

# HISTORIANS WITHOUT BORDERS

*Writing Histories of International Organizations*

Leiden University – 22-23 March 2018

*This workshop is organized by the ERC project ‘Rethinking Disability’. It is intended to bring together early-career researchers from different fields working on international organizations, to discuss methodological challenges together with peers and established scholars. A combination of a master class, keynote lectures, and roundtable discussions aims at providing an informal and interactive setting for the exchange of ideas and perspectives. Confirmed speakers include:*

**Davide Rodogno**

*The Graduate Institute,  
Geneva*

**Corinne Pernet**

*University of Geneva*

**Kiran Patel**

*Maastricht University*

## **Call for abstracts**

Ever since the paradigm of ‘globalization’ has found its way into the field of history, ways of writing histories beyond borders have proliferated. Today, historians no longer need to justify enlarging their geographical scope beyond the national, but it can nonetheless be a daunting task to decide on how to do this. While we are going beyond borders, the choice for a translocal, transnational, transregional or global history still reveals our preference for a certain scale. Methodologically, our toolbox now offers us concepts such as comparisons,

transfers, connections, entanglements and circulations. As different approaches focus on different concepts, choosing one approach often entails a rejection of other possible approaches. Transnational historians will distance themselves from comparative history; global history, as any global historian will tell you, is not the same as world history. The further we seem to get in advancing the call for breaking with our 'methodological nationalism', the more we seem to split up into different subfields, where fruitful dialogue becomes increasingly difficult. The purpose of this workshop is to open up this dialogue, to see what specific advantages different approaches can offer and how they can be best put to use.

In order to do this, the workshop will focus on the history of international organizations (IOs), as they are "extremely stimulating heuristic objects for historians of globalism in that they represent a true laboratory of the accords and tensions at work between the international, national, and local scenes and frames of reference" (Kott, 2011, p. 449). Therefore, writing their history automatically compels us to think about methodologies of doing 'history beyond borders'. Although they automatically force historians to think about international connections, it is equally important to consider the continuing role of local or national scales within international organizations. Research objects in this regard can encompass both the main intergovernmental organizations (IOs) – such as the League of Nations, the UN or the NATO – and the vast field of International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), spanning a diverse range of causes from the environment (Greenpeace), over human rights (Amnesty International), to humanitarianism (Médecins sans frontières).

For this workshop, we are looking for original contributions on the history of IOs and INGOs, based on empirical research, but with explicit methodological reflections on transnational, global, comparative, etc. approaches. Questions raised can include (but are not limited to):

- What specific advantages do different approaches bring to the history of international organizations?

- Are these approaches mutually exclusive, or do we need to combine different perspectives and concepts?
- What are some of the methodological challenges in writing the history of international organizations, in terms of analyzing connections, entanglements, comparisons, etc.?
- What are some of the practical challenges in writing the history of international organizations, in terms of mobility, language barriers, cultural sensitivity, etc.?
- How can we deal with the fact that levels can be used both as analytical concepts (used by the historian) and as historical concepts (used by the historical actors)?
- How can we deal with different uses of terms like international, national, local, e.g. as level, geographical or spatial unit or loyalty of a historical actor?
- How can we deal with the (hidden) hierarchy of terms or levels like global, national, etc.?

## **Program**

The workshop will offer a combination of a master class, keynote lectures, and roundtable discussions. It will start on 22 March in the afternoon, with a master class by Davide Rodogno (The Graduate Institute, Geneva), followed by a keynote lecture by Corinne Pernet (University of Geneva). The second day (23 March) will consist of roundtable sessions, where participants present their research and enter into discussion. Senior researchers will chair these sessions and Kiran Patel (Maastricht University) will deliver a closing keynote.

## **Submission of abstracts**

Please send an abstract of max. 500 words and a short CV to the following email address: [rethinkingdisability@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:rethinkingdisability@hum.leidenuniv.nl) by 13 November 2017. Questions to the organizers can be sent using the same address. Authors will be notified regarding the acceptance of their contribution by 20 November. Invited participants will be expected to submit a short draft version of a more substantial paper two weeks prior to the event, which will be circulated among all other participants. Participants who are accepted to present their paper are also automatically accepted to participate in the master class. If you are unable or do not wish to attend the master class, kindly indicate this in your application.

## Organization

The workshop is initiated and hosted by the research team of the ERC project 'Rethinking Disability: the Global Impact of the International Year of Disabled Persons (1981) in Historical Perspective', based in the Institute for History at Leiden University. It is supported by the Huizinga Institute, the national Dutch research network for Cultural History.



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