

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Subject matters: Imperialism and the constitution of International Relations

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Abstract

This article contributes to the critical historical research that has demythologised the ‘noble origins’ of the International Relations discipline (IR) by exposing its imperial, colonial, and racist legacies. Where most critical historiographies have unveiled the centrality of racialised and imperialist ontologies in individual thinkers and theories, this article traces imperialist origins of international thought by reconstructing its impact on administrative-institutional infrastructures. Specifically, it interrogates the most systematic and institutionalised attempt to define the ‘subject matter’ of IR under the International Studies Conference (ISC) organised by the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC) of the League of Nations. Through a parallel reading of the archives from ISC’s ‘administrative meetings’ and ‘study meetings’, the article contends that the seemingly academic discussions on the subject matter of IR in the ‘administrative meetings’ were in fact intertwined with the imperialist-colonial politics central to ‘study meetings’. The article thus not only challenges IR’s conventional history, but its historical ontologies by revealing how race and empire were central to the constitution of its very subject matter and its early institutionalisation.

Keywords: Disciplinary History of International Relations; Subject Matter; Imperialism; Racism; Interwar Period; International Studies Conference

Introduction

Critical historical work has demythologised the ‘noble origins’ of International Relations (IR) – established post-1919 in the idealist spirit of preventing another world war – and exposed the ‘willful amnesia’ of its imperial, colonial, and racist legacies in the nineteenth century¹ and the interwar period.² This has challenged IR’s conventional history, but also its historical ontologies by revealing how concepts of race and empire were central in the constitution of its subject

¹Sankaran Krishna, ‘Race, amnesia, and the education of International Relations’, *Alternatives*, 26:4 (2001), pp. 401–24; Errol Henderson, ‘Hidden in plain sight’, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 26:1 (2013), pp. 71–92; Benjamin de Carvalho, Halvard Leira, and John Hobson, ‘The big bangs of IR’, *Millennium*, 39:3 (2011), pp. 735–58; John Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016); Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda, and Robbie Shilliam, *Race and Racism in International Relations* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015); Jeanne Morefield, *Empires Without Imperialism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014).

²David Long and Brian Schmidt, *Imperialism and Internationalism in the Discipline of International Relations* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005); Robert Vitalis, ‘The noble American science of imperial relations and its laws of race development’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 52:4 (2010), pp. 909–38; Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015); Cecelia Lynch, ‘The moral aporia of race in international relations’, *International Relations*, 33:2 (2019), pp. 267–85.

matter.³ As historical work has already unveiled the centrality of racialised and imperialist ontologies in individual thinkers and theories, this article follows recent calls for tracing ‘the permeation of the political categories of empire into international thought’ by reconstructing its impact on *administrative-institutional infrastructures*.⁴ Specifically, it interrogates one of the earliest institutionalised attempts to define the subject matter of IR: the debates on ‘University Teaching of International Relations’ under the International Studies Conference (ISC) organised by the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC) of the League of Nations.

The ‘political categories of empire’ is obviously contested ground, so some conceptualisation is necessary. Empire can be defined as a formal or informal political dominance system in which a metropolitan centre extends political authority over a distant peripheral territory.⁵ Imperialism, then, is the theory, practice, and advocacy of extending such political authority over peoples and territories ‘that you do not possess, that is distant, that is lived on and owned by others’.⁶ Imperialism, narrowly defined, often refers to its most direct and coercive forms: formal territorial acquisition, extraction of natural resources, exploitation of labour, and forced opening of markets. But empire has a broad ‘semantic range’, and in more expansive uses covers both territorial and non-territorial forms of rule.⁷ Contrasted to the static and atomistic Westphalian ontology centred on the limits of sovereign states, imperialism has been conceptualised as more deterritorialised and expanding, more relational in stressing the mutual constitution of metropole and periphery, and ‘thicker’ in conceiving the international as ‘social and cultural flows as well as political-military and economic interactions in a context of hierarchy’.⁸ In this view, imperialism is never only an act of coercive exploitation but also supported by ‘ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people *require* and beseech domination, as well as form of knowledge affiliated with domination’.⁹ Imperialism can therefore also take more paternalistic ‘white man’s burden’ forms that may expound notions of economic and political liberties, and as such may stress the inherent humanity in all peoples and their ability to progress, but only on the condition that a liberal, knowledgeable, civilised, and superior subject intervenes and tutors these illiberal, infantilised, inferior, and possibly even ‘barbaric’ objects.¹⁰ Arguments for both coercive and liberal paternalistic forms of imperialism can be identified in the ISC discourse. Finally, it should be noted that when I use the term ‘academic imperialism’ to characterise early visions of IR as an orchestrating master discipline that overlooks a vast array of auxiliary sciences, I use the term metaphorically, although this vision in some of its articulations also functions as a form of knowledge that can undergird ‘real-world’ imperialism.

Race is also a ‘complex and multiply contested concept’¹¹ and racism, like imperialism, has been defined in different ways in the literature on racism in historical IR; ranging from individual bigotry, prejudice, or discrimination of a person or people based on their membership of a particular (often minority) racial or ethnic group to the more structural, political, and institutional

³John Hobson, ‘What’s at stake in doing (critical) IR/IPE historiography?’, in Brian Schmidt and Nicolas Guilhot (eds), *Historiographical Investigations in International Relations* (Cham: Springer, 2019), pp. 149–69.

⁴Or Rosenboim, ‘Threads and boundaries’, in Schmidt and Guilhot (eds), *Historiographical Investigations in International Relations*; Vineet Thakur, Alexander Davis, and Peter Vale, ‘Imperial mission, “scientific” method’, *Millennium*, 46:1 (2017), pp. 3–23.

⁵Johan Galtung, ‘A structural theory of imperialism’, *Journal of Peace Research*, 8:2 (1971), p. 81; Michael Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 45.

⁶Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London, UK: Random House, 1993), pp. 6–8.

⁷Martin Bayly, ‘Imperialism’, in Benjamin de Carvalho, Julia Costa Lopez, and Halvard Leira (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Historical International Relations* (London, UK: Routledge, 2021), p. 359.

⁸Tarek Barkawi and Mark Laffey, ‘Retrieving the imperial’, *Millennium*, 31:1 (2002), pp. 110–11.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 9; Randolph Persaud and Alina Sajed, *Race, Gender, and Culture in International Relations* (London, UK: Routledge, 2018), pp. 3–4.

¹⁰Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics*, pp. 5, 25–8; Bayly, ‘Imperialism’, p. 359; Morefield, *Empires Without Imperialism*.

¹¹Randolph Persaud and R. B. J. Walker, ‘Apertura: Race in International Relations’, *Alternatives*, 26:4 (2001), p. 373.

'belief in, practice, and policy of domination based on the specious concept of race.'¹² This article is not primarily concerned with the prejudice of individual scholars, but with reconstructing how the categories of empire and race impacted the administrative-institutional infrastructures of early IR. Like imperialism, racism is a 'polymorphous shapeshifter' that materialises as both as outright biological and 'scientific' racism (which again can take both biological-genetic but also environmental-geographical forms) as well as more subliminal forms of cultural racism assuming a hierarchy of races dominated by white Europeans at the top and non-whites occupying spatially subordinate and temporally 'backward' positions.¹³ Several of these forms can be identified in the ISC, and common to all is that they generate 'hierarchies of the human'¹⁴ that can be used to rationalise policies of racial domination such as imperial conquest, colonisation, civilising missions, and cultural conversion. But the relationship between imperialism and racism is complex. It has been argued, for instance, that imperialism as political form predates modern notions of race and therefore need not be supported by concepts of race and, conversely that anti-imperialist thought need not be anti-racist but can be associated with the advocacy of racial isolationism, segregation, and anti-miscegenation.¹⁵

When existing historiographies of IR have recovered the imperial-racist legacies of IR, the primary focus has been *Anglo-American* scholarship and institutions. Examining the relatively more international ISC that comprised institutions from Europe, North America, and gradually also Latin America and Asia therefore advances our knowledge in this respect. Historical work has also started to restore the long-neglected ISC to its status as a central institutional site; one of the first international associations of International Relations (after the Institute of Pacific Relations) and arguably a precursor to contemporary associations like ISA and WISC.¹⁶ The ISC has not yet been examined as a site for uncovering the imperial-colonial legacies on the institutionalisation of IR, however. This is striking considering the centrality of the ISC in the interwar discussions on the research and teaching of IR. The ISC organised numerous 'administrative' meetings from 1930 onwards that gradually evolved into organised conferences and publications on the 'University Teaching of International Relations' led by Alfred Zimmern (rapporteur), one of the most influential IR scholars at the time. Although rarely read today, numerous memoranda, articles, and books on the subject matter of IR emanated from this discourse.¹⁷ Moreover, oral debates at the conferences were transcribed almost verbatim and in themselves constitute an interesting archival material.

Viewed on their own, the discourse on administrative matters and 'University Teaching' look rather academic – hardly the most obvious place to look for imperialist-colonial origins of IR.

¹²Henderson, 'Hidden in plain sight', p. 72; see also Amitav Acharya, 'Race and racism in the founding of the modern world order', *International Affairs*, 98:1 (2022), pp. 25–6; Meera Sabaratnam, 'Is IR theory white?', *Millennium*, 49:1 (2020), pp. 6–7.

¹³Hobson *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics*, p. 6; John Hobson, 'Unmasking the racism of orthodox international relations/political economy', *Security Dialogue*, 53:1 (2022), p. 5; Henderson, 'Hidden in plain sight', p. 72; Jessica Blatt, "'To bring out the best that is in their blood'", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 27:5 (2004), p. 693.

¹⁴Sabaratham, 'Is IR theory white?', p. 3; see also Lynch, 'The moral aporia', p. 269.

¹⁵Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics*; Duncan Bell, *Empire, Race and Global Justice* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

¹⁶David Long, 'Who killed the International Studies conference?', *Review of International Studies*, 32:4 (2006), p. 603; Michael Riemens, 'International academic cooperation on international relations in the interwar period', *Review of International Studies*, 37:2 (2011), pp. 911–28; Jo-Anne Pemberton, *The Story of International Relations, Part One* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); Joanne Pemberton, *The Story of International Relations, Part Two* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); Joanne Pemberton, *The Story of International Relations, Part Three* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

¹⁷Edith Ware and James Shotwell, *The Study of International Relations in the United States* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1934); Stanley Bailey, *International Studies in Modern Education* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1938); Alfred Zimmern, 'University Teaching of International Relations' (International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation, League of Nations, 1939); C. A. W. Manning, 'The University Teaching of Social Sciences: International Relations' (Geneva: UNESCO, 1954).

Long afternoon sessions on institutional collaboration, exchanges of syllabi and bibliographies, discussions of how to teach IR, delimit the subject matter, its relationship to other disciplines, appropriate methods, general aims, and so on. But the academic discourse in the administrative meetings, which throughout the 1930s evolved into dedicated ‘University Teaching of IR’ meetings, took place alongside the ISC’s other meeting format: the so-called *study meetings*. Study meetings were organised in biannual cycles whose discourse focused on international problems *du jour*: ‘The State and Economic Life’ (1931–3), ‘Collective Security’ (1933–5), ‘Peaceful Change’ (1935–7) and ‘Economic Policies in Relations to World Peace’ (1937–9). The format was largely modelled on the Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR).¹⁸ The ‘problems’ treated in study cycles reflected the imperialist and racialised geopolitics of the time; for example, the collapse of trade and retreat into imperial trading blocs, the rise of fascism and Nazism, the Japanese and Italian imperial invasions of Manchuria and Abyssinia, German remilitarisation and demands for *Lebensraum*, colonial retrocession and treaty revision.

Read separately, the discourse in study meetings seems far removed from the more academic discourse on ‘University Teaching’. But separating the two would be artificial as they were on the agenda at the same conferences, had some overlap in participants, and there was even an explicit, though unfulfilled, attempt to integrate study meeting topics into the discussions on university teaching.¹⁹ Apart from explicit connections, a more subtle reading also reveals that some definitions of the academic subject matter (for example, those that included raw materials or demographics) were inspired by the discourse on access to colonial raw materials or settler colonialism in the study meetings. Through a parallel reading that alternates between the archives from the administrative and teaching meetings and those from the study meetings, the article contends that these early and seemingly highly academic discourse on the subject matter, pedagogy, and methodology of IR intersected with the imperialist-colonial discourse so central to study meetings. The two can be productively read as contrapuntal – not in a strict postcolonial sense²⁰ because both discourses were dominated by voices from the ‘centre’ – but by bringing out the common threads and connections between, and indeed co-constitutive nature of, these seemingly unconnected counterpoints. Such a reading will necessarily be selective in centring on how the two are connected by the political categories of empire and there is a multitude of other stories to tell about the ISC, some of which I have explored elsewhere.²¹

Reading at the interstices of these two discourses renders visible a number of connections and threads: When it comes to definitions of the subject matter, it reveals how some notions of the subject matter advanced in the teaching discussions, such as the one advanced by Alfred Zimmern under the slogan ‘Nihil Humani Alienum a Nobis Putamus’ (‘Nothing Human is

¹⁸As outlined in a 1930 memorandum to the third ISC by John Condliffe, research secretary of the IPR, the IPR also facilitated international collaboration among national committees that jointly decided on a programme topic that was ‘of greatest importance at the time’ and then sent members from a range of different disciplines as well as representatives from business and politics for biannual conferences organised in round tables that ‘consider a definite problem in its entirety; John Condliffe, ‘International Collaboration in the Study of International Relations [AG I-IIICI-C-88]’ (1930), pp. 11–12.

¹⁹IIIC, ‘Agenda of the Programme Meeting on the University Teaching of International Relations, International Studies Conference: Tenth Session Paris, June 28th – July 3rd, 1937 [AG I-IIICI-K 1935-1939-96]’ (1937), p. 2.

²⁰See Said, *Culture and Imperialism*; Krishna, ‘Race, amnesia’; Pinar Bilgin, ‘“Contrapuntal reading” as a method, an ethos, and a metaphor for global IR’, *International Studies Review*, 18:1 (2016), pp. 134–46.

²¹Some examples are the ‘peaceful change’ discussions, the ISC’s attempt to make IR ‘more international’, or the traces of realist-idealist debate in the ISC, all of which I examine at length elsewhere. Many other stories can also be found in Pemberton’s recent three-volume work. This article, however, will focus specifically on the intersection between the disciplinary debates in the administrative sessions and the imperial-colonial dimension of the study meetings. See also Peter Marcus Kristensen, ‘Peaceful change’ in International Relations: A conceptual archaeology’, *International Theory*, 13:1 (2021), pp. 36–67; Peter Marcus Kristensen and Arlene Tickner, ‘Beyond a “more international” International Relations’, in John M. Hobson and Allan Lauyng (eds), *Is International Theory International?* (London, UK: Routledge, forthcoming); Peter Marcus Kristensen and Ole Wæver, ‘Realism-Idealism Debate at the International Studies Conference’, working paper (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2022).

Foreign to Us'), were defined in the broadest possible terms, including colonial and racial relations, in order to better connect to the discussions over in the study meetings. In terms of IR's place in the academy, we see how the 'Nothing Human is Foreign to Us' vision of IR easily lent itself to an academic imperialism in which IR could become a super discipline covering all manifestations of international human life, stretching from moral philosophy to natural science. And, more importantly, how this call for interdisciplinarity connected IR to bordering fields like imperial political economy, colonial administration, demography and eugenics, geology and geography in ways that undergirded the inter-imperial discussions on raw materials, colonies, and overpopulation over in the study meetings. In terms of IR's *raison d'être*, it allows us to see how the seemingly 'noble' academic mission of averting war and fostering international understanding outlined in the teaching discussions reflected and materialised in the study meetings as a political project of avoiding war *in Europe* driven by the fear of the destruction of 'Western civilisation'. As for the proto-disciplinary sociology conducted by the ISC, reading administrative and study meetings together reveals how the interest in surveying national variations of IR as a means of fostering 'sympathetic understanding' over in the administrative meetings in practice often centred on the political differences and conflicts between the perspectives of the French, British and American empires *vis-à-vis* Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and Imperial Japan, which were so central in the study meetings. Those on the receiving end of imperialism were silenced, often paternalistically spoken for and entered discussions as a 'solution' to Europe's problems: that is, 'colonial redistribution' as a means of averting war by satisfying the so-called 'have-nots' demand for Lebensraum and raw materials.

Below I seek to bring out these entanglements of academia and politics by alternating between sections focused on the discussion of academic 'subject matters' in the administrative and teaching meetings and sections focused on the discussion of the 'subject matters' of empire in study meetings. The article moves along an overall chronology starting with the first meetings in 1928 and ending with the largest conference in 1937 in order to elucidate the evolution of the ISC as an institution over the period covered. In between the starting and end points the article does not proceed along a chronological structure, though, but rather shifts according to the intellectual and political threads that weave together the two spaces. Sometimes the threads are as direct and explicit as when Zimmern after attending the 1937 study conference, which centred on questions such as whether threats to the peace could be averted by means of colonial redistribution, increased settler colonialism, and/or shared exploitation of colonial raw materials, argued that this had led him to believe that minerals, racial biology, and demographics should be part of the subject matter of IR. At other times the connection is more by example; for instance, when the teaching discussions emphasised the importance of sympathetic understanding of the perspectives of others and the study meetings practiced such a sympathetic understanding of the Nazi and Fascist delegations. The article sometimes jumps in time in order to stress these entanglements, while at other times the connection is made through their synchronicity: for example, delegates at the 1935 conference went almost directly from administrative meetings on the subject matter of IR to study meetings on whether the collective security system could save 'Western civilisation', only interrupted by lunches, dinners, and receptions. By reading the two as entangled counterpoints, neither the political nor the teaching discussions are given priority. The point in what follows is not (only) to unearth the direct causal links between the two discourses (although certainly that too when they exist), but also to show how the two evolve in reflection of each other, more or less directly inspire each other, and mutually constitute each other.

Administrative meetings: War, peace, and the emergence of a 'virgin field'

The agenda at early meetings of the 'Conference of Institutions for the Scientific Study of International Relations' (its name until 1933) were mainly 'administrative'; that is, to coordinate, liaison, survey the institutional landscape, exchange bibliographies, publications, syllabi, and staff.

These administrative discussions were marked by a sense of novelty. The very first meeting describes the subject as ‘practically a virgin field’ gradually becoming a ‘branch of scientific enquiry’²² and throughout the 1930s, participants in the debates on ‘University Teaching of International Relations’ would state that ‘a science is being born, the science of International Relations’,²³ but remains in ‘its first stages of development’,²⁴ ‘of recent birth’,²⁵ ‘in a nascent state’ and a ‘newcomer in the academic field’²⁶ – all foreshadowing that famous first line in E. H. Carr’s *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*.²⁷ Although decades of disciplinary history has demonstrated that ‘IR’ has a longer nineteenth-century lineage as imperial relations and colonial administration,²⁸ it is worth noting, as Joanne Pemberton does in the most extensive study of the ISC to date, that ‘almost all of those involved in promoting the study of international relations in the interwar years believed that they were engaged in a new intellectual enterprise.’²⁹

The Great War was seen as the main source of discontinuity. Stanley Bailey’s survey under the ISC asserted that IR virtually did not exist prior to 1914.³⁰ Alfred Zimmern argued that the post-war emergence of IR was a product of the inattentiveness and methodological nationalism of other (social) sciences before the First World War, and therefore ‘International relations as a special subject is a child of the war.’³¹ Although the sense of discontinuity was perhaps exaggerated, something important did happen in the interwar period, particularly in terms of institution-building, the development of a disciplinary consciousness, and the labelling of activities as nominally ‘IR’. It is well known that many of the first dedicated ‘IR’ professorships, departments, and research institutions date to this period. There is also an extensive archive of syllabi, bibliographies, textbooks, and teaching surveys produced from the 1920s onwards.³² This is clearly a period where activities start being labelled ‘IR’. Most notoriously, one of the field’s first journals, *Journal of Race Development*, changed its name to *Journal of International Relations* and then *Foreign Affairs*. The very term ‘International Relations’ (capitalised) has never taken up as much space in books as in years immediately after the First World War (see Figure 1).

The distinction, now conventionally in lower- and upper-case letters, between ‘international relations’ designating the ‘real-life subject-matter’ and ‘International Relations’ designating the academic discipline can also be dated (at least) back to the ISC discussions where Charles Manning, among others, deployed it.³³ The institutionalisation of the ISC with sustained meetings on ‘The University Teaching of International Relations’ is itself a prime example of this nascent disciplinary identity. That a group of scholars from various countries and disciplines who saw themselves as preoccupied with ‘International Relations’ (however defined) held sustained meetings to discuss what ‘International Relations’ is, how to study and train future generations in it, was certainly new by any measure. The fact that IR now studied ‘itself as itself’ contributed to the sense of novelty.

²²IIC, ‘Report to the Sub-Committee on University relations on the Meeting of Experts for the co-ordination of Higher International Studies, Berlin, March 22-24, 1928 [AG 1-IICI-C-27]’ (1928), pp. 3–4.

²³IIC, ‘The University Teaching of International Relations: Report of a Preliminary Discussion. London, June 7, 1935 [AG 1-IICI-K 1935-1939-25]’ (1935), p. 9.

²⁴Ibid., p. 13.

²⁵IIC, ‘Peaceful Change: Procedures, Population, Raw Materials, Colonies’ (Paris: International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation, 1938), p. 596.

²⁶Cited in Zimmern, ‘University Teaching of International Relations’ (1939), pp. 246, x.

²⁷E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919–1939* (London, UK: Macmillan, 1939)

²⁸See supra note 1 and 2.

²⁹Pemberton, *The Story of International Relations, Part One*, pp. 2–3.

³⁰Bailey, *International Studies in Modern Education*.

³¹Zimmern in Zimmern, ‘University Teaching of International Relations’ (1939), p. 216.

³²Vitalis, *White World Order*, p. 6.

³³IIC, ‘University Teaching of International Relations: A Short Record of the Discussions Held During the Ninth International Studies Conference, 1936 [AG 1-IICI-K 1935-1939-70]’ (1936), p. 66.



Figure 1. The use of 'International Relations' in textbooks.

Source: Google Ngram.

The emergence of disciplinary self-reflection poses a hitherto unrecognised puzzle as Robert Vitalis remarks: none of the scholars advocating for a 'new interdisciplinary specialization described anything remotely like a continuous tradition traceable to the ancient'. Why? According to Vitalis, because this would not aid 'the legitimacy of a claim of autonomy for their new enterprise and its specialized object of knowledge'.³⁴ The claim to novelty and discontinuity, while not entirely unfounded, was also a strategic move: it allowed scholars to make a radical break with the past and re-envision IR's subject matter. As Manning remarked in an ISC meeting: 'As an academic subject, international relations is whatever you or I choose to make it'.³⁵ The perceived discontinuity was also reflected in the debates on the temporal delimitation of the *subject matter* where there was relative consensus that IR was concerned with 'present reality', 'the hodiernum', and 'contemporary history' rather than history.³⁶ This presentism is what allowed many at the ISC to represent IR as a blank slate decoupled from pre-1919 imperial-colonial expertise, although some participants resisted the 'arbitrary' post-1919 demarcation, especially 'in respect of colonial problems'.³⁷

The idea that IR emanated from the First World War is fundamental to the myth of 'noble origins': that IR was the science of peace and mutual understanding, not the science of imperial relations and colonial administration.³⁸ The earliest 'administrative meetings' that discussed 'rather dull things' (Arnold Toynbee's words) like bibliographies and handbooks also saw the ISC as revolutionary because of its 'nobler' spiritual purpose of overcoming national prejudices, improving international understanding, promoting peace, and hopefully removing the 'fatal institution of war'.³⁹ Compared to the 'less noble' chemists fabricating arms, various participants stressed that '*noblesse oblige*', that their purpose was to construct the 'arsenal of peace',⁴⁰ and their cause 'a noble one', indeed the 'noblest of human ideals': namely, 'the establishment of a

³⁴Vitalis, *White World Order*, p. 6.

³⁵Manning in Zimmern, 'University Teaching of International Relations' (1939), p. 228.

³⁶IIC, 'The University Teaching of International Relations: Report of a Preliminary Discussion', p. 7; IIC, 'University Teaching of International Relations: A Short Record of the Discussions Held During the Ninth International Studies Conference', pp. 9, 23–4, 171.

³⁷IIC, 'The University Teaching of International Relations: Report of a Preliminary Discussion', p. 19; IIC, 'University Teaching of International Relations: A Short Record of the Discussions Held During the Ninth International Studies Conference', pp. 10, 105, 130; Sofronie in Zimmern, 'University Teaching of International Relations' (1939), p. 234.

³⁸Vitalis, 'The noble American science of imperial relations'.

³⁹'The Conference of Institutions for the Scientific Study of International Relations', *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*, 8:3 (1929), pp. 191, 202.

⁴⁰IIC, 'Peaceful Change', p. 564.

lasting peace, of good understanding among the nations, and of the solidarity of the peoples' through 'the scientific investigation [of] international relations'.⁴¹ Whether IR should also nurture a 'spirit of peace and mutual understanding' and 'rapprochement of minds and thereby for peace' was a continuous theme in the discussions on 'University Teaching of IR'.⁴² The sense of a disciplinary mission was strong, but there was disagreement on whether this was best achieved by normative or scientific means.

To Zimmern who saw IR as a modern humanism spanning from moral philosophy to natural science, IR should not only advance knowledge but also contribute to 'the making of a better world'.⁴³ Not all bought into this normative and philosophical vision of the field. Proponent of a more sociological, positive, and descriptive approach warned that IR scholars should not 'preach', 'impose his opinion', promote 'international conformism' or peace and League propaganda but apply the 'scientific method' if the discipline was to gain any respectability.⁴⁴ The normative-positive divide at the ISC could be viewed as a precursor to later methodological debates in IR. Despite these disagreements, there was consensus that the ISC, and IR more generally, might contribute to 'the problem of world peace' by bringing scholars with different national perspectives and 'systems of morality' into dialogue so as to counterbalance international misunderstandings.⁴⁵ Indeed, the ISC's very organisation into *national committees* meant that its *study meetings* (contra the 'administrative meetings') focused more on 'national attitudes towards the problem' than covering subjects from 'a universal standpoint'.⁴⁶ So this is a fitting place to shift to the study meetings for an example of how the project of fostering peace and mutual understanding among different systems of morality took shape in practice.

Study meetings: Fascist propaganda and wonderful frescoes

Introductions to the study meetings often exemplify the 'noble' textbook self-image. Thus, Arnold Wolfers introduced the first study conference on 'The State and Economic Life' arguing that its purpose was to discuss how 'the better ordering of the State and economic life may ultimately lead to national recovery and international peace'.⁴⁷ The conference, one of the first international conferences on IR, took place in 1932 in Mussolini's Italy in what Alfred Zimmern described as a 'happy atmosphere' amid the 'wonderful frescoes' of Castello Sforzesco and an 'excursion to the Borromean islands'.⁴⁸ The conference was presided over by the Fascist Alfredo Rocco, author of the namesake Fascist penal code as Mussolini's minister of justice, who also introduced by calling for cooperation within 'the scientific study of international relations' in the 'noble' pursuit of truth.⁴⁹ Prominent Fascist ministers, propagandists, and intellectuals, notably Alberto di Stefani

⁴¹Sofronie and Deryng in Zimmern, 'University Teaching of International Relations' (1939), pp. 242, 320.

⁴²IIIC, 'University Teaching of International Relations: A Short Record of the Discussions Held During the Ninth International Studies Conference', p. 75; Bonnet in Zimmern, 'University Teaching of International Relations' (1939), pp. 222–3.

⁴³Alfred Zimmern, 'University Teaching of International Relations: Preliminary Memorandum [AG 1-IIICI-K-XI-3]' (1937), p. 6.

⁴⁴See, for example, Charles Manning, Stanley Bailey, Richard Kerschagl, Waclaw Komarnicki, Obdulio Fernandez, Ludwig Ehrlich, Vaclav Joachim, Antoni Deryng, José de Yanguas Messia, and Giannino Dalle Spade in IIIC, 'University Teaching of International Relations: A Short Record of the Discussions Held During the Ninth International Studies Conference', pp. 18, 42, 70, 79, 104–06, 125, 128–40.

⁴⁵Deryng in *Ibid.*, p. 23; Antonesco in Zimmern, 'University Teaching of International Relations' (1939), p. 249.

⁴⁶Riemens, 'International academic cooperation on International Relations', p. 919.

⁴⁷IIIC, 'The State and Economic Life' (Paris: International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation, 1934), p. 41.

⁴⁸Alfred Zimmern, 'Report Presented at the Fifth Session of the Conference of Institutions for the Scientific Study of International Relations, Milan, May 23–27, 1932 [AG 1-IIICI-C 1932-21]' (1932), p. 4.

⁴⁹IIIC, 'A Record of the First International Study Conference on the State and Economic Life, with Special Reference to International Economic and Political Relations, Held at Milan on May 23–27, 1932' (Paris: International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation, 1932), pp. 4–6.

and Luigi Amoroso (and in later conferences Francesco Coppola, Roberto Forges-Davanzati, and Giuseppe de Michelis) participated to promote the Fascist model of political economy. The Italians tried to persuade the entire conference to officially adopt their critique of liberalism and advocate the 'corporative' Fascist system. Though unsuccessful in this, they managed to put the study of the corporative system on the agenda for the 1933 London conference.⁵⁰

The discourse in London on 'state intervention' also in its own way fulfilled the purpose of bringing about sympathetic understanding among different national perspectives. It contained a 'clear conflict of schools of thought' with British, American, and French delegates leaning towards liberalism and internationalism, and Germans and Italians towards corporatism, fascism, and authoritarianism.⁵¹ Arnold Toynbee who declared himself liberal summarised the debate as 'a controversy between the old Liberal standpoint and the new authoritarian one.'⁵² Luigi Amoroso, introduced as 'a distinguished Italian, a representative of the Fascist organization', portrayed liberalism as 'a relic of the past' and advanced a new theory for 'a century of will; the century in which, in the realm of history, dictators take change; the century of authority.'⁵³ German delegates characterised 'Der totale Staat', the total unity of state and society, which Italy and Germany were building as 'a Democracy'.⁵⁴ British, American, and French participants pushed back against the politically illiberal, dictatorial, repressive, and violent authoritarian 'model'⁵⁵ but also expressed 'interest', 'admiration', and 'sympathy'.⁵⁶ One can 'admire the idealism' in National-Socialism and Fascism while also being shocked at the accompanying violence, stated Arnold Toynbee, who acknowledged that Liberalism was 'a French-American-British thing' that might not 'suit the world as a whole' and therefore should offer 'concessions' to the new authoritarianism.⁵⁷ Arnold Wolfers found himself 'in harmony with not only Amoroso's thesis, but on the whole with the policy of the Fascist State'.⁵⁸ Charles Manning was unconvinced that the theory would apply in liberal countries but nonetheless characterised Amoroso's as a 'most interesting exposition' and noted that 'My mind, I shamelessly confess, is open on this question of the Corporative State.'⁵⁹ The point here is not to suggest that the above-mentioned scholars were necessarily any more sympathetic towards viewpoints of fascist states than other scholars at the time (E. H. Carr comes to mind),⁶⁰ but to illustrate one of the forms the project of fostering 'peace and mutual understanding' of different 'systems of morality' took.

The fascist-liberal debate faded after 1933 when 'certain changes' led to Germany's withdrawal from the conference.⁶¹ One German, Fritz Berber, continued to participate as a 'private guest', though he was really a Nazi spy sent by Joachim von Rippentrop to spread propaganda.⁶² Berber, who self-identified as a representative of 'National Socialist science',⁶³ for instance promulgated the idea that Germany was neither 'fascist', 'totalitarian', nor a 'dictatorship' but simply 'realistic' and 'concrete'.⁶⁴ While the historical connection between Anglo-American liberal

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 97–9, 111.

⁵¹IIIC, 'The State and Economic Life', pp. 306, 181–211, 226, 284–92, 304–16.

⁵²Ibid., p. 292.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 182–4.

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 200–01, 195.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 192, 199, 275.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 230; IIIC, 'A Record of the First International Study Conference on the State and Economic Life', pp. 18, 98.

⁵⁷IIIC, 'The State and Economic Life', pp. 292–3.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 226.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 196.

⁶⁰Namely, the sympathy Carr expressed with 'Herr Hitler', the Munich Agreement and peaceful change in the first edition (1939) of *The Twenty Years' Crisis*.

⁶¹Alfred Zimmern, 'Report on the Sixth Session of the International Studies Conference (Administrative Meeting) [AG 1-IIIC-C 1933-67]' (1933), pp. 6–7.

⁶²Katharina Rietzler, 'Before the cultural cold wars', *Historical Research*, 84:223 (2011), p. 163.

⁶³Pemberton, *The Story of International Relations, Part Three*, p. 53.

⁶⁴IIIC, 'Collective Security' (Paris: International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation, 1936), p. 394.

internationalism and the imperial and racial imaginaries of early IR is well documented,⁶⁵ work on the role of Fascism (and its connections to realism) in early IR has only just begun.⁶⁶ Considering the clash between national perspectives at the first study conference, it is worth returning to the ‘administrative meetings’ where questions of membership, national representation, and surveying how IR was taught and thought differently in different countries were also central, although they took on a somewhat limited character.⁶⁷

Administrative meetings: Membership and representation

The ISC started as a limited and exclusive operation, but quickly expanded its scope. At the inaugural ‘Meeting of Experts for the co-ordination of Higher International Studies’ in 1928 only delegates from Austria, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Switzerland, US, and international institutions were represented for the discussion of ‘co-ordination of institutions engaged in higher international studies’.⁶⁸ Already in 1930, however, a proposal for ‘a systematic inquiry into the various activities connected with the study of international relations in different countries’, specifically ‘as they tend to impart a knowledge of the League and develop the spirit of international co-operation, with special reference to the scope, nature, methods, and results of such activities’ was adopted.⁶⁹ Soon memoranda on ‘IR in country x’ were produced by the respective national committees. The conference saw the promotion of IR institutions around the world as its *raison d’être* and eventually expanded to include institutions from Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, British India, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, China, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Rumania, South Africa, Soviet Union, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, UK, US and Yugoslavia.⁷⁰ The ISC has even been portrayed as a model for a more international association.⁷¹

Despite attempts to expand membership and promote IR institutions, teaching and research around the world, several observers have noted how the ISC’s ‘clubby’ organisation into national committees meant that it comprised almost exclusively white men from a limited number of (mostly European) elite institutions.⁷² Robert Vitalis has even unearthed archival evidence that scholars from the ‘Howard School’ were (and felt) excluded from the American committee.⁷³ The racial and gendered bias was rarely problematised. On the contrary, some participants saw the ISC as a ‘League of Minds’⁷⁴ and arguably possessed what Peter Wilson, in another context, calls an ‘imperial mindset’ in that they truly believed that they simply ‘represented the most advanced thinking in the world’.⁷⁵

⁶⁵Duncan Bell, ‘Before the democratic peace’, *European Journal of International Law*, 20:3 (2014), pp. 647–70; Bell, *Reordering the World*; Duncan Bell, *Dreamworlds of Race* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020); Long and Schmidt, *Imperialism and Internationalism in the Discipline of International Relations*; Morefield, *Empires Without Imperialism*; Vitalis, ‘The noble American science of imperial relations’.

⁶⁶Ian Hall, *Radicals and Reactionaries in Twentieth-Century International Thought* (Cham: Palgrave, p. 2015); Jens Steffek, ‘Fascist internationalism’, *Millennium*, 44:1 (2015), pp. 3–22.

⁶⁷See also Kristensen and Tickner, ‘Beyond a “more international” International Relations’.

⁶⁸IIC (1928), ‘Report to the Sub-Committee on University relations’, item 6, p. 2.

⁶⁹Cited in Alfred Zimmern, ‘Memorandum on a Proposed Conference of Educationists, Fourth Conference of Institutions for the Scientific Study of International Relations, Copenhagen, June 8–10, 1931 [AG 1-IICI-C-111]’ (International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation, 1931), p. 5.

⁷⁰Riemens, ‘International academic cooperation on International Relations’, p. 920.

⁷¹Chadwick Alger, ‘Introduction’, in *Peaceful Change* (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 1972), p. 16.

⁷²Long, ‘Who killed the International Studies Conference?’, pp. 606–08; Pemberton, *The Story of International Relations, Part One*, p. 4.

⁷³Vitalis, *White World Order*, p. 107.

⁷⁴IIC, ‘Preliminary Study Conference on Collective Security [AG 1-IICI-C 1934-93]’ (1934), p. 192.

⁷⁵Peter Wilson, ‘Where are we now in the debate about the First Great Debate?’, in Brian Schmidt (ed.), *International Relations and the First Great Debate* (London, UK: Routledge, 2012), p. 146.

It might be ahistorical to expect anything resembling the contemporary reflexivity about representativeness in the 1920s and 1930s. But it bears mentioning that when absences were articulated, they were national or geopolitical. Specifically, that the conferences lacked representation from the Soviet Union, Italy, Germany, and Japan,⁷⁶ that is, the missing ‘point of view of a “have-not” country’.⁷⁷ When a Japanese delegation eventually participated in a study meeting, it was given a ‘raced’ welcome that in its own way revealed the Eurocentrism of the ISC: ‘Here we are scientists of European race, except that, for the first time, we have the privilege of having amongst us the representatives of the Japanese Empire.’⁷⁸ Colonised countries were not represented even though the so-called ‘colonial problem’ was central over in study meetings. Colonies were not even classified as ‘have-nots’ in international relations but objectified in that the *possession of colonies* (having or not having) was what distinguished ‘haves’ from ‘have-nots’ states. The ISC was surely ‘more international’ than conventional Anglophone sites of historical IR by also including delegates from the French Empire, Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and many more European countries, but this remained an internationality centred on Europe. And despite the obvious political differences between liberal and authoritarian viewpoints, participants also at times shared certain assumptions about international relations. For instance, as we return to the ‘study meetings’, concerning the looming threat to ‘Western civilisation’.

Study meetings: Saving ‘civilisation’

The quest to preserve peace was also central at the study meetings on ‘Collective Security’ in 1934 in Paris and 1935 in London. The backdrop was the mounting threat to the League’s collective security system after the Japanese imperial invasion of Manchuria and the pending Italian imperial expansion into Abyssinia (Ethiopia). The ambition in choosing the theme ‘Collective Security’ was to ensure ‘the maintenance of peace and thus to reinforce the security of every State’ and the hope was that the conference could ‘have a favorable influence on the establishment of peace and better relations among men’.⁷⁹ Its first meeting was devoted to the fundamental principles of collective security – the idea of security, methods of prohibition of violence, how to substitute violent for peaceful means, sanctions, and neutrality. But it quickly became clear that the conference was not about peace and security in general, but in and of Europe.

The introductory address by Allen Dulles admitted the ‘European viewpoint’ due to the conference’s composition and the European nature of the problem.⁸⁰ Others justified Eurocentrism – peace and security in Europe first, then the world – on practical grounds: ‘Let security be established there first. Once the fear of war is removed from Europe, the world problems will be easier to face and to be dealt with.’⁸¹ Other participants not only framed the problem of maintaining peace and security in Eurocentric, but also *civilisational* terms. ‘Standard of civilisation’ terminology, which was used to justify disparate treatment of Europeans and non-Europeans based on a unified civilisational hierarchy, appeared for instance when Polish delegate S. Cybichowski interpreted the conference agenda on ‘the security of every State’ to mean only ‘those States which recognize international law, i.e. civilized States.’⁸² In other cases, there was a slippage from a unified civilisational hierarchy to the security of *our* civilisation. ‘We are discussing whether our civilization as we know it is to continue’, argued Arnold Toynbee, the British historian of civilisations, a civilisation that in his view came out of ‘the bosom of the

⁷⁶IIIC, ‘The State and Economic Life’, pp. 69, 88, 93, 223; IIIC, ‘Preliminary Study Conference on Collective Security’, pp. 195–6.

⁷⁷IIIC, ‘Peaceful Change’, pp. 315, 505.

⁷⁸IIIC, ‘Collective Security’, p. 262.

⁷⁹Toynbee and Bourquin in IIIC, ‘Preliminary Study Conference on Collective Security’, pp. 5, 196, 200–01.

⁸⁰IIIC, ‘Collective Security’, p. 43.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁸²Cybichowski in IIIC, ‘Preliminary Study Conference on Collective Security’, S11.

Catholic Church'.⁸³ Next year, Toynbee, fearful of the decline of *European* civilisation warned the conference that if any state survived another conflagration, 'it was unlikely to be a European state or even a state of European origin.'⁸⁴

Although such interventions were unapologetically Eurocentric and also often relied on subliminal 'hierarchies of the human', they were not couched in explicit and offensive racial terms. This was about to change, though, when the professor and Fascist propagandist Francesco Coppola picked up Toynbee's civilisationist thread. Coppola rejected collective security (against Italy's imperialist aggressions) as a solution to the threat against European civilisation and instead urged his European IR colleagues to unite in 'solidarity' to defend 'Western civilisation' against a 'common danger', the burgeoning 'anti-European revolution'.⁸⁵ Coppola, a card-carrying Fascist who has been characterised elsewhere as a white supremacist,⁸⁶ advanced a 'yellow peril' argument contending that the 'white race' was no longer 'unquestionably dominant' as 'dangerous forces' are denying the 'hegemony of the occident' and leading 'a revolution against the West'.⁸⁷ Another Italian delegate and National Fascist Party member, Senator Robert Forges-Davanzati, also called for solidarity of 'Western civilisation'.⁸⁸

Most participants rejected the Fascist attack on collective security, and some also criticised the 'fatal illusion of the superiority of our Western civilization'.⁸⁹ But many delegates concurred with the looming threat to 'Western civilisation' albeit without couching it in as racially offensive terms as Coppola. Rumanian delegate M. Djuvara supported collective security but 'endorsed the appeal to the western nations to rally to the defence of their civilization, their spiritual patrimony'.⁹⁰ Lord Lytton, a British colonial administrator, did not view 'an anti-European revolution' ('I have never seen it') but rather 'internecine war' as the primary 'danger to Western civilization'.⁹¹ Gilbert Murray, who addressed the final session in his capacity of President of the International Committee of Intellectual Cooperation, launched a fierce attack on Coppola's critique of collective security. But Murray nonetheless noted that 'any war that now comes among the civilized nations of Europe will be a Civil War', between 'fellow citizens' and therefore war was 'incompatible with the continuance of our civilisation'.⁹² Despite differing diagnoses, there was some common ground in that the goal was to protect 'our civilisation'. The thread connecting the study meetings to the more academic discussions on IR's subject matter may seem far removed at this point, but the two in fact coincided in space and time as participants gathered for administrative meetings on the 'University Teaching of International Relations' on the very same days as the study meetings on how to save 'Western civilisation'.

Administrative meetings: 'Nothing human is foreign to us'

Administrative meetings on University Teaching of International Relations took place on the sidelines of the 1935 Collective Security conference (and continued at the 1936 and 1938 conferences). Unlike in normal administrative meetings, which included only two delegates from each national committee, at the 1935 meeting all 'participants of the conference were invited to take part in a discussion on the University Teaching of International Relations'.⁹³ Even if only 17

⁸³Ibid., pp. 292–4.

⁸⁴IIC, 'Collective Security', p. 165.

⁸⁵IIC, 'Minutes of a General Study Conference on Collective Security [AG 1-IICI-K 1935-1939-24]' (1935), p. 48.

⁸⁶Rocco D'Alfonso, 'Guerra, Ordine e Razza Nel Nazionalismo di Francesco Coppola', *Il Politico*, 65:4 (2000), pp. 539–70.

⁸⁷IIC, 'Collective Security', p. 183; IIC, 'Minutes of a General Study Conference on Collective Security', p. 158.

⁸⁸IIC, 'Minutes of a General Study Conference on Collective Security', p. 126.

⁸⁹IIC, 'Collective Security', p. 180.

⁹⁰IIC, 'Minutes of a General Study Conference on Collective Security', p. 56.

⁹¹IIC, 'Collective Security', p. 184.

⁹²Ibid., pp. 461–2.

⁹³IIC, 'The University Teaching of International Relations. Report of a Preliminary Discussion', p. 1.

participated in the administrative meeting, there was significant overlap with participants from the study meetings. The administrative meetings then started discussing the 'nature and scope of the teaching of international relations', that is, the subject matter of IR and its relationship to other disciplines.⁹⁴ The purpose of this change was to give the 'administrative meetings' a concrete agenda of its own in addition to the 'routine items' usually discussed.⁹⁵

Rapporteur for the University Teaching meetings, Alfred Zimmern, commenced by outlining an intellectually comprehensive definition of IR encapsulated by the slogan 'Nihil Humani Alienum a Nobis Putamus' ('Nothing Human is Foreign to Us'), which 'we might well inscribe on our banner'.⁹⁶ Not all agreed and discussions from the very first meeting in 1931 through the 1935 and 1936 meetings on University Teaching revolved around 'two distinct opinions – if not schools of thought – in regard to the definition of International Relations': the 'restrictive' and 'comprehensive'.⁹⁷ These to some extent correlated with, respectively, the positive and normative approaches mentioned above, but were more concerned with delineating the subject matter than with methodology.

The restrictive school defined the subject matter as contemporary 'inter-state relations'⁹⁸ with a focus on political-legal relations: 'International Relations are relations between states: they consist of questions which bring about co-operation and questions which cause disputes.'⁹⁹ Its proponents argued that no existing discipline adequately covered inter-state relations and they therefore advocated the establishment of IR as a new discipline, albeit one closely connected to political science.¹⁰⁰ Acknowledging that the restrictive school was more widespread in the United States, some Europeans also advocated for IR as a political science: If we conceive 'international relations as constituting a branch of international politics' this would render IR more 'limited and closer to reality' and, not least, make it easier to find professors capable of teaching the subject.¹⁰¹ This rendition resonates with the dominant post-Second World War, and especially realist, definitions of the subject matter, but was far from dominant at the time. Quite the contrary, many ISC delegates saw IR as 'far broader than international policy' and argued that IR 'limited to the setting forth of the connection which exist between States would become superficial'; it should concern the 'connections between men as well'.¹⁰² In summarising the discussions on IR's subject matter, Zimmern in both 1936 and 1938 noted a general agreement that IR was the study of society – 'not simply of politics or Government' – which favored a more comprehensive approach.¹⁰³

The comprehensive definition encapsulated by 'Nothing Human is Foreign to Us' suggested that IR become a 'modern humanism' encompassing all relations among humans belonging to different social groups: 'inter-human relations' between 'collectivities of whatever sort' or 'the whole field of human activity in so far as it concerns contemporary relations between peoples

⁹⁴IIC, 'University Teaching of International Relations: A Short Record of the Discussions Held During the Ninth International Studies Conference', p. 122.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 1.

⁹⁶Alfred Zimmern, 'The University Teaching of International Relations: A Paper Prepared for the Conference's Administrative Meeting [AG 1-IIIC-K 1935-1939-6]' (1935), p. 4; IIC, 'University Teaching of International Relations: A Short Record of the Discussions Held During the Ninth International Studies Conference', p. 180.

⁹⁷Zimmern, 'Report Presented at the Fifth Session of the Conference', p. 3; IIC, 'The University Teaching of International Relations: Analysis of the Preliminary Discussion held in London on June 7, 1935 [AG 1-IIIC-K 1935-1939-32]' (1935), p. 2; IIC, 'University Teaching of International Relations: A Short Record of the Discussions Held During the Ninth International Studies Conference', pp. 9, 169.

⁹⁸Vranek and Mantoux in IIC, 'The University Teaching of International Relations: Report of a Preliminary Discussion', pp. 7, 13.

⁹⁹IIC, 'University Teaching of International Relations: A Short Record of the Discussions Held During the Ninth International Studies Conference', p. 169.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 170.

¹⁰¹Winiarski in Zimmern, 'University Teaching of International Relations' (1939), pp. 257–8.

¹⁰²Sofronie and Antonesco in Ibid., pp. 243, 250.

¹⁰³IIC, 'University Teaching of International Relations: A Short Record of the Discussions Held During the Ninth International Studies Conference', p. 124; Zimmern in Zimmern, 'University Teaching of International Relations' (1939), pp. 248, 326.

or between the governments of the different nations.¹⁰⁴ The object of the ‘science of international relations’ was delineated by its ‘internationality’, that is, ‘all spheres of social life when that life oversteps the boundaries of one State and influences relations between nations.’¹⁰⁵ Here the subject matter extends from natural science to moral philosophy. It was also likened to ‘History’ understood in a Toynbian sense as the ‘rise and fall, growth, development and interaction of civilizations’. It was ‘practically identical with Sociology in its widest extent’, Zimmern held, with the key difference that sociology stresses societal unity whereas IR stresses societal diversity and the interaction of ‘various human groups’.¹⁰⁶ A definition that bears some semblance to what in contemporary debates on the subject matter is called societal multiplicity.¹⁰⁷ Some ISC participants even dubbed the field ‘international sociology’ whose purpose was to apply sociological rules to human society extended to its largest dimensions, the structure and institutions of international society, to arrive at ‘the theory of the international community’.¹⁰⁸

The academic discussions on whether to delineate the subject matter comprehensively or restrictively may, again, seem one step removed from the inter-imperial politics discussed in the study meetings. However, the ‘thick’ scientific ontology of ‘Nothing Human is Foreign to Us’ – defined as all human relations ‘whether between states or any other kind of organized group’ – explicitly included imperial, colonial, and racial relations excluded by the restrictive school.¹⁰⁹ Zimmern wanted to ‘stretch the definition to its widest limits’ to encompass relations ‘between government and between peoples’ who may be citizens of the governments but also ‘other unspecified social groups existing within or across the dividing lines of States’.¹¹⁰ The range of ‘human relations’ was elaborated by others. Some included anything from food, architecture, clothing, religion, science, sport, aircraft, and broadcasting to the ‘subjugation of primitive tribes’ (singled out as one of the few instances where a people in its entirety comes into contact with another) as subjects that fall ‘within the range of the science of international relations’.¹¹¹ Others delimited the subject matter as ‘relations between social groups and their members’ including state and pre-state groups and their rights, duties, and laws to the ‘structure of international society’, which in a more detailed exposition included the following subjects: Ethnically: Population and Migration – Races – Nationalities – Colonisation ... Economically: Raw Materials – Communication – International Trade – Monetary Systems – Finance. – Economic and social structure: Capitalism – Communism – Agricultural, commercial and industrial civilisations. – Politically: Comparative Constitutional Law – Various forms of government – Municipal administration – Political and social ideals of the different countries. – Psychologically: Religion – Literature – Languages.¹¹² As Patricia Owens has argued, Lucy Mair,

¹⁰⁴IIIC, ‘University Teaching of International Relations: A Short Record of the Discussions Held During the Ninth International Studies Conference’, pp. 42, 169; Sofronie and Boyer in Zimmern, ‘University Teaching of International Relations’ (1939), pp. 226, 234, 280–1.

¹⁰⁵Deryng in IIIC, ‘University Teaching of International Relations: A Short Record of the Discussions Held During the Ninth International Studies Conference’, p. 23.

¹⁰⁶Zimmern, ‘University Teaching of International Relations’ (1939), pp. 7–8; Zimmern, ‘The University Teaching of International Relations: A Paper Prepared for the Conference’s Administrative Meeting’, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷See Justin Rosenberg and Milja Kurki (eds), *Multiplicity* (London, UK: Routledge, 2021).

¹⁰⁸IIIC, ‘University Teaching of International Relations: A Short Record of the Discussions Held During the Ninth International Studies Conference’, pp. 128, 160, 173; Von Verdross, Komarnicki, Winiarski in Zimmern, ‘University Teaching of International Relations’ (1939), pp. 23, 254–6, 279.

¹⁰⁹Zimmern, ‘University Teaching of International Relations: Preliminary Memorandum’.

¹¹⁰Zimmern, ‘The University Teaching of International Relations: A Paper Prepared for the Conference’s Administrative Meeting’, p. 2.

¹¹¹Joachim in IIIC, ‘University Teaching of International Relations: A Short Record of the Discussions Held During the Ninth International Studies Conference’, pp. 32–5; Boyer in Zimmern, ‘University Teaching of International Relations’ (1939), pp. 280–1.

¹¹²Lambert in IIIC, ‘University Teaching of International Relations: A Short Record of the Discussions Held During the Ninth International Studies Conference’, pp. 49–50, emphasis in original, see also 161–2. On top of which came a long list of ‘institutions of international society’ included in the subject matter.

a scholar of colonial administration who was indirectly involved in the ISC,¹¹³ also defined ‘International Relations as a Separate Subject’ as relations between communities or peoples that are ‘highly organized politically’ but not necessarily independent states, exactly so as to encompass colonial relations in the subject matter.¹¹⁴ That International Relations not only included but was sometimes synonymous with Inter-imperial Relations was evident in the study meetings where it was often hard to distinguish interstate relations, certainly among the great powers, entirely from imperial relations, or international political economy from imperial political economy.

Study meetings: Imperial Political Economy (IPE)

The ‘State and Economic Life’ (1933) study conference is illustrative. On the agenda were conventional state-centric international political economy topics like trade, protectionism, tariffs, the most favoured nation clause, finance, debts, and state intervention.¹¹⁵ But in practice it focused on trade relations between ‘Mother countries’ and ‘Colonial territories’ and the relative merits of the ‘Open Door’ vs ‘Imperial Preference’ as colonial commercial policies.¹¹⁶ Italian and German delegates complained that ‘the Door’ to colonies was closed to non-colonial powers for export of manufactured goods, imports of raw materials, and emigration from over-population – and argued that this would lead such countries to demand colonies.¹¹⁷ Illustrative of the Eurocentric and imperialist nature of discussions connecting trade, prosperity, and peace, Italian and German delegates argued that the ‘Open Door’ is ‘wise’ and should be applied to all colonies because it benefits ‘all concerned’ [of the European powers], ‘helps towards the maintenance of peace and friendly relations in the world [Europe], and mitigates the disadvantages of unequal distribution of Colonial possessions [among European powers]’ and can help ‘smooth over not only economic but also social and political unrest [in Europe]’.¹¹⁸

Although most participants favoured the ‘Open Door’, some British and French delegates defended ‘imperial preference’ as in the best interest of ‘the natives’. As a liberal imperialist, Zimmern advocated ‘imperial preference’ because it allowed ‘non-self-governing’ colonies to determine their own commercial policy and was a step towards ‘complete autonomy’ while the ‘Open Door’ was open only from the outside and treated ‘colonial areas without any regards to the wishes of their inhabitants’.¹¹⁹ John Coatman, British colonial administrator and imperialist, criticised the ‘Open Door’ for drawing ‘primitive societies’ into the economic system of highly developed powers ‘over which they have no possible control and cannot even understand’.¹²⁰ Henri Hauser, the French chair, defended ‘imperial preference’ on the basis that ‘France is concerned essentially with defending the rights of the native, in relation to whom she stands in the position of tutor.’ Although Hauser explicitly criticised the ‘colonial spirit’ of racial *biological* superiority, his argument for imperial preference was nonetheless a mission civilisatrice informed by *cultural* racism: that France has a ‘duty to protect’ the ‘secondary race’ of ‘black peasants’ in Africa, that the actual interest of native populations in Equatorial and West Africa is to sell to the French market, and that given that the French have borne ‘the weight of the white man’s burden’ by intervening militarily, building railways and irrigation systems, ‘cannot they claim some privilege?’¹²¹

¹¹³Mair contributed a lecture and chapter on colonial policy and peaceful change to the LSE lecture series and subsequent volume edited by Manning leading up to the 1937 ISC on Peaceful Change. Charles Manning (ed.), *Peaceful Change* (London, UK: Macmillan, 1937).

¹¹⁴Mair cited in Patricia Owens, ‘Women and the history of international thought’, *International Studies Quarterly*, 62:3 (2018), pp. 467–81.

¹¹⁵IIIC, ‘The State and Economic Life’, p. 21.

¹¹⁶Ibid., pp. 27–8.

¹¹⁷Ibid., pp. 87, 96.

¹¹⁸Ibid., pp. 96–8.

¹¹⁹Ibid., pp. 86–7; IIIC, ‘Peaceful Change’, pp. 321–2.

¹²⁰IIIC, ‘The State and Economic Life’, p. 92.

¹²¹Ibid., pp. 101–08.

The debate between the 'open door' and 'imperial preference' was an intra-imperialist debate between two imperialist trade regimes that generally revolved around how to ensure an 'equitable' and 'fair' access to colonial resources and markets for European powers, imperial 'haves' as well as 'have-nots'. Neither side questioned imperialism, per se, but rather represented more or less exploitative and paternalistic versions of it. While it is possible that liberal proponents of imperial preference were genuinely concerned about the 'natives', their arguments were paradigmatic examples of paternalistic imperialism. Even those who advocated for self-government as the ideal end state subscribed to the paternalistic imperialist notion that 'tutelage' was a precondition for colonised peoples to 'climb the ladder of civilization' and become capable of self-government.¹²² Apart from undergirding the imperial project in the study meetings, there was also on an 'academically imperialist' mission over in the administrative meetings.

Administrative meetings: Imperial mission in the academy

The question of IR's position in the academy was on the agenda in administrative meetings from 1931 onwards. It was particularly central at the conferences on University Teaching in 1936 in Madrid and 1938 in Prague, which discussed 'Is International Relations a distinct academic subject?', 'Can the teaching of international relations be regarded a single science?', and 'What is its relationship to the other sciences?'¹²³ There was 'unanimous agreement' that 'time had come for the study of International Relations to be recognised and treated as a distinct academic subject',¹²⁴ but also that its subject matter concerned many disciplines. The ISC itself was a multidisciplinary institution whose participants were not 'IR' scholars trained, employed, and publishing in 'IR', but professors of history, international law, classics, political economy, racial geography, colonial administration, sociology, political science, demography, and so on. They therefore diverged on how to reconcile the quest for disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity.

Zimmern's definition of IR as a 'modern humanism' covering all human relations conjured up the vision of a super discipline. IR constituted a 'revolution' because it, unlike other sciences, synthesises, integrates, and works against compartmentalisation by 'bringing together studies that have too long been separated' and 'not properly harmonised'.¹²⁵ This included political science, international law, economics, history, sociology, and geography, but essentially spanned from moral philosophy to natural science. IR was conceived not as a conventional single discipline with a body of teaching material, textbooks, and syllabi that comprise all its elements, but as 'a bundle of subjects' – Zimmern called it a 'fascio' (bundle) – 'viewed from a common angle'.¹²⁶ IR represented not so much a new subject in the 'rigid academic framework', Zimmern contended, but a special aspect of other disciplines; a distinct 'point of view' (to which some other participants cried 'no') and a 'new outlook, transforming the existing subject-matter'.¹²⁷ IR was also posited as a superior viewpoint available to old disciplines, not necessarily a discipline equal in status.¹²⁸ There was a 'hierarchical' relationship between these 'auxiliary sciences' and the IR scholar at the 'pinnacle with the panorama', the 'super-specialist' to whom subordinate sciences provide inputs.¹²⁹ Some characterised IR as an 'omniscience'.¹³⁰ An 'exceedingly

¹²²The exact wording in IIC, 'Peaceful Change', p. 447.

¹²³Zimmern, 'Memorandum on a Proposed Conference of Educationists', p. 2; Zimmern, 'The University Teaching of International Relations: A Paper Prepared for the Conference's Administrative Meeting'; IIC, 'University Teaching of International Relations: A Short Record of the Discussions Held During the Ninth International Studies Conference', pp. 138–9.

¹²⁴Zimmern, 'Report Presented at the Fifth Session of the Conference', p. 2.

¹²⁵The Conference of Institutions for the Scientific Study of International Relations', p. 200.

¹²⁶Zimmern, 'The University Teaching of International Relations: A Paper Prepared for the Conference's Administrative Meeting', pp. 5–6; Zimmern, 'University Teaching of International Relations' (1939), p. 9 emphasis in original.

¹²⁷IIC, 'The University Teaching of International Relations: Report of a Preliminary Discussion', pp. 36–7.

¹²⁸Zimmern, 'University Teaching of International Relations' (1939), p. 10.

¹²⁹Ibid., p. 327.

¹³⁰Antonesco in Ibid., p. 84.

difficult' and 'complex' topic requiring prior knowledge of geography, language, political science, history, and international law.¹³¹ IR is 'not easy, it is very difficult' and requires a 'special quality of mind' that is 'unusual, even in academic circles', Zimmern declared with some pomposity, although he underlined that these extraordinary attributes were not the preserve of 'Western peoples' but found 'among all peoples at every stage of development'.¹³² As a reviewer of the deliberations put it, chairs of IR should only be established if universities could find 'a Zimmern'.¹³³

Proponents of 'international sociology' rejected this hierarchical supra-disciplinary vision and posited IR as an *independent and equal social science*, albeit supported by cognate fields such as history, philosophy of history, political and economic history, social psychology, international law, political law, political science, political philosophy, political economy, social law, human and social geography, economics, and statistics.¹³⁴ An IR student, Manning noted tongue-in-cheek, was 'a person who regrets that he does not better understand psychology, economics, diplomatic history, law, jurisprudence, sociology, geography, perhaps languages, comparative constitutional organization, and so on down a long list'.¹³⁵ Although less ambitious than Zimmern's, this was no modest vision for IR. Other subjects would provide the empirical input that allows the IR student to synthesise: 'International Relations' will draw upon the 'International Studies' of other disciplines.¹³⁶ IR would be a synthetic and coordinating discipline whose job was not 'to mine the ore, to hew the timber, to mix the paint' but 'to build the ship' – or, as it was put elsewhere, not to make sounds but to conduct the orchestra.¹³⁷ Another, less ambitious multidisciplinary view did not call for independent disciplinary status, because no single human could 'possibly possess sufficient knowledge of all those branches which fall under this heading' and because existing disciplines, universities, and governments would not recognise IR.¹³⁸ Finally, a more interdisciplinary view stressed IR's special affiliation with, variously, history, economics, political economy, social psychology, international law, among other disciplines.¹³⁹

The 'Nothing Human is Foreign to Us' vision of IR, expounded in particular by Zimmern, was surely the most *academically* imperialist of these. In its attempt to span from moral philosophy to natural science, it was also the one that most explicitly incorporated the political categories of empire. Zimmern envisioned a discipline picking up 'seeds of wisdom in the most unexpected quarters' such as the parts of 'biological [or] medical science which affect the growth or diminution or physical improvement or deterioration of populations'.¹⁴⁰ This phrase was explicitly conceived as *race relations* in the French version: the 'growth of races and their diminution, the improvement of their physical character or their tendency to degenerate'.¹⁴¹ Thus 'scientific racism' and eugenics was explicitly suggested as part of IR's subject matter by perhaps the most influential IR scholar at the time and the rapporteur for the entire endeavour to define

¹³¹IIC, 'The University Teaching of International Relations: Report of a Preliminary Discussion', pp. 8, 18.

¹³²Zimmern, 'The University Teaching of International Relations: A Paper Prepared for the Conference's Administrative Meeting', pp. 7–9.

¹³³W. E. C. Harrison, 'The university teaching of international affairs', *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, 2:3 (1936), p. 434.

¹³⁴See, for example, Alfred von Verdross, Frede Castberg, Waclaw Komarnicki, Charles Manning, Georges Sofronie, Georges Vladesco-Racoassa in IIC, 'University Teaching of International Relations: A Short Record of the Discussions Held During the Ninth International Studies Conference', pp. 10, 36, 67, 160, 173; Zimmern, 'University Teaching of International Relations' (1939), p. 227.

¹³⁵Manning in Zimmern, 'University Teaching of International Relations' (1939), pp. 235–6.

¹³⁶Manning in IIC, 'University Teaching of International Relations: A Short Record of the Discussions Held During the Ninth International Studies Conference', p. 67.

¹³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹³⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 46, 125–7, 131–6, 144–6.

¹³⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 141–3, 173; Zimmern, 'University Teaching of International Relations' (1939), pp. 253–83.

¹⁴⁰Zimmern, 'The University Teaching of International Relations: A Paper Prepared for the Conference's Administrative Meeting', p. 2.

¹⁴¹Zimmern in Pemberton, *The Story of International Relations, Part Two*, p. 516.

the 'University Teaching of International Relations'. The interdisciplinary definition of IR's subject matter was thus not only academically imperialist but also connected to the imperial-colonial peace project, as becomes evident when we turn to the peaceful change study meetings.

Study meetings: The interdisciplinarity of (the colonial) peace

The conferences on 'Peaceful Change: Procedures, Population, Raw Materials, Colonies' took place at a preparatory meeting in 1936 in Madrid and a large 1937 conference in Paris (that is, alongside and before the largest meetings on university teaching in 1936 in Madrid and 1938 in Prague). The 'Peaceful Change' conference was the culmination of the ISC and given that the concept of peaceful change has recently been revived in IR, this conference deserves extra attention. 'Peaceful Change' was a distinctly Eurocentric take on the problem of war: how to effect peaceful changes in the status quo (anywhere in the world) to preserve peace (in Europe), and therefore focused mostly on demands for change advanced by (European) powers threatening war (in Europe). The 'noble' peace project's embeddedness in colonial politics was exemplified by the fact that the opening speech was held by a former French minister of colonies and author of *Grandeur et Servitude Coloniales* which, according to the conference proceedings, 'urged colonizing nations to protect colonies against nationalism' who encouraged the conference to contribute to 'justice and peace'.¹⁴² Plenary sessions discussed political-legal 'procedures' of peaceful change in the relatively general terms of justice, peace, change, and security. But the conference, as its subtitle suggested, had responded to the German (and Italian) call for 'concreteness' and 'realism' by focusing on particular cases concerning (a) population, migration, colonisation and (b) markets and distribution of raw materials.¹⁴³ Most of the conference revolved around whether it was possible to avoid war by peacefully redistributing colonial possessions or mandated territories to satisfy the demands of imperial 'have-nots' (Germany, Italy, and Japan) for colonies, raw materials, and population outlets, that is, settler colonialism or 'Lebensraum'. Three meetings were devoted to 'colonial questions', three to 'raw materials' and two to 'demographic questions'.

Even though the political problem of peaceful change may seem disconnected from the academic discussions on IR's place among other disciplines, this particular definition of the problem of peaceful change as one of access to colonies, raw materials, and population outlet reflected the calls for interdisciplinarity in earlier conferences. The ISC therefore extended, for the first time, invitations to non-members to present 'a different viewpoint' on these more 'technical aspects'.¹⁴⁴ Consequently, eugenicists, demographers, colonial ethnologists, raw materials economists, mining engineers, geographers, geologists, and scholars (and practitioners) of colonial administration played a significant role in this study cycle.

The 'raw materials and markets' meetings included geological and mining expertise but also imperial political economy as they (re)examined whether a liberal 'open door' allowing equal 'access to all colonies', the creation of chartered companies for 'the exploitation of colonies' or a 'redistribution of colonies' could provide 'unsatisfied nations access to raw materials'.¹⁴⁵ There was much debate about 'equality of treatment' in colonial matters, but 'equality' mostly from a Eurocentric imperialist viewpoint: 'equality of opportunity' for colonial 'Haves' and 'Have-nots' in terms of access to colonial raw materials, colonial trade, colonial markets, and for 'younger sons of good families' to pursue careers in colonial administration.¹⁴⁶

The 'meetings on demographic questions' were another site for interdisciplinary engagements. The central problem was 'overpopulation' insofar it produced enough dissatisfaction with the

¹⁴²IIIC, 'Peaceful Change', p. 651; as noted by Pemberton, *The Story of International Relations, Part Three*, p. 138.

¹⁴³IIIC, 'Peaceful Change', p. 22.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 27–8.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 206, 274–6, 307–14.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 314–18, 462, 506–13.

international status quo to threaten peace – and how population control, migration to colonies, colonial expansion, or redistribution might remedy this ‘friction between States’ and maintain peace.¹⁴⁷ The problem discussed was not overpopulation or lack of subsistence, per se, which one attendee noted may occur in many places, but overpopulation *in Europe* (and Japan) based on the Eurocentric argument that in cases where ‘the peace of the world is not imperiled [that is, overpopulation problems outside Europe and Japan], then the question does not concern this Conference.’¹⁴⁸ The demographic meetings furthermore imported ‘scientific racism’ into the colonial peace project. As noted in the introduction, ‘scientific racism’ in international thought took various forms where some emphasised genetics and biology, others climate and the environment.¹⁴⁹ Among the former was eugenics, which played a role in the ISC discussions about a ‘synthetic optimum of population’ based on ideas about ‘rational demographic evolution’ and ‘eugenic selection for the betterment of the race’.¹⁵⁰ More geographical versions came to the fore in the ‘scientific racist’ inquiry into the possibilities for settler colonialism in ‘underpopulated regions’, the ‘possibilities of habitat’ for ‘different races’ outside their ‘natural habitat’, the relationship between climate and physiology, and the ideal temperatures for ‘the white race’.¹⁵¹ These ‘theories’ came in various forms that lent themselves to different colonial policies: from the notion ‘that the different races of man, like the different types of fauna and flora, can thrive and multiply only within limited climatic regions’ – used as an argument *against* colonisation – to the white supremacist notion that the ‘white race is distinguished by its ability to adapt itself everywhere’ – used as an argument *for* white settler colonialism.¹⁵² The more interdisciplinary the ISC became, the more manifestly and ‘scientifically racist’ it became.

The ‘meetings on colonial questions’, which particularly engaged with colonial administration experts, discussed colonialism as a ‘cause of violent change’ but also a ‘solution of certain particular problems of peaceful change’.¹⁵³ As ‘solutions’, the following were suggested: ‘Free access’ to colonial resources and markets, ‘Participation of nationals of non-colonial Powers in the colonial administration’, ‘International cooperation in the exploitation of colonial resources’, ‘International cooperation with regard to cultural penetration’, ‘Transfer of territory from a colonial Power to another national sovereignty’, among others.¹⁵⁴ In the colonial study group, IR was akin to colonial bookkeeping calculating the economic ‘value of colonies from the standpoint of the colonial Powers’ in order to ‘factually’ assess the validity of the claims of ‘have-nots’.¹⁵⁵ The divide between the imperial ‘haves’ and the (mainly Fascist) imperial ‘have-nots’ was therefore central again.

On the one hand, most participants were sceptical that ‘repartitions’ or a ‘new distribution’ of colonies would be a practical possibility since colonial powers would never give up possessions.¹⁵⁶ Participants doubted whether Germany would access the necessary raw materials in the colonies, warned that the value of colonial raw materials ‘should not be exaggerated’ and saw the ‘colonial claim [as] extraordinarily weak’, ‘refuted’, and resting on ‘fragile foundations’.¹⁵⁷ It was also questioned whether a ‘redistribution of colonies’ could appease Germany’s alleged need for raw materials or ‘Lebensraum’ if its claims were not based on economic needs but a desire for prestige – in which case it would only create ‘more trouble’.¹⁵⁸ The conference was mostly sceptical of the

¹⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 117–19, 138–9, 142, 360–5, 392, 599.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 362–3.

¹⁴⁹Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics*, p. 6.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 128, 488.

¹⁵¹IIIC, ‘Peaceful Change’, pp. 118, 138–9, 147, 372–3, 490.

¹⁵²Ibid., pp. 139–40.

¹⁵³Ibid., p. 169.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 211–13.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 175–7, 415.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 443, 448.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 83, 101–04, 208, 334, 472, 500.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 451, 470.

'have-nots' demographic and economic claims for colonies,¹⁵⁹ but it should be noted that the discussions operated on the bookkeeping-like assumption that an 'actual' need for population outlets or raw materials *could have* justified colonisation or colonial redistribution. Furthermore, arguments against colonial appeasement were not necessarily anti-colonial, but often read more like propaganda for the status quo couched in, more or less liberal, pro-imperialist advocacy (as E. H. Carr who participated in this conference later pointed out in *The Twenty Years' Crisis*). This sometimes took more offensive imperialist forms, as when French participants stated that questions of transfer of sovereignty was only for the 'colonizing peoples' to decide because of the 'sacrifices made by the mother country on behalf of the colonies' whereas non-colonial powers 'have done nothing for colonization' and should not 'share the harvest'.¹⁶⁰ But it also took paternalist imperialist forms as when Dutch, Belgian, French, and British participants, many of them colonial administrators, portrayed their own colonial policies as benevolent exceptionalisms, more liberal and enlightened, on a 'civilizing mission', no longer driven by 'reckless exploitation' but 'a feeling of trusteeship' and 'real moral sympathy' towards 'natives', and 'as profitable to the colonized as to the colonizers'.¹⁶¹ The opposition to redistributing of colonies was not out of selfishness, a Belgian participant asserted, but the 'moral prerogatives which they have assumed with regard to native populations, whom they have, at a given moment, taken by the hand, and whom they have already led to a high degree of civilization'.¹⁶² The stress on 'native interests' was thus not necessarily an objection against colonialism per se, but against trading colonies 'like cattle'.¹⁶³ Specifically against *German* colonialism and served also to paternalistically stress that 'colonial Powers have to shoulder a heavy responsibility, that of the development, transformation and progress of the native'.¹⁶⁴

On the other hand, delegates from the self-proclaimed imperial 'have-nots' advocated for a redistribution of colonies. Italian Fascist delegate Vito Catastini stated that colonies would provide only 'a relative solution' (referring to colonies as a 'light lunch') that could nonetheless stimulate the economy of the 'mother-country' and 'help solve the problem of overpopulation'.¹⁶⁵ Japanese delegate Shunzo Yoshizaka argued that the problem of overpopulation was more urgent among 'civilized nations' and that colonies like Manchukuo 'offers an outlet for emigration'.¹⁶⁶ Another Japanese delegate Saburo Yamada stated that the 'raw materials question can never be settled satisfactorily without an equitable redistribution of the underdeveloped regions of the world' and that a 'fair redistribution of colonies' was necessary 'to ensure the real peace of the world'.¹⁶⁷ In a thinly veiled threat of war, Fritz Berber asserted that Germany's claim for the retrocession of colonies was not based on its economic needs as a 'have-not' but 'on grounds of right and justice'.¹⁶⁸ Berber, who in 1935 had euphemistically compared former German territories and colonies to a 'watch' unjustly stolen at Versailles,¹⁶⁹ critiqued the 'abstract formula' that 'it is not legitimate to transfer native people like cattle' while contending that this was 'exactly the way' they were taken from Germany at Versailles.¹⁷⁰ Berber furthermore rejected the argument that Germany's former colonies would 'be of no use to us' or that Germany would 'break down' if it 'accepted this terrible white man's burden'.¹⁷¹

¹⁵⁹Pemberton, *The Story of International Relations, Part Three*, p. 188.

¹⁶⁰IIC, 'Peaceful Change', pp. 309, 473.

¹⁶¹Ibid., pp. 446, 456–8, 463.

¹⁶²Ibid., p. 445.

¹⁶³Ibid., p. 399.

¹⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 469, 438.

¹⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 440–1.

¹⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 375–6.

¹⁶⁷Ibid., p. 352.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 465–7.

¹⁶⁹IIC, 'Collective Security', p. 277.

¹⁷⁰IIC, 'Peaceful Change', pp. 464–5.

¹⁷¹Ibid., pp. 467, 479.

Colonialism was thus central in the ISC's 'noble' peace mission in that colonies featured as objects to be exchanged for a new equilibrium of peace in Europe. Some participants rebelled against this framing of the problem, though. In a last minute amendment, it was 'thought advisable' to add as a 'solution' the 'gradual disappearance of colonial status as a result of the emancipation of the native population'.¹⁷² Participants opposing the transfer of colonies also argued that the ideal goal is the 'complete sovereignty of the native peoples', the 'end of all Imperial domination rather than sharing its privileges', that colonial administration was 'inherently unnatural', that colonial subjects are the truly 'dissatisfied' that require peaceful change, and that justice would imply that colonies were 'given to their inhabitants'.¹⁷³ As Pemberton summarises, the debates on colonial retrocession signalled a gradual change in the attitude towards colonies – from exploitation to trusteeship and eventual independence – and may even have tipped the opinion in favour of decolonisation.¹⁷⁴

Finally, it is worth briefly touching upon the thread connected back to the administrative meetings. After having attending the 1937 study conference on Peaceful Change, Zimmern wrote a preliminary memorandum in preparation for the 1938 University Teaching discussions where he asked the conference whether other subjects should be added to the subject matter of IR. These included 'Biology in certain of its aspects (e.g. the study of natural resources in the animal and vegetable world or of certain questions, such as the inheritance of acquired characters, bearing upon problems of social organization), Geology in certain of its aspects (e.g. the study of mineral resources), Demography, as a detached branch of Sociology or Social Science?'¹⁷⁵ In a later note on the agenda for the 1938 University Teaching discussions, he asked the conference to consider 'in particular, what is the relationship between International Relations and the natural science, such as geology and biology, which have important bearings upon the course of world affairs.'¹⁷⁶ At the 1938 conference on University Teaching, he suggested that 'nickel, chromium, tungsten, etc. belong to the world of international relations.'¹⁷⁷ When read on its own, this might seem like a trivial, perhaps somewhat curious, academic argument about the merits of certain natural sciences in an interdisciplinary definition of IR. But when read alongside the study meetings that presumably inspired their addition, there is a thread connecting the discussions on IR's subject matter in the teaching meetings to the imperial-colonial peace project discussed in the study meetings. It is of course difficult to determine whether Zimmern's suggestions were directly inspired by the 1937 study conference, but it is notable that those subjects had been prominent in the conference and that this was precisely around this point that the suggestion to integrate study meeting topics further into university teaching was made.¹⁷⁸

Conclusion

The earliest and most institutionalised reflections on the subject matter of IR were entangled with the imperialist and racialised politics of the interwar period. Debates on how restrictively or comprehensively to define the subject matter of IR – as interstate politics or 'all human' relations ranging from racial relations to the extraction of minerals – took place alongside discussions on whether a redistribution of colonies could provide enough raw materials and population outlets to Germany, Italy, and Japan to prevent another war and preserve 'Western civilisation'. Not all participants agreed with the most comprehensive definitions of academic IR or with political

¹⁷²Ibid., pp. 418, 450–1, 460, 477.

¹⁷³Richardson, Shiels, and Wright in Ibid., pp. 450–3, 460–3, 477, 524.

¹⁷⁴Pemberton, *The Story of International Relations, Part Three*, pp. 198–201.

¹⁷⁵Zimmern, 'University Teaching of International Relations: Preliminary Memorandum', p. 2.

¹⁷⁶Alfred Zimmern, 'Note by Sir A. Zimmern on the Agenda of the Meetings on the University Teaching of International Relations [AG 1-IIIC-K-XI-18]' (1938), p. 2.

¹⁷⁷Zimmern in Zimmern, 'University Teaching of International Relations' (1939), p. 218.

¹⁷⁸IIC, 'Agenda of the Programme Meeting on the University Teaching of International Relations', p. 2.

proposals for appeasement by redistributing colonies, there was dissent, but the fact that the ISC was a site of significant disagreements should not obscure that this was nonetheless the terrain on which the discourse unfolded. Even if not universally accepted, the suggested slogan ‘Nothing Human is Foreign to Us’ is also rendered problematic by the fact that the ISC itself reproduced a colonial relation where the ‘us’ for whom nothing human is foreign was predominantly European, white, and male while the colonised humans so central to its discussions were absent, infantilised, and spoken for. The conference was sometimes conscious of its absences. Colonial roundtables were introduced by rejecting that ‘the absent are always in the wrong’ and stressing that ‘their rights and interests will always be taken into account.’¹⁷⁹ But it was nevertheless an expression of paternalistic ‘white man’s burden’ imperialism when a group of mostly white Euro-American men who considered themselves a ‘League of Minds’ reminded each other to remember the ‘interests of natives’ but did not entertain the thought that silenced and subjugated humans should have a say in the deliberations. The systematic exclusion and objectification of colonised peoples was enabled – indeed rendered natural and invisible – by the conference’s racial hierarchisation of humans into ‘natives’, ‘primitive societies’, and ‘backward tribes’ who were deemed incapable of self-government and of even ‘understanding’ international politics versus ‘whites’ and ‘civilized Powers’ who saw it as their noble task to speak for, tutor and develop the former.¹⁸⁰

The main ‘so what’ question is whether this history constitutes a legacy of IR, then and now, or simply the ISC? And if we do view this as a legacy of contemporary IR, what disciplinary feats had to be accomplished to forget it?¹⁸¹ One possible objection to viewing the ISC as a legacy of IR stems from its interdisciplinary nature: namely, that this was not ‘IR proper’ but law, history, economics, political science, and sociology, with some demographics, geology, and colonial administration mixed in. Because this was a period of premature institutionalisation, revisionist readings of the racism, and imperialism in individual pre-Second World War authors – who were rarely trained, working, and publishing in ‘IR’ because no such thing existed – therefore risk being dismissed as ‘not-really-IR’. This objection is misleading, though, because the prevailing view of IR at the ISC was exactly multi- if not super-disciplinary: as the ‘conductor’ discipline that organised auxiliary disciplines around international problems. Furthermore, it is hard to dismiss the ISC as not proper IR when it organised an entire conference series entitled ‘University Teaching of International Relations’. Furthermore, the participating scholars increasingly identified with ‘IR’ and many have later become central figures in the disciplinary pantheon.

To say that the ISC was part of the history of IR is not, however, to say that it was exhaustive or representative of interwar IR. The ISC was one particular attempt to institutionalise IR under the League of Nations. The result was an elite network of institutions and never an open academic association as we know them today. The League connection meant that the ISCs were not ‘academic conferences’ as contemporarily understood, but quasi-diplomatic conferences due to their organisation into national committees. They constantly tried to strike a balance between examining international problems from different national viewpoints while also remaining scientific and not taking on an official character. The institutional connection to the League, which valued universalism in the form of political neutrality, also explains the ISC’s *raison d’être* of promoting sympathetic understanding and thus possibly the tolerance of Fascists at the conferences. The Fascists were a minority in most ISC conferences and their participation was perhaps also unsurprising considering the European diplomatic scene at the time. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that Fascist legacies on the institutionalisation of IR remain more obscure in disciplinary memory than the interconnections between interwar idealism, liberal internationalism, and

¹⁷⁹IIIC, ‘Peaceful Change’, p. 418.

¹⁸⁰Ibid., pp. 463, 473.

¹⁸¹Vitalis, *White World Order*.

imperialism that have received sustained attention in the histories of IR, thus offering a promising avenue for further research.

A final possible objection might come from a more contextualist perspective: namely, that the ISC should be confined to and understood in its interwar context, not through presentist lenses. Surely, the ISC was in many ways an interwar phenomenon the contemporary relevance of which can be questioned. It eventually failed as an institution and ultimately imploded post-World War Two. The comprehensive and normative vision of IR covering all human relations encapsulated by Zimmern's 'Nothing Human is Foreign to Us' slogan, which was not even hegemonic in the interwar period, eventually lost out to the restrictive political science vision in the postwar period. Few of its memoranda and publications are read today. So who cares? All this could be taken as evidence that the ISC is of mere antiquarian interest. Indeed, a more externalist contextualist objection might go further to argue that the ISC was simply a 'product of its time'. That it reflected the interwar context and norms and was perhaps no more imperialist or racist than the surrounding society. Besides, if colonial and racial relations constituted a large part of world affairs back then, the objection might go, would it not only be natural that they formed part of the subject matter of IR then, and less so in the postcolonial era? This externalist objection ignores that the ontologies of IR never only reflect a 'world outside' but are also complicit in constituting and reproducing it. Moreover, the radical temporal break between eras is questionable. Even though 'Nothing Human is Foreign to Us' looks like an antiquated road not taken, the break between imperial and state-centric ontologies was and is not clear-cut. The two coexisted then and some of the political categories of empire linger. For example, the distinction between 'haves' and 'have-nots' – and the related terminology of 'satisfied' and 'dissatisfied' states – remains central in realism today. In the ISC discourse, these terms were not only deployed to describe states, but empires: 'have-nots' were *imperial* 'have-nots'. The notion that IR was born to create peace *among states* obscures the centrality of imperial ontologies and the imperial peace project. Similarly, the concept of 'peaceful change' has recently been revived in IR, but its colonial origins are also mostly neglected.¹⁸² These imperial legacies cannot be dismissed by reference to individual prejudices or aberrations when they were institutionalised in a conference that gathered hundreds of then-prominent scholars. This, again, underlines the importance of studying institutional infrastructure, not only individual authors.

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¹⁸²T. V. Paul, 'Recasting statecraft: International Relations and strategies of peaceful change', *International Studies Quarterly*, 61:1 (2017), pp. 1–13.