de Bordeaux, 1998; for those over nutrition and health see Iris Borowy, *Coming to Terms with World Health: The League of Nations Health Organisation, 1921-1946*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 2009.

[10] Ulrike Lindner, "New Forms of Knowledge Exchange between Imperial Powers: The Development of the Institut Colonial International (ICI) since the End of the Nineteenth Century" and Florian Wagner, "Private Colonialism and International Co-operation in Europe, 1870-1914", dans Volker Barth and Roland Cvetkovski (eds.), *Imperial Co-operation and Transfer, 1870-1930,* London, Bloomsbury, 2015, p. 57-78 and 79-103.

[11] Neta Crawford, *Argument and Change in World Politics: Ethics, Decolonization, Humanitarian Intervention*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002; Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007.

[12] Michael Callahan, *A Sacred Trust: The League of Nations and Africa, 1929-1946*, Brighton, Sussex Academic Press, 2004; Paul Gordon Lauren, *Power and Prejudice: The Politics and Diplomacy of Racial Discrimination*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1996, p. 82-126.

[13] For the period considered, this aspect needs more studies. For some excellent examples on other periods see, among others, Daniel Speich, "The use of global abstractions: national income accounting in the period of imperial decline", *Journal of Global History*, vol. 6, n° 1, 2011, p. 7-28; Michele Alacevich, "The World Bank and the Politics of Productivity: the Debate on Economic Growth, Poverty, and Living Standards in the 1950s", *Journal of Global History*, vol. 6, n° 1, 2011, p. 53-74; Vincent Bonnecase, "La pauvreté au Sahel. Du savoir colonial à la mesure internationale", *Monde(s)*, vol. 4, n° 2, 2011, p. 159-185; Vincent Bonnecase, "Généalogie d'une évidence statistique: de la 'réussite économique' du colonialisme tardif à la 'faillite' des États africains (v.1930-v.1980)", *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, vol. 4, n° 62, 2015, p. 33-63; Stephen Macekura, "Whither Growth? International Development, Social Indicators, and the Politics of Measurement, 1920s-1970s", *Journal of Global History*, vol. 14, n° 2, 2019, p. 261-279. See also several texts in Philippe Bourmaud (ed.), *De la mesure à la norme : les indicateurs du développement*, Bangkok, BSN Press, 2011.

[14] Suzanne Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century: The Evolution of a Global Problem*, Walnut Creek, Altamira Press, 2003, p. 23.

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Conference (1884-1885) and the Brussels Anti-slavery Conference (1889-1890) −both crucial moments of internationalization of colonialism− persevered, gaining a new energy.[15] The atrocities committed by Congo under Leopold II and, to a lesser extent, the "modern slavery" in the Portuguese colonies, both cases significantly publicized worldwide, surely contributed to a new momentum.[16] The plural "tensions of internationalism" were closely related to the myriad of tensions of colonialism and their tentative administration by European colonial powers, at home and abroad.[17]

Imperial Internationalism, International Imperialism

Anti-slavery internationalism was co-opted for political and economic reasons and intentions, serving as a rationale to further colonial expansion and sustain existing global social hierarchies and inequalities. The challenges effectively posed to the transatlantic slave trade, not necessarily to slavery and *analogous conditions* "on the ground," and the advocacy of "humanitarian reform politics" were related to the economic and political projects of the so-called *new imperialism* and the "effective occupation" of colonial territories debated in Berlin in 1884-1885. The *legitimate trade*, which entailed a different spatial economy of labour (e.g. the fixation of labour force), was indivisible from the *legitimate politics* of colonialism (e.g. the establishment of international norms that recognized formal colonial sovereignties and tentatively defined acceptable standards of administration).[18] In relation to Africa, the association between "progress" and "conquest" and societal transformation was strong, coupled with efforts to prevent "messy intrigues" between interested parties and to set "minimum standards for what a civilized government should do −including ending the slave trade."[19] Likewise, interwar internationalism, and its reformist vocabularies regarding colonial contexts, was also prone to instrumental uses of various kinds. It was, for instance, useful for the renewal of "civilizing" discourses that legitimised the continuation, indeed the intensification, of colonial rule.

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[15] Stig Forster, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, and Ronald Robinson (eds.), *Bismarck, Europe, and Africa: The Berlin Africa Conference 1884-1885 and the Onset of Partition*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988; Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo, *A Diplomacia do Império. Política e Religião na Partilha de África (1820-1890)*, Lisboa, Edições 70, 2012.

[16] Kevin Grant, *A "Civilized Savagery" Britain and the New Slaveries in Africa, 1884-1926*, New York, Routledge, 2005, p. 39-78.

[17] Daniel Laqua, "The Tensions of Internationalism: Transnational Anti-Slavery in the 1880s and 1890s", *The International History Review*, vol. 33, n° 4, 2011, p. 705-726.

[18] Susan Zimmermann, "The Long-Term Trajectory of Anti-Slavery in International Politics: the Long-Term Consequences of the Abolition of the Slave Trade", in Marcel van der Linden (ed.), *Humanitarian Intervention and Changing Labor Relations*, Leiden, Brill, 2011, p. 436. See also Robin Law (ed.), *From Slave Trade to 'Legitimate' Commerce*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995; Suzanne Miers, "Slavery and the Slave Trade as International Issues 1890-1939," dans Suzanne Miers and Martin A. Klein (eds,), *Slavery and Colonial Rule in Africa*, London Frank Cass, 1999, p. 19-37; Frederick Cooper, "Conditions Analogous to Slavery: Imperialism and Free Labor Ideology in Africa", dans Frederick Cooper, Thomas C. Holt, and Rebecca J. Scott (eds.), *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2000, p. 107-149; Amalia Ribi Forclaz, *Humanitarian Imperialism: The Politics of Anti-Slavery Activism, 1880-1940*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015.

[19] Frederick *Cooper*, "Networks, Moral Discourse, and History", dans Thomas Callaghy *et al.* (eds.), *Intervention and Transnationalism in Africa*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 33-34.

In the post-WWI moment the debates about the standards of "imperial civilization" and about the colonial situation were therefore manifold, shaped by many actors and institutions with different agendas and expertise, aiming to shape colonial dynamics in a number of fields of intervention, especially related to social issues.[20] Expressions of imperial internationalism –that is discourses and projects promoted by groups and institutions aiming at developing forms of internationalism dealing with imperial and colonial affairs, namely through international organizations– and manifestations of internationalist imperialism –that is discourses and projects of empire-building and colonial projection promoted by official instances or by pressure groups of various types (e.g. missionary societies or economic associations), aiming to give instrumental use to the possibilities opened by internationalism, with a view to further legitimise such endeavours and justify related motivations– proliferated.[21] The existence of these voices and interests, coming from multiple geographical and ideological spaces, were related to the emergence of a "professional internationalism" –epistemic communities gradually professionalized addressing the colonial worlds and their specificities– and the rise of an "institutionalized internationalism" –more governmentalized (i.e. dependent on governments) and with a clearer instrumental, political purpose.[22] Both entailed the systematic exchange of information and statistics, of professional ethos and outlooks, of models and typologies of administration and *civilization* (in more secular or religious versions), of legal frameworks and "native" policies templates, influenced by, and at the same time influencing, the standards of "imperial civilization" and related colonial projects.[23]

"Professional internationalists" aiming to shape the direction and content of international, but also national, arguments and policies about colonial realities were key protagonists. The already mentioned ICI, in all its internal diversity regarding agendas and expertise, competed, on many levels, with the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society (ASAPS). One of the most effective *vigilante* of imperial formations, for long highly involved in the denunciation of the most significant moral and social indignities that characterised European colonization – especially slavery and its succedanea, for instance the variety of modalities of forced

[20] The literature on this question is huge, although a comparative approach is still missing. For the general debate see Gerrit W. Gong, *The Standard of Civilization in International Society*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984 and Brett Bowden, *The Empire of Civilization: The Evolution of an Imperial Idea*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2009. The special issue on the subject in *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, vol. 42, n° 3, 2014 contains many important papers. For the "civilising mission" arguments in relation to colonial projects see, among others, Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize. The Republican idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999; Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2002; Harald Fischer-Tiné and Michael Mann (eds.), *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India*, London, Anthem Press, 2004; Boris Barth and Jürgen Osterhammel (eds.), *Zivilisierungsmissionen: Imperiale Weltverbesserung seit dem 18. Jahrhundert*, Konstanz, UVK, 2005; Dino Costantini, *Mission civilisatrice: Le rôle de l'histoire coloniale dans la construction de l'identité politique française,* Paris, La Découverte, 2008.

[21] Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo, "A League of Empires: Imperial Political Imagination and Interwar Internationalisms", dans Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo and José Pedro Monteiro (eds.), *Internationalism, Imperialism and the Formation of the Contemporary World, op. cit.*, p. 113.

[22] On "epistemic communities", see Sandrine Kott, « "Une « communauté épistémique » du social ? Experts de l'OIT et internationalisation des politiques sociales dans l'entre-deux-guerres", *Genèses*, vol. 2, n° 71, 2008, p. 26-46.

[23] Martin H. Geyer and Johannes Paulmann (eds.), *The Mechanics of Internationalism, op. cit.*, p. 22. See also Davide Rodogno, Bernhard Struck, and Jakob Vogel (eds.), *Shaping the Transnational Sphere: Experts, Networks and Issues from the 1840s to the 1930s*, New York, Berghahn, 2015.

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labour –, the ASAPS saw the possibilities of action opened up by the LoN's institutional framework as a "breath of a new life" to dependent territories, namely Africa, as its secretary John Harris, a declared advocate of international imperial trusteeship, stated.[24] Despite the numerous obstacles posed by imperial sovereignties and by "colonial clauses" blocking unwanted universalizing tendencies, the organisation participated actively in the important informational, normative and political transformations that the interwar period brought to the international judgements and assessments addressed to the imperial and colonial projects. Notwithstanding the fact that the ASAPS was more inclined to colonial reform than to political emancipation, its action contributed to significant progressive effects: on national legislative changes and on policy orientations, at the colonial worlds and internationally, for instance.[25]

Other organizations, less powerful and more vulnerable to the strengthening of "institutionalized internationalism," but equally important in some cases, produced similar pressures over imperial and colonial governments. The Bureau International pour la Défense des Indigènes (BIDI), led by René Claparède, and formed in 1913, was one example. The BIDI influenced the debates over the labour problem in Portuguese colonies, mainly Angola and Mozambique, in the 1920s, rejuvenating accusations already made in 1913, in Claparède's *L'esclavage portugais et le "Journal de Genève"*. Harold Grimshaw, at the same time head of the diplomatic service of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and delegate at the Permanent Mandates Commission of the LoN, may have characterized a meeting of the BIDI as a gathering of "eccentrics". But the "black cross", as the BIDI was sometimes referred to at the time, played an important role, delivering memoranda questioning the persistence of slavery in Africa in 1920, 1923 and 1925 (the last one on the "violations of the rights of the natives in Portuguese Africa"). They generated internal enquiries, more accusations and refutations, official and in newspapers. They led to the reappraisal of existing laws and "native policies", to comparisons with other colonial and non-colonial contexts. In a way, they empowered those who wanted to reform colonialism on political, economic and social dimensions. These consequences should not be downplayed.[26]

Other relevant actors in the consolidation of imperial internationalism and internationalist imperialism were those associated with forms of religious internationalism, that is the ideas and the activities of transnational and supranational religious organizations that engaged with international issues.[27] These forms were crucial to the internationalization of colonialism and its institutionalization since the late nineteenth-century. Religious dynamics, competitive and cooperative, engaging in distinct ways with political powers, namely with empire-states, played a vigorous role in the internationalisation (and *trans-nationalisation*) of imperial and colonial affairs. They were vital actors in the ways in which crucial themes of such internationalisation were outlined, contributing to the gradual definition of international standards of imperial civilization, pushing for

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[24] Amalia Ribi, " 'The Breath of a New Life'? British Anti-Slavery Activism and the League of Nations", *in* Daniel Laqua (ed.), *Internationalism Reconfigured*, London, I. B. Tauris, 2011, p. 93-113.

[25] Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo, *The "Civilizing Mission" of Portuguese Colonialism*, *op. cit.*

[26] *Ibid..*, p. 141-144, 146, 157-158. See also Emmanuelle Sibeud, *"Entre geste impériale et cause internationale: défendre les indigènes à Genève dans les années 1920"*, *Monde(s)*, vol. 6, n° 2, 2014, p. 24.

[27] Vincent Viaene, "International History, Religious History, Catholic History: Perspectives for Cross-fertilisation (1830-1914)", *European History Quarterly*, vol. 38, n° 4, 2008, p. 594-595.

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colonial reform or for the introduction of new agendas of international concern and potential international regulation.[28] In the aftermath of the First World War, the creation of International Missionary Council (IMC, 1921), which sought to become the coordinating hub of an organized and cooperative strategy in the field of Protestant missions, was particularly important. Like many other institutions interested in assessing and shaping the developments of the post-war momentum related to imperial and colonial dynamics, the IMC actively participated in the informational, normative and political solutions adopted in Geneva, providing information "from the ground" or pressuring governments at home and representatives abroad.[29]

On the catholic side, similar initiatives existed, notwithstanding the public downplaying of "Wilsonian secular internationalism" by the Vatican. Catholic internationalists, like their protestant counterparts, were able to recognize the advantages that could derive from an active engagement with the LoN and its specialized agencies, aiming to control its direction on multiple subjects, including those focused on colonial societies. The Union Catholique d'Études Internationales (UCEI) is one revealing example of this process.[30] The UCEI, through his leader Gonzague de Reynold and benefitting from the fact that it was based in close proximity to Geneva (Fribourg), became "the institutional home of Catholic internationalism at the League of Nations", "a proxy voice for the promotion of the Holy See's otherwise unrepresented interests within the international organization". De Reynold was especially active at the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, being the Swiss delegate there from 1922 to 1939.[31] But the UCEI engaged with many other issues and commissions at the LoN regime, including those related to slavery, at the League, and "native labour", at the ILO. In 1929, for instance, they intervened in the debates about what would later turn into the Native Labour Convention of 1930, producing a *mémoire* on the topic, which was sent to the ILO. The part played by the canon Eugène Beaupin in this respect was noteworthy.[32]

One last example of the diverse and relatively numerous pressure groups that engaged with the opportunities opened by the LoN's "force field" is offered by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).[33] This Geneva-based non-governmental organization was an important example of "feminist internationalism" that engaged with colonial topics, such as labour.[34] In meetings

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[28] Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo, "Religious internationalisms and European colonialism (1880s-1920s)", forthcoming.

[29] John Stuart, "Beyond Sovereignty? Protestant Missions, Empire and Transnationalism", *in* Kevin Grant, Philippa Levine, and Frank Trentmann (eds.), *Beyond Sovereignty. Britain, Empire and Transnationalism c. 1880-1950*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 103-125. See also Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo and Hugo Gonçalves Dores, "Internationalisms and the Policies of Mission in the Portuguese Colonial Empire (1885-1930)", *Illes i Imperis*, n° 19, 2017, p. 101-123.

[30] Philippe Trinchan, *L'Union catholique d'études internationales. Monographie d'un groupe de promotion catholique à la Société des Nations (1920-1939),* Fribourg, Université de Fribourg, 1988.

[31] Cormac Shine, "Papal Diplomacy by Proxy? Catholic Internationalism at the League of Nations' International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, 1922-1939", *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 69, n° 4, 2018, p. 5.

[32] Trinchan, *L'Union catholique d'études internationales, op. cit.*, p. 107-108, 168-170, 216-218, 291.

[33] For the notion of "force field", see Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians, op. cit.*, p. 5.

[34] Maria Grazia Suriano, *Donne, pace, non-violenza fra le due guerre mondiali. La Women's International League for Peace and Freedom e l'impegno per il disarmo e l'educazione*, Bologna, Ph.D. thesis, Università degli Studi di Bologna, 2007. See also Laura Beers, "Advocating for a Feminist Internationalism between the Wars", *in* Glenda Sluga and Carolyn James (eds.), *Women, Diplomacy and International Politics since 1500*, London, Routledge, 2015, p. 202-221.

in 1925 and 1926, in Thonon and Dublin, the theme of colonialism was already a matter of debate. In 1927, between 25 August and 8 September, a summer school on *Les rapports des races blanches avec les races de couleur* was organized in Gland (Switzerland), having Félicien Challaye, the human rights activist, presiding its sessions. Roger Baldwin (American civil-rights activist), John Harris (missionary and member of the Anti-Slavery Society), Henri Junod (missionary and ethnographer), William Rappard (diplomat and academic), Jawaharlal Nehru (activist and, later, first prime minister of independent India), Duong Van Giao (Vietnamese lawyer), Mohammad Hatta (Indonesian politician, later prime minister and vice president of Indonesia) were some of the participants. The goal was twofold, according to the press release: inform the League's members about the wrongdoings and the lasting negative effects of colonization, and stir a public debate about them; and show the "natives" that there was a community that was favourable to their complaints and willing to add pressure to the respective governments with a view to supress colonial rule. The "colonial regime" was criticized by many, portrayed as contrary to the ideals of freedom and peace; the mandates were questioned: they were little less than colonies. The participants advocated emancipation, denounced forced labour and argued for the need for better social policies. They sponsored "elementary" rights, from the right to have a home and to have access to education to freedom of circulation between territories and free labour. Also in August, a public meeting on "La paix, la liberté et le problème colonial" taking place in Geneva united Roger Baldwin and Jawaharlal Nehru as speakers, among others. The goals were the same: move beyond mere colonial reform. The Gland conference was attended by Jean Goudal, a chief specialist of the native labour section of the ILO. Albert Thomas was immediately informed about its conclusions, both by the WILPF and by Goudal, who wrote a report about it. The problem of colonial, forced labour was seen as one of the greatest problems, and the role of the ILO was considered vital to confront its continuation worldwide, especially in colonial contexts.[35]

The Case of "native" Labour

As noted above, the problem of "native" labour and its administration in colonial or mandated territories was one of the key topics which imperial internationalism and international imperialism focused on.[36] Being a persistent contentious issue, which shaped diplomatic engagements, political and decision-making processes, as well as economic projects, the problem had a crucial place in the dynamics of internationalization of European empire-states since the late nineteenth-century, in connection with the troubled "transformations of slavery", the varying ways in which the latter was followed by similar conditions.[37] It had a prominent place in the debates about the standards of "imperial civilization". The assessment of the distance between the existing laws and the practices associated with the recruitment and use of manpower in colonial or mandated societies and the normative frameworks being defined in Geneva became one of the central mechanisms of political and moral

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[35] OIT Archives, WN 1000/6/5/2. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Summer School 1927. See also Suriano, *Donne, pace, non-violenza fra le due guerre mondiali, op. cit.*, p. 378-381.

[36] Daniel Maul, "The International Labour Organization and the Struggle against Forced Labour from 1919 to the Present", *Labor History*, vol. 48, n° 4, 2007, p. 477-500.

[37] Paul Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

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pressure upon imperial powers. A multifaceted "international colonial issue network" committed to question and ultimately suppress forced labour and conditions analogous to slavery converged in the LoN, namely at the ILO.[38] Notwithstanding the recurrent use of the argument of "local conditions" and "special circumstances" and the manipulated provision of information regarding colonial realities, sometimes as a consequence of the actual scarcity of information, this political and moral pressure was nonetheless felt in the workings of forums such as the temporary and the regular Slavery Commissions of the League, the Mandates Commission and also the ILO's Committee of Experts on Native Labour.[39]

The action of imperial internationalists and international imperialists generated a massive flow of information, within and outside the LoN galaxy, as a consequence of protocolary request of information and, also, as a result of transformations in the ways in which empire-states and colonial administrations engaged with their territories. In the first case, the gradual homogenization of concepts and methods of analysis of current colonial practices occurred, following external pressures for *comparability* about the implementation of the standards of imperial civilization became possible. Interimperial differentiation was from then on based on factual records. The same happened with the criticism about the workings of colonial empires. In the second case, increasing internationalization (and the dynamics of interimperial comparison) entailed a recurrent collection and appreciation of data about labour colonial realities. The League of Nations questionnaires on slavery, in 1923, in 1926 and 1936, and the ILO's on forced labour that led to the 1930 Convention were meaningful illustrations of these developments. At the League, the 1936 so-called *ethnographic questionnaires* about practices of slavery and servitude across the colonial world generated processes of self-scrutiny that reached, for the first time in many cases, the remotest parts of the colonial empires. Imperial and colonial bureaucracies, surely in different ways according to statecraft traditions and human and financial resources, needed to adapt to new information, and to new legal and diplomatic contexts. Self-scrutiny was enhanced and policy assessments multiplied. Irrespective of its quality and bias, knowledge over "native labour" increased. The necessity to meet the demands of international accountability had significant consequences: the information about the multitude of practices that restricted individual liberty –from serfdom to slavery to a myriad of forms of debt bondage– changed in quantity and quality. Even if the information provided to Geneva was questionable, the internal processes of information-gathering provided different tools of analysis and intervention to the governments in the metropoles and the colonial administrations on the ground. The new knowledge circulated through governments and bureaucracies, redefining the elaboration of policies and associated decision-making processes. It became increasingly available to all those individuals and groups that aimed to influence imperial and colonial endeavours. This also offered new opportunities to those domestic actors who wanted to reform (or terminate) the colonial projects of their own empire-states. The formulation of imperial and colonial legal frameworks, respective rationales and concrete policies (e.g. native colonial labour codes) were now under a more significant and diversified pressure. The production of colonial knowledge surely continued to be shaped by

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[38] Luís Rodríguez-Piñero, *Indigenous Peoples, Postcolonialism, and International Law. The ILO Regime 1919-1989*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 26.

[39] Suzanne Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century, op. cit.*, p. 100-151; Luís Rodríguez-Piñero, *Indigenous Peoples, op. cit.*, p. 17-36.

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rooted prejudices and political and economic interests. The legitimisation of any imperial form now depended greatly on the ability to demonstrate a modicum of conformity and compliance with the standards of imperial civilization in relation to the exaction and use of colonial manpower.[40]

Conclusion: The Multiple Effects of Internationalisation

The formulation, institutionalization and tentative international regulation of the standards of "imperial civilization", and the monitoring of their observance, required new instruments of knowledge production and assessment. Feeding *internationally inspired* programs of policy intervention in colonial (or mandated) territories was one of the significant outcomes of the political transformations that marked the post-war period. The production and circulation of common instruments of imperial and colonial policy-making and policy-analysis –for instance, comparing legislations, common questionnaires and shared reports on a given topic– enabled critical (and comparative) assessments of imperial formations by international and transnational organizations. This led to the rethinking of colonial rule, internationally but also locally, despite several resistances, at the metropole and at the colonies, and notwithstanding the absence of real legal and political mechanisms to penalize the non-compliance with novel standards. Nonetheless, the multifaceted process of internationalization shaped, directly or indirectly, national legislation and policy orientation, affecting their informational basis and their political rationales. However limited, the ideological and socio-political constraining of the *workings* of the empire-states and respective colonial outposts was a reality. The post-war political opportunities and economic incentives, normative contexts, ethical debates and moral pressures, connected as they were to processes of internationalization, were simultaneously cause and consequence of transformative governing experiments related to imperial and colonial affairs.[41]

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[40] Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo, "A League of Empires", *op. cit.*, p. 104-106.

[41] To understand how and to what extent these debates, epistemic communities and international, intergovernmental agencies actually shaped policy-making and related practices "on the ground" is fundamental. This surely varied significantly, depending on contexts, power relations and political cultures, or human and material resources available, for instances. The need to scrutinize particular cases and specific dynamics, and compare them, is immense, and much research needs to be done.