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Understanding non-governmental organizations in world politics: the promise and pitfalls of the early 'science of internationalism'

Abstract

The years immediately preceding the First World War witnessed the development of a significant body of literature claiming to establish a 'science of internationalism'. This article draws attention to the importance of this literature, especially in relation to understanding the roles of non-governmental organizations in world politics. It elaborates the ways in which this literature sheds light on issues that have become central to twenty-first century debates, including the characteristics, influence, and legitimacy of non-governmental organizations in international relations. Amongst the principal authors discussed in the article are Paul Otlet, Henri La Fontaine and Alfred Fried, whose role in the development of international theory has previously received insufficient attention. The article concludes with evaluation of potential lessons to be drawn from the experience of the early twentieth century 'science of internationalism'.

Keywords: internationalism, non-governmental organizations, global governance, world government

Introduction

The notion that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are significant actors in world politics has become one of the hallmarks of post-Cold War international relations scholarship and teaching (Price 2003; Mingst and Arreguin-Toft 2013: 233-40). The growing literature on NGOs in world politics has been concerned with many aspects, including, amongst others, NGOs' defining characteristics (Willetts 2011), how NGOs influence international decision-making (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998),

and how intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) interact with NGOs (Tallberg, Sommerer, Squatrito and Jönsson 2013; Ruhlman 2015). Further concerns have included NGOs' status in international law (Charnovitz 2006), how the growing reach and influence of NGOs may be explained (Scholte 2000), and the role of NGOs in bringing about a more peaceful world (Kaldor 2003). Recent literature has laid special emphasis on the sources of legitimacy of NGOs (Steffek and Hahn 2010; Nasiritousi, Hjerpe and Bäckstrand 2015), and a common concern has been how NGOs should seek to enhance the effectiveness and legitimacy of their activities (Schmitz, Raggo and Bruno-van Vijfeijken 2012). Such concerns are far from new. As this article will show, each of these aspects of NGOs' roles in world politics were addressed by the 'science of internationalism' that was developed by Alfred Fried, Henri La Fontaine, and Paul Otlet before the First World War, the pertinence of which to contemporary debates on NGOs in world politics has been almost entirely overlooked in post-Cold War international relations scholarship.

Despite their extensive history (Davies 2014), it remains common for introductory textbooks to claim that NGOs are "new" forces in international politics' (Ahmed and Potter 2006: ix). As Götz (2008: 238) argues, it is not NGOs that are of recent origin but the term that is used to describe them, which entered common discourse with the drafting of Article 71 of the United Nations Charter in 1945, and which displaced previous terms such as 'free international associations' or 'private international organizations'. It is partly on account of this mid-twentieth century

change of terminology that writings on NGOs since this date have largely neglected the earlier literature on 'private international organizations'.

Twenty-first century literature on NGOs in world politics has commonly drawn from classical scholarship, but rather than turning to the early twentieth century 'science of internationalism' it has looked instead to the writings on civil society and associations of authors such as Ferguson, Tocqueville, Hegel and Gramsci (Kaldor 2003: 15-21). This choice is surprising given that in these writings, as Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor (2001: 16) argue, 'civil society was primarily thought of as a national concept'. The literature on private international associations preceding the First World War, on the other hand, placed its primary focus specifically on international rather than domestic actors.

The neglect in the contemporary literature on NGOs in world politics of the early 'science of internationalism' is all the more surprising given the considerable influence of this literature in its day. For instance, two of the three principal authors explored in this article, Alfred Fried and Henri La Fontaine, were Nobel Peace Prize winners, while the other, Paul Otlet, has since been acclaimed as the intellectual progenitor of the internet (Wright 2014). Furthermore, as Wilson (2003: 223) has argued, these authors were to have a profound influence on later international relations theorists including Leonard Woolf. The institution which these authors co-founded, the Union of International Associations (UIA), remains to this day the leading data repository on NGOs, with its *Yearbook of International Organizations* being the

source of first resort for statistical analyses of NGOs (Boli and Thomas 1999; Smith and Wiest 2012).

In recent years, there has been growing interest in international relations theory preceding the First World War (for instance, Long and Schmidt 2005; Ashworth 2013; Bell 2014). However, although the significance of topics now recognised as 'global governance' to debates in this period has been recognised (Jahn 2013: 18), recent literature on international relations theory in the opening years of the twentieth century has commonly overlooked the role of private international associations in that theory. Furthermore there has been a tendency in this literature to concentrate primarily on authors located in Great Britain and the United States, in preference to the authors operating in continental Europe discussed in this article, despite the influence of the latter upon some of the former (as noted by Wilson 2003: 223). Although historically informed studies of internationalism have been growing in number (for instance, Holbraad 2003 and Macciò 2015), the contributions of the authors considered in this article have tended to be omitted.

As Hurrell (2001: 493-4) has argued, the study of international relations has often suffered from 'relentless presentism' and better engagement with history can help shed light on how concepts developed, how contemporary debates were considered in earlier contexts, and how the contrasts between past and present understandings may be instructive on contemporary concerns. In this article, through evaluation of the work of Fried, Otlet and La Fontaine, each of these roles of an historical perspective are elaborated in relation to the study of NGOs in world politics.

In respect of the development of concepts, this article considers how in the period preceding the First World War understandings which have endured to the present-day were shaped of the distinguishing characteristics and bases of legitimacy of public and private international organizations. With respect to the evaluation of contemporary debates in an earlier context, the article considers how early twentieth century work explored the ways in which NGOs and IGOs interact, how NGOs pioneer norms, the factors explaining NGOs' growth, the legal status of NGOs, and how NGOs may enhance their effectiveness and legitimacy. In considering these aspects, the article shows continuities between the pre-war work and contemporary discussions, such as in identifying the norm entrepreneurship role of NGOs. However, the article also reveals significant contrasts with present-day literature, especially in relation to the role of hierarchy and centralization in addressing the effectiveness and legitimacy of NGOs. As the concluding sections elaborate, these contrasts shed light on potential pitfalls present-day literature should avoid in addressing NGO effectiveness and legitimacy.

Turning to the literature on private international associations from before the First World War is therefore valuable not only because it provides context for understanding the evolution of ontological issues such as regarding the boundaries between the public and the private in global governance, but also because it helps us to understand moral questions concerning the accountability and legitimacy of NGOs. As DeMars and Dijkzeul (2015: 3) note, in the present day 'more observers are questioning the presumptive legitimacy accorded to NGOs, which claim to hold states

and other actors to account while their own accountability remains elusive.’ This article will show that the handling of this issue in the early twentieth century ‘science of internationalism’ reveals limitations of approaches that emphasise hierarchical structures and centralized organization, which neglect management of a plurality of perspectives, and which fail to address the concerns of unrepresented groups.

After surveying the many strands of internationalist theory that developed in the years immediately preceding the First World War, this article introduces the three leading authors considered in this article - Fried, Otlet and La Fontaine - and what they meant by a ‘science of internationalism’. The article proceeds to discuss multiple ways in which core aspects of analysis of the roles of NGOs in world politics central to twenty-first century debates were explored in their thought, including NGOs’ defining features, influence, interactions with IGOs, legal status, and legitimacy. The article concludes by revealing the limitations of their work and the relevance of these limitations to contemporary concerns especially with respect to the structure and legitimacy of NGOs in world politics: the need go beyond strictly hierarchical and centralized structures, and to address the concerns of diverse perspectives and unrepresented constituencies are emphasised.

Internationalism preceding the First World War

As De Carvalho, Leira and Hobson (2011: 748) have argued, the academic study of international relations did not begin with a ‘big bang’ in 1919. In the years leading up to the First World War, a diverse body of literature sought to deepen understanding of

international relations, with internationalism – alongside imperialism – constituting one of the predominant themes (Long and Schmidt 2005: 9).

Internationalism has been defined as ‘the ideology of international bonding’ (Holbraad 2003: 1) or ‘the idea that we both are and should be part of a broader community than that of the nation or the state’ (Halliday 1988: 187). In recent work, a wide range of forms of internationalism have been disaggregated, with liberal approaches emphasising the benefits of international integration being contrasted with hegemonic perspectives stressing the asymmetries in international cooperation and revolutionary approaches promoting the potential of the international arena for facilitating revolutionary change (Halliday 1988: 194). Within liberal internationalism, economic, political, socio-educational, legal-organizational, humanitarian, and integrationist perspectives have been identified, with each perspective emphasising different agendas, such as free trade, non-intervention, democracy, international law, human rights, and regional integration (Holbraad 2003: 8-9).

A common feature of liberal internationalist thought has been promotion of international reforms as a means towards international peace (Ceadel 1987: 110). The nature of the reforms to be promoted, however, has varied considerably between authors from different perspectives. One of the most commonly repeated typologies contrasts commercial, republican, institutional and sociological perspectives that promote the advancement of peace through reforms facilitating free trade, democracy, international regimes and transnational interactions respectively (Baldwin 1993: 4; Lamy 2011: 122).

In the years preceding the First World War, alternative typologies of internationalisms were put forward (Van Acker and Somsen 2012: 1398-1399). At this time, internationalisms were commonly seen to be associated with particular sectors within society, such as socialists, Catholics, and businessmen. One prominent Dutch internationalist, Pieter Eijkman (1908: 2), therefore disaggregated three internationalisms based on the German flag: 'gold' economic internationalism promoted by businessmen, 'red' socialist internationalism, and 'black' clerical internationalism (Somsen 2014: 217).

Paul Otlet (1908: 12), on the other hand, drew distinctions closer to contemporary typologies providing contrasting solutions to the problem of war: a pacifist perspective promoting disarmament, a juridical perspective promoting international law, an interparliamentarian perspective promoting arbitration, and a socialist perspective promoting the demise of capitalism (Van Acker and Somsen 2012: 1399).

Commentators in the opening years of the twentieth century were often struck by the rich variety of international activities that had developed by this time, with approximately 400 private international associations estimated to be operational by 1911 (Otlet and La Fontaine 1912c: 32). Most of these organizations were headquartered in European cities such as London, Paris and Brussels, and many of them survive to the present day. They had expanded particularly rapidly since 1870, in a period broadly coinciding with the era of 'new imperialism,' the second industrial

revolution, and the establishment of a range of specialist sectoral intergovernmental bodies, but no 'general association of nations' (Davies 2014; Boli and Thomas 1999).

The rich array of international associational life at the onset of the twentieth century - including public as well as private international organizations - led Paul Reinsch (1911: 4) to assert in his landmark work on public international unions that 'cosmopolitanism is no longer a castle in the air, but it has become incorporated in numerous associations and unions world-wide in their co-operation' and Norman Angell in his famous book *The Great Illusion* (1911: 188) to claim: 'In a thousand respects association cuts across State boundaries, which are purely conventional, and renders the biological division of mankind into independent and warring States a scientific ineptitude'.

The diversity of international associations that had developed by beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century was so great that it may be argued that as many as twenty-one different forms of internationalism were represented among them, each form of internationalism promoting a different variety of international reform as a means towards the promotion of a more peaceful world. These are summarised in Table 1, which is based on the author's analysis of the objectives of the international NGOs operational in the period preceding the First World War listed in the *Annales* of the Union of International Associations. Each of the organizations listed in this table included as a component of their objectives the promotion of international peace by the mechanism indicated in the table. For the authors

considered in this article – Fried, Otlet, and La Fontaine – it was the combined efforts of these associations that contributed towards a more peaceful world.

Table 1: Twenty-one internationalisms that had developed by 1911^a

<i>Internationalism</i>	<i>Mechanism for promotion of peace</i>	<i>Representative NGO (with year of foundation)</i>
<i>Anarchist</i>	Universal freedom from authority	Anarchist International (1907)
<i>Cooperative</i>	International cooperative associationalism	International Cooperative Alliance (1895)
<i>Economic liberal</i>	Free trade and investment	Permanent Committee of the International Congresses of Chambers of Commerce (1906)
<i>Educational</i>	Internationalist education	International Bureau of New Schools (1894)
<i>Environmental</i>	Global environmental cooperation	World League for Protection of Animals (1898)
<i>Feminist</i>	Women's cooperation and equality	International Council of Women (1888)
<i>Institutional</i>	International federation or confederation	Union of International Associations (1910)
<i>Intellectual</i>	Scientific progress through cross-border collaboration	Universal Scientific Alliance (1876)
<i>Legalist</i>	International arbitration	International Law Association (1873)
<i>Linguistic</i>	Universal auxiliary language	Universala Esperanto-Asocio (1908)
<i>Nationalist</i>	Universal national self-determination	Union of Nationalities (1911)
<i>Pacifist</i>	Disarmament	International Peace Bureau (1891)
<i>Professional</i>	International professional cooperation	International Council of Nurses (1899)
<i>Religious</i>	Ecumenism or interfaith dialogue	World Alliance of YMCAs (1855)
<i>Republican</i>	Spread of republican governments	International League of Peace and Liberty (1867)
<i>Socialist</i>	Social ownership of the means of production	International Socialist Bureau (1900)
<i>Sport</i>	'Happy and brotherly' sport encounters (Pierre de Coubertin)	International Olympic Committee (1894)
<i>Syndicalist</i>	International trade unionism	International Federation of Trade Unions (1901/13)
<i>Technical</i>	Global standardization	International Association for Obtaining a Uniform Decimal System (1855)
<i>Welfare</i>	Transnational humanitarianism	International Committee of the Red Cross (1863)
<i>Youth</i>	International youth fraternity	International Federation of Students (1889)

Given this context of multiple internationalisms put forward by multiple international associations in the years preceding the First World War, it is

^a Note: not an exhaustive list; not all of the organizations listed here were still in existence in 1911.

unsurprising that efforts were made to advance the scientific study of this phenomenon at that time. It is this 'science of internationalism', announced in an article by Alfred Fried five years before the onset of the First World War, that is the focus of this article.

The 'scientists of internationalism'

The principal 'scientists of internationalism' explored in this article – Alfred Fried, Paul Otlet and Henri La Fontaine – were amongst the most influential international figures of their time, a status recognised in a growing body of transnational historical research (Laqua 2013; Rayward 2014; Rodogno, Struck and Vogel 2015). Yet, with the exception of the occasional reference to their work in the context of other authors such as Angell and Woolf (Wilson 2003: 223; Knutsen 2013: 23) they remain almost unknown in the theory of international relations. While the significance of science to early twentieth century internationalism has been recognized (Fritz 2005), the application of a 'science of internationalism' to the study of private international associations in this period has up to now been neglected in the study of international relations.

The first – and most sophisticated – of the three principal 'scientists of internationalism' explored in this article was Alfred Fried, an Austrian Jewish pacifist renown for his role in establishing the *Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft* and for editing *Die Friedenswarte*, described by the Nobel Peace Prize Committee as 'the best journal in the peace movement' (Laqua 2014: 182). Fried spearheaded the scientific study of

public and private international associations by launching the *Annuaire de la Vie Internationale* in 1905, which sought to become 'a reliable and complete guide to international life', an international directory surveying official and private international congresses and organizations (Fried 1905: vii-viii).

In 1907, Fried chose to collaborate with the other two principal 'scientists of internationalism' studied in this article – the Belgian founders of the International Institute of Bibliography Paul Otlet and Henri La Fontaine – in the production of an expanded version of the *Annuaire de la Vie Internationale* (Laqua 2014: 186). In 1912, these volumes were joined by Otlet and La Fontaine's journal, *La Vie Internationale*, which aimed 'to follow in its many aspects, the vast movement of ideas, facts and organizations which constitute international life' (Otlet and La Fontaine 1912a: 5). Through these and the other early publications of their Union of International Associations, Otlet and La Fontaine pursued an ambitious approach to the role of public and private international associations in world politics, which extended beyond Fried's more cautious perspective.

Despite their differences, Fried, Otlet and La Fontaine shared an approach to world politics that placed international organizations – both intergovernmental and non-governmental – at the centre of their work. In the study of peace movements (Chickering 1975; Van den Dungen 1977; Cortright 2008), Fried has become known for his promotion of 'scientific pacifism' which he distinguished from a 'dilletantist pacifist' perspective in its consideration of peace as the result of a 'natural process' rather than an ideal to be constructed (Fried 1916: 16). In outlining the 'science of

internationalism' Fried (1909: 24) emphasised the importance of a 'natural logic' underpinning the evolution of international organizations, drawing analogies with evolutionary biology. Fried, Otlet and La Fontaine described political institutions including states and international organizations as 'organisms', and much of their work was dedicated to taxonomy (UIA 1912).

Although Fried (1909: 24) described the 'science of internationalism' as interrogating causal processes as well as the 'essence and scope' of internationalism, his approach and that of Otlet and La Fontaine did not involve the rigorous hypothesis-testing characteristic of later 'scientific' approaches to the study of international relations. Nevertheless, Fried (1916: 16) was keen to claim a contrast between an empirical-analytical focus in his 'scientific pacifism' and a more exclusively normative and programmatic perspective in earlier pacifisms which he described as 'utopian'.

Fritz (2005: 143) has noted that other internationalist writers of the era such as Hobson and Reinsch shared an outlook emphasising the contributions of scientific cooperation to technological progress and international integration, and this was a perspective also shared by Otlet, La Fontaine and Fried. For instance, Fried (1909: 26) claimed that 'science as a whole works unconsciously in an international manner', promoting progress towards a more integrated world through the international congresses, publications, and associations that scientists had developed.

In turning to evolutionary biology as a model for their 'science of internationalism', Fried, Otlet and La Fontaine built on the earlier work of Jacques

Novicow (1901), which outlined the purportedly natural evolution of human societies towards global intergovernmental federation. In respect of their treatment of the evolution of intergovernmental organizations as analogous to the development of higher organisms in biological science, their work may therefore be considered to be unoriginal (Chickering 1975: 101-2; Laqua 2014: 183). However, in their consideration specifically of *private* international organizations, their work extended significantly beyond that of other writers in this period.

While Fried, Otlet and La Fontaine advanced more fully than any other authors in their time the 'scientific' study of private international associations, it should be noted that they were not unique. For example, Otlet and La Fontaine built on the work of Cyrille van Overbergh, founder of the Belgian Sociological Society, whose 1907 study *L'Association Internationale* provided some conceptual and analytical foundations for Otlet and La Fontaine's later studies. At the same time in the Netherlands, Eijkman (1910 and 1911) emulated the methods of Otlet and La Fontaine in narrower studies of medical and scientific international associations.

These authors were keen to distinguish their 'scientific' internationalism focused on associations from alternative internationalisms put forward by groups such as socialists and pacifists (Otlet 1908: 12-13; Eijkman 1908: 1-2). Eijkman liked to describe his internationalism as 'colourless' since associations could represent any ideology (Eijkman 1908: 2), while Otlet and Overbergh described the internationalism of associations with which they were concerned as 'the highest and most fruitful' (van Overbergh 1907: 4; Otlet 1908: 23). However, the perspective on

the role of NGOs in world affairs put forward by these authors was as this article will show far from neutral, and reveals that traditional portrayals of Otlet and La Fontaine as 'peacemakers' 'devoted to justice' (Gillen 2010 and 2012) need to be reconsidered.

NGOs in the early 'science of internationalism'

Although Fried, Otlet and La Fontaine dedicated much of their attention to the study of intergovernmental and not only non-governmental organizations, it was in the particular consideration given to non-governmental actors that their work was especially noteworthy for going beyond the writings of contemporaries such as Reinsch who concentrated primarily on the intergovernmental sector and whose work has more commonly been recognised in international relations literature. Given their role in the creation of an international NGO comprised of and dedicated to serving the interests of international NGOs – the Union of International Associations – Fried, Otlet and La Fontaine produced studies that are especially valuable for their consideration of core aspects of NGOs in world politics that have become central to twenty-first century analysis. These included the defining features of NGOs, their interactions with intergovernmental organizations, the factors explaining their growth, their legal status, and their legitimacy. The following paragraphs will unpack each of these aspects in turn.

Defining characteristics of NGOs

Although the early twentieth century 'scientists of internationalism' did not use the term 'NGO', the distinction between public and private international organizations was one that they were keen to specify. In one of the earliest works to draw the contrast, van Overbergh (1907: 4-5, 8) distinguished between 'official' (i.e. governmental) and 'free' (i.e. non-governmental) international associations, characterised by international composition, being open to members in multiple countries, having general and non-profit-making objectives and a permanent organization. These defining characteristics – such as the emphasis on non-profit objectives – were adopted by Fried, Otlet and La Fontaine, and remain to this day influential in understandings of what constitute groups subsequently referred to as NGOs, with profit-making transnational corporations excluded from consideration (Willetts 2011: 9). Eijkman (1910: 2) was particularly vehement that profit-making establishments 'cannot ever be considered to be included'.

In the present day, it is common to make a tripartite distinction among international organizations comprising (i) intergovernmental organizations consisting of states, (ii) non-governmental organizations possessing non-state members, and (iii) 'hybrid international organizations' with a membership of both states and nonstate actors (Willetts 2011: 4, 64, 73). Building on Overbergh's work, Otlet (1909: 46) and Fried (1909: 27-28) anticipated this typology when they drew a contrast between 'official' organizations set up by governments, 'private' (or 'free') institutions set up

independently of governments, and a third category of 'mixed' organizations combining governmental and non-governmental involvement.

Given the apparent novelty of their subject of research, much of the early 'scientific' study of international associations was dedicated to basic tasks of categorization. Otlet (1909: 65-9), for instance, disaggregated eleven different purposes of international organizations: scientific research, scientific organization, professional interest, propaganda, public utility, social and political action, economic organization, ethics/religion, forming relationships, information exchange, and solidarity. However, the early twentieth century 'science of internationalism' also spoke to deeper analytical themes that have become central to recent analyses of NGOs' place in world politics. In some cases this work anticipated key aspects of contemporary debates in the study of international relations, while in other cases this work is significant for the very different approaches taken to those in the present day, as the subsequent sections of this article will reveal.

Interactions between NGOs and intergovernmental organizations

The early scientists of internationalism did not merely distinguish between intergovernmental and nongovernmental international organizations: they also explored the interactions among these institutions that have become a significant component of the contemporary study of global governance. As Steffek and Hahn (2010: 10) argue, NGOs 'function as "transmission belts" between the transnational citizenry and the sites of intergovernmental policymaking'. In one of the earliest

treatments of the subject, Otlet (1909: 47) noted the way in which private international organizations would serve as what today would be termed 'norm entrepreneurs' (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998) by pioneering international standards and campaigning for their adoption by governments. The example Otlet (1909: 47) used was the International Bureau for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic, which successfully promoted an international agreement on the traffic of women that attracted the signatures of a dozen states including Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Russia in 1904 (Limoncelli 2010).

In contemporary global governance, it is common to note the role of NGOs not only in pioneering new norms but also in the process of securing the adherence of additional states to international standards and in facilitating the internalization of international norms in states' practices (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 895). A century ago, Otlet (1909: 47-8) used the example of the International Literary and Artistic Association and its relationship with the intergovernmental intellectual property institutions at Berne to illustrate how private international associations would 'prepare extensions to conventions and secure new state signatories' to them, as well as assisting and monitoring their work.

Otlet was not the only author to explore the relations between private and public international organizations preceding the First World War. For example, Reinsch (1911: 167) noted how intergovernmental bodies would sometimes turn to private institutions for information, although he viewed this information as 'limited, partial, and in many ways inadequate'. This anticipates more recent literature that has

noted the functional demand for NGO resources among intergovernmental institutions, amongst other factors driving their relations (Tallberg, Sommerer, Squatrito and Jönsson 2013; Ruhlman 2015). Reinsch (1911: 146) further remarked that private international organizations could afford to take greater risks and to promote more ambitious objectives than States that had to 'regard every interest from the point of view of national organization'.

Explaining the growth of NGOs

In a similar manner to post-Cold War claims with respect to the 'rise' of transnational civil society (Florini 2000), at the onset of the twentieth century it appeared to some authors writing at the time that private international organizations had become 'infinitely numerous' and were a 'new, interesting and serious' development, constituting even 'a kind of "international self-government"' (Kazansky 1902: 355). For Fried (1907: 36) 'private internationality' was significantly 'further reaching' than that of governments, and he claimed that by 1907 'there are very few branches of knowledge, of trade, of labour, of art, etc. the representatives of which have not combined internationally.' The explanations that were put forward for the growth of private international associations in literature from this period merit further attention.

In post-Cold War literature explanations put forward for the rise of transnational civil society have often concentrated on the context of globalization, involving 'mutually reinforcing impulses of global thinking, certain turns in capitalist development, technological innovations, and enabling regulations' (Scholte 2000:

240). Rather than 'globalization', Otlet and La Fontaine (1912b: 29) referred to 'the era of globality' to describe the context of the multiplying international associations which they witnessed, a term initially put forward by Belgian sociologist Guillaume de Greef (Van Acker 2014: 157). For Otlet and La Fontaine (1912b: 29-30), this context of 'globality' included global thinking ('une pensée mondiale'), an 'economy that has become global in all sectors of work, industry, commerce and finance', as well as technological developments including global communications, and an international political context shaped by public international unions.

Just as teleological arguments underpin present-day arguments concerning the 'inevitability' of a world state (Wendt 2003), there was a strongly teleological aspect to work on the evolution of international organizations in the early twentieth century (Duras 1908; Van Acker 2014). Even no less a figure than Kaiser Wilhelm II argued in 1904 that 'gradually the solidarity among nations of civilized countries makes undoubted progress in different fields ... that these fields are extended ... and that the solidarity is, unnoticed but irresistibly, introduced into the programme of Statesmen' (quoted in Fried 1907: 36). The 'scientists of internationalism' Fried, Otlet and La Fontaine applied a similar perspective to explaining the development of the private international associations that by 1907 Fried (1907: 36) described as 'innumerable'. Fried (1911: 17; 1909: 24) argued that international associations had developed through 'a natural process' in an 'ascending line' from the formation by the earliest humans of families and tribes, through to the formation of states and in turn international associations. The evolution of human organization was summarised by

Otlet and La Fontaine in Figure 1, with an endpoint termed 'the civilised community of all the world', the composition of which, including subnational and supranational entities in addition to states, was similar to that now considered under the heading of 'global governance' (Harman and Williams 2013: 3; Weiss and Wilkinson 2014: 4).

[insert Figure 1 approximately here]

The legal status of NGOs

The growing significance of NGOs in contemporary international politics has led a number of twenty-first century authors to consider their status in international law (Charnovitz 2006; Lindblom 2005). A vital problem is considered to be their lack of international legal personality (Charnovitz 2006), although Willetts (2011: 83) has noted the significance of ECOSOC consultative arrangements with NGOs in conferring to these institutions a form of international legal status.

The status of private international organizations in international law was also one of the key issues of concern for the early twentieth century 'scientists of internationalism'. For Otlet (1909: 72) it was necessary to address the issue that 'neither in national legislation nor international law do appropriate legal provisions for international associations exist'. He and La Fontaine made this a leading issue for discussion at the first world congress of international organizations that they convened in 1910, to which most of the principal NGOs of the period sent representatives as did many governments. The first resolution of this congress

advocated creation of an intergovernmental convention providing a 'supernational statute' so that private international organizations could be established on an international basis rather than having to be registered as an association in the country in which they were headquartered (UIA 1911a: 825). As the President of the Institute of International Law argued, 'international associations do not wish to be German, or French, or Belgian ... or to rely on any national law subject to modification' (UIA 1911b: 1054). The criteria considered at the congress for eligibility to be established on this 'supernational' basis (UIA 1911b: 1074-1075) were later to be crucial to NGO recognition under the consultative status procedures of ECOSOC, such as having an international membership, being organized on a not for profit basis, and being established for scientific or public interest purposes (Willetts 2011: 8-10).

NGOs' legitimacy

The legal status of NGOs comprises one part among many in contemporary discussions of these organizations' legitimacy (Mariaga 2002). Evaluations of legitimacy extending beyond regulatory aspects have often focused on the role of moral legitimacy based on values and social legitimacy centred on representation (Vedder 2007). With respect to the latter, amongst the most common arguments in contemporary literature on NGOs in global governance is that NGOs may play a critical role in addressing the 'democratic deficit' at the global level by representing constituencies that governments may be unable or unwilling to represent (Mercer 2002: 8; Nasiritousi, Hjerpe and Bäckstrand 2015: 5).

While Otlet (1909: 140) noted the significance to a private international association of its 'moral authority derived as a result of its actions', he was more interested representational aspects of legitimacy, drawing a contrast between the constituencies represented by states and those represented by private international associations. For Otlet (1909: 35), 'states correspond to no more than the grouping of interests on a territorial basis and, in large part, an ethnic base', whereas 'an alternative basis of representation, the importance of which increases with the progress of civilization, is that of professional economic and scientific specialism', combined within each state in national societies, and increasingly united in international associations formed by these national units. This anticipates the present day distinction noted by Bartelson (2014: 41) by which 'non-state actors typically do not claim authority over portions of space but over distinct functional domains or issue areas'.

Figure 2, published by Otlet and La Fontaine in 1912, illustrates the representation of contrasting interests at the international level in their early twentieth century model. At the bottom of the diagram is the representation of territorial interests by states (labelled B), and the representation of functional and specialist interests by associations is depicted at the top (labelled A). These in turn form the public and private international associations in the middle of the diagram, the interactions among which (labelled C) form what Otlet and La Fontaine termed the 'civilised community coordinating interests and relations of international life on the double basis of territorial boundaries [i.e. states in intergovernmental organizations]

and economic, intellectual and social functions [i.e. private international associations]’ (UIA 1912: 25-26).

[insert Figure 2 approximately here]

The pitfalls of the early ‘science of internationalism’

It would appear from the foregoing discussion that the early twentieth century ‘scientists of internationalism’ were remarkably prescient in their contributions to understanding the place of NGOs in world politics: they provided distinguishing characteristics of private international organizations and criteria for their international recognition which continue into contemporary practice; they disaggregated factors explaining the growing influence of these organizations which in the present day underpin approaches to globalization; and they unpacked the relationship between public and private international organizations that anticipates contemporary discussions of global governance, including a valuable distinction between the sources of authority and legitimacy of governmental and nongovernmental actors.

However, a fuller consideration of the analysis of the role of private international associations in world politics in the writings of the early ‘scientists of internationalism’ reveals significant problems that are pertinent to contemporary debates. As the concluding section will highlight, these problems are especially relevant to contemporary discussions of the authority and legitimacy of NGOs which

have drawn attention to the societal constituencies NGOs can claim to represent (Steffek and Hahn 2010: 10; Schmitz, Raggo and Bruno-van Vijfeijken 2012).

A closer inspection of the understanding of the nature of authority and representation of private international organizations in the early twentieth century 'science of internationalism', for example, reveals a fundamentally hierarchical approach to this issue. Otlet (1909: 140-1), for instance, argued that 'in general' the authority of private international associations was 'uncontested', stemming in part 'from being the only organization dedicated to international interests' in its field, with each organization's annual congress forming the arena within which its authority is recognized, and its constitution the instrument 'determining the exercise of its authority'. When discussing the issue of who should be entitled to vote in discussions, Otlet (1909: 54) highlighted the importance of enlightened leadership by sectoral experts, noting the practice of exclusion of non-specialists from decision-making in the examples he cited.

In addition to the problem of hierarchy in this work, there was also excessive faith in the utility of ever greater centralization. For Otlet and La Fontaine, the world in 1914 was confronted with a 'vast and continuous movement' promoting 'the unification of methods and international agreements on all subjects, wherever possible and desirable'. According to this perspective, the existence of multiple private international organizations working in isolation was inefficient, and a 'natural consequence' of these institutions' work was to consider how 'they form parts of a whole, which embraces the entire social functions of mankind'. As they depicted in

Figure 3, it was necessary from this perspective to address the inefficiency of multiple uncoordinated NGOs by establishing 'a world center ... to extend and coordinate international cooperation in all the sciences, technical and social activities' and 'harmonizing the ... program and ... work' of existing NGOs. This was to be achieved through 'organization of the representation of all the [private] international associations in a federated body' (UIA 1914a: 5-7). It was anticipated that for each sector of human activity there would be a single private international organization federating 'the interests of its specialism throughout the world', and these institutions in turn would establish a global confederation of NGOs. All intergovernmental organizations were anticipated to form a parallel global intergovernmental federation of IGOs. The two projected global bodies, one intergovernmental and the other non-governmental, were expected to 'realise the equilibrium of the forces' through representing territorial and sectoral interests respectively as depicted in Figure 2 (UIA 1914b: vii).

[insert Figure 3 approximately here]

Although these ideas may sound somewhat ambitious, they received widespread approval amongst internationalists in the years preceding the First World War. Nearly all of the principal international NGOs of the period agreed to take part in the two world congresses of international associations organized by Otlet and La Fontaine to promote the realisation of these objectives. The idea was particularly

popular in the international peace movement, with the Universal Peace Congress of 1908 passing a resolution promoting 'international federation of all intellectual and economic interests of humanity' (UIA 1912: 27-8). According to Schuster (1907) an 'organization of organizations' had the potential to limit the prospects for conflict between rival bodies. However, rival bodies were established to promote the unification of NGOs in a single centre: at the same time as Otlet and La Fontaine established their Union of International Associations in Brussels, Eijkman and Horrix (1907: 3) created a Foundation for the Promotion of Internationalism with the intention of establishing 'a powerful universal organization' that would 'take the place of all the... individual efforts' of particular NGOs 'in order to take in hand in a powerful international manner all those interests that require international treatment'.

It should be noted that internationalists of the pre-First World War era varied in the degree of centralization envisaged in their analyses of international organization. Fried (1909: 23, 25), for instance, was keen stress that in his perspective internationalism did not envisage 'a single world state encompassing the entirety of humanity' but rather 'the federation of interests of certain groups within states or certain interests of states themselves' in NGOs and IGOs respectively. This, Fried (1909: 25) believed, would contribute towards rather than detract from the vitality of states through the contribution made by the cumulative work of international organizations to general wellbeing.

As Herren (2000) has argued, the promotion of internationalism in the years preceding the First World War served particularly well the interests of states

otherwise marginal in international relations, particularly neutral states such as Belgium, Switzerland and the Netherlands which hosted many of the principal IGOs and NGOs of the period. The ambitious proposals of authors such as Otlet, La Fontaine and Eijkman therefore need to be considered in the context of the promotion of plans for rival 'world capitals' in Brussels and the Hague in this era (Van Acker and Somsen 2012).

A further characteristic shared in internationalist writings on NGOs in world politics in the opening years of the twentieth century was a belief that these institutions embodied 'the highest representation of worldly interests and *civilization*' (UIA 1914: xlv). For Otlet (1909: 141) NGOs represented the culmination of the 'general march of civilization towards unification, simplification, integration, concentration, comparative study, exchange of products and services, solidarity, and representation of interests'. Otlet (1909: 31-2) claimed NGOs were 'born of the great fact of the expansion of mankind throughout the world and the resulting need for agreement, unification and cooperation', following in a line from the Greek conquest of Asia Minor, the Roman conquest of Greece, the unification of medieval Europe by the Roman Catholic Church, and the European wars of revolution and empire subsequently. Despite this presentation of the evolution of NGOs in terms of what they perceived to be the culmination of a linear path of progress of 'Western civilization', the early 'scientists of internationalism' should be distinguished from other authors at the time that presented schemes for world federation based on racial lines (Bell 2014). Otlet and La Fontaine (1912: 32) emphasised what they termed 'the spirit of

polycivilisation', with NGOs 'uniting all that is good and non-contradictory of each particular civilization'. Nevertheless, it is clear that their vision of 'universal civilization' was extremely Eurocentric, with all their historical reference points stemming from the European experience. Western-centrism in scholarship on NGOs in world politics is a problem that has persisted in much of the more recent literature on the subject, as Bettiza and Dionigi (2015: 629) have noted.

The aspirations of the early 'scientists of internationalism' for a universal 'civilised community' of states united in one global federation and NGOs united in a confederation were to be brought to an abrupt halt with the German invasion of Belgium in 1914. This turn of events seems to have come as a surprise to the leaders of international associations of the time, who were preoccupied with planning for the anticipated third world congress of international associations to be held in San Francisco in 1915, which was never to take place: as Lyons (1963: 369) argued, they demonstrated 'a remoteness from reality which is almost inexplicable in view of what we know to have been the state of Europe at that time'.

Conclusion: A warning from history?

Although the First World War put an end to plans for global confederation of international NGOs, the ideas of the early 'scientists of internationalism' were to be influential in proposals for the subsequent peace settlement. Leonard Woolf's treatise on international government (1916: 164-76), for instance, drew substantially on their work in outlining the role of international NGOs in his scheme for post-war settlement.

Woolf (1916: 166-7) set the trend emulated by most subsequent authors on private international associations and later NGOs by taking forward the defining characteristics of these institutions developed by Overbergh, Fried, Otlet and La Fontaine; Woolf also pioneered the now commonplace practice of using their data on NGO numbers to justify assertions in respect of their scale. Furthermore, as this article has shown, their analysis of issues such as interactions between public and private international organizations, the legal status of NGOs, and explanations of growing NGO influence anticipated several features of contemporary discussions of global governance. The subsequent League of Nations Covenant was even to echo Otlet and La Fontaine's proposals for inter-organizational unification in Article 24's provision for the placing of existing international organizations under the direction of the League.

Nevertheless, as this article has also shown, there were considerable limitations to the analysis of the place of NGOs in world politics in the early 'science of internationalism.' Their analysis was, as argued in the previous section, characterised by excessive faith in the benefits of ever greater centralization, unification, and hierarchical organization. Insufficient attention was paid to the problem of how to manage differences within, between and beyond territorial and sectoral interests. Although in the present day there has been a growing emphasis on non-hierarchical forms of civil society mobilization, there persists into the contemporary era the vulnerability of many international NGOs to a similar critique for being 'global,

hierarchical organizations ... [that] stifle diversity and discipline dissent' (Hopgood 2013: 113-4).

In order to overcome the problems of the early 'science of internationalism', it is important to address effectively the issues which the early twentieth century authors on private international associations failed adequately to consider. Issues of representation, authority, and legitimacy – which have become of growing interest in twenty-first century work (Schmitz, Raggo and Bruno-van Vijfeijken 2012) – need to be given far more careful treatment than was evinced in the writings of Otlet and La Fontaine.

As this article has shown, Otlet and La Fontaine's federalist proposal for a world organization uniting one NGO per sector left limited scope for pluralism of perspectives, and did little to address those not represented in any association. In Otlet and La Fontaine's account, issues of representation were presented in terms of a rather crude contrast between two different forms of interest representation: territorial interests in the case of states, and sectoral interests in the case of NGOs. Although Otlet (1909: 34, 55) considered the possibility of universal, collective and plural suffrage amongst international association members and transferred to the international level Tocquevillian arguments concerning the role of associations in balancing state power, the importance of democracy is underplayed in Otlet and La Fontaine's account of interest representation, an issue later authors such as Zimmern were to take steps to address (Davies 2012).

The key question of 'How and under what conditions should NGOs take the interests of non-members into account' (Steffek and Hahn 2010: 263) is one that the early science of internationalism regrettably overlooked. Rather than elaborating on mechanisms for accountability and transparency, there was a tendency among early twentieth century institutional internationalists to place their faith simply in the enlightened leadership of sectoral experts (Otlet 1909: 54). The growing attention in post-Cold War work on NGOs to issues of democracy, accountability and legitimacy in NGOs' practices would therefore appear to be addressing a crucial deficit in the earlier literature.

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