

**Jonas Bredebach, Martin Herzer, Heidi Tworek, eds.** *International Organizations and the Media in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Exorbitant Expectations*. Routledge Studies in Modern History. Abingdon: Routledge, 2018. 256 pp. \$140.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-138-30308-9.

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Over recent years the historical study of transnational events, networks, and institutions has flourished. There has been a conscious attempt to move away from the limits of national histories and to frame old questions in new ways, reorienting our understandings of the global North and South, of East and West, and of core and periphery. Many of the recent volumes in the Routledge Studies in the Modern History series exemplify this approach, and Jonas Bredebach, Martin Herzer, and Heidi Tworek's addition is no different. The intersection between two main objects of analysis—international organizations and the media—is the focus of the volume. The subtitle of the book is “Exorbitant Expectations,” and the phrase is apt for any potential readers who might expect a comprehensive account of the interplay of international organizations and the media across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As is often the case with edited volumes that emerge from conferences, the final collection of chapters is dependent on the range of papers given by those in attendance and is thus far from comprehensive. The volume is, however, composed of a range of topics, covering disparate nations, regions, and methodologies. The introduction states that the volume is one of the first to explore interactions with the media as a “formative component of international

organizations” and frames the subsequent pieces as bringing together “two burgeoning, yet largely unconnected strands of research: the history of international organizations and international media histories” (p. 6). However, while a clear conception of international institutions is evident, the media aspect is less clearly defined. What constitutes the “media” is understood in an extremely broad manner, which might confuse those expecting a survey of the mass media, such as newspapers, television, and the radio. This has its advantages and allows the chapters to cover a wide range of topics and source material, though it also makes the effort to discern wider patterns more challenging.

Nevertheless, some clear trends are evident throughout the volume, and the introduction from the editors does an admirable job of outlining some general insights and lessons—especially regarding how international organizations interacted with and used various forms of media. The League of Nations and the United Nations and its component suborganizations, perhaps unsurprisingly, serve as the central foundation of the book. The introduction offers two arguments. The first underlines the difficulty of documenting “public opinion,” an often slippery and ill-defined concept (pp. 1-2). The second—which treads new ground—

concerns the effectiveness of the media strategies of international organizations and of those that attempted to interact with them. Although many lofty and utopian ambitions can be discerned by actors operating in such a manner across the past two centuries, the introduction makes clear that “there were limits to what media attention and publicity could achieve.” A “cynical interpretation,” it is noted, could even be made that “international organizations turned to courting the public when they could not convince politicians or other decision-makers. More communications could not conceal political conflict or lack of will” (p. 2).

The first chapter by Robert Mark Spaulding analyzes a very early—possibly the earliest—transnational institution, the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine (CCNR), which emerged from the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Spaulding provides a clear overview of the structure of the CCNR and how it functioned but also thoroughly charts the different channels and formats by which information about the CCNR was relayed. The CCNR had a complicated purview, overseeing traffic on a river that passed many different sovereign states. Spaulding outlines “five distinct print streams of print media” used by the CCNR to speak to all of the various audiences that might require information about its regulatory framework: the general press of daily newspapers; “semi-academic” material, such as encyclopedias and news essays; truly academic material, such as scholarly journals, especially in law and “proto-political science”; ordinances and decrees published by individual member states’ governments; and publications produced by senior CCNR officials and commissioners (p. 25). Spaulding acknowledges that evaluating the reception of such material is difficult, as is so often the case with questions of influence and reception. He argues, however, that attempts can be made in less direct ways, rather than relying on the testimonies of those who interacted with such artifacts. Such an attempt is most welcome, as too often discussion of media influence is avoided as it is deemed too diffi-

cult. Spaulding’s claims nevertheless remain restrained, as he argues that increasing media coverage of the CCNR encouraged and enabled the dramatic growth in both trade volume and the rise in the number of transnational private sector groups along the river.

Richard R. John examines another early transnational institution, and an extremely successful and long-lasting one: the Universal Postal Union (UPU). His analysis is confined to the “anglophone world” of the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Based on the material corralled by John, further research on other nations and regions would be fruitful. The chapter opens with a quote from H. G. Wells, who stated in 1940 that the history of the UPU was “surely something that should be made part of compulsory education of every statesman and publicist.” Although this did not materialize, John’s chapter does a good job of showing that Wells’s claim was justified in its view of the activities and successes of the UPU. However, it is also made clear that the obscurity of the UPU was, “to a significant degree, intentional.” This was because the UPU’s administrators understood that in order to allow their system to operate successfully they had to convince the public of many different nations that, unlike politicians and state figures, they were “dispassionate experts who lacked a political agenda” (p. 38). There was purposeful, strategic effort to stay out of the headlines and avoid controversy that might undermine the UPU’s legitimacy. This notion of technical experts beyond the realm of national politics was similar to the image presented by the administrators of the CCNR. The material John surveyed includes the periodical press, as well as ephemeral items, such as postcards, souvenir envelopes, and postage stamps. Images of many of these ephemera are reproduced, which is a nice touch. John demonstrates that the “magnitude of [the UPU’s] achievements” was recognized by various journalists and intellectuals. For the mass of people, however, in-depth information about the UPU was lacking. Its own administrators

mainly confined themselves to writing for “*L’Union Postale*, a trilingual monthly mag written by and for postal insiders” (p. 41). Regardless, the ephemera helped UPU become a largely overlooked part of day-to-day life. The strategy of avoiding exposure was amazingly successful.

The next two chapters shift focus to the League of Nations. Tomoko Akami’s chapter examines the Tokyo Office of the Information Section of the League of Nations. Although the term “propaganda” now has negative connotations, it was widely used to describe information-sharing efforts in the early decades of the twentieth century. Indeed, the league described its attempts to publicize itself as “peace propaganda” (pp. 70-71). Akami charts how such efforts were created by experts for an elite audience, specifically how this was “superseded by emerging mass-based politics and electronic mass-media technologies in the 1930s” (pp. 71-72). David Allen’s examination of the league’s presence at the New York World’s Fair of 1939-40 offers an alternative interpretation of the extent and character of the league’s propaganda. He argues that there was a sharp decline in explicit efforts by the late 1930s. However, the exhibition at the World’s Fair maintained a recognition that there were two distinct types of audience—the elite and the masses—and was heavily slanted toward the latter. The means employed to achieve this included films and public lectures. There was also a move away from framing such activities as being propaganda. The league was instead portrayed as merely a cornerstone of the modern world.

This might have seemed surprising to those written about in an interesting chapter by Arthur Asseraf on the efforts of Algerians to engage with the league between 1919 and 1943. Such efforts were ignored by the league because Algeria was under French control. Asseraf notes that the chapter is an attempt to move beyond looking at the communications of international organizations from the perspective of the organizations themselves. A variety of different forms of communica-

tion in Algeria are discussed, from newspapers and official petitions sent to the league, to rumors spread orally, and the interplay among all three. The rumors in question are accessed through French colonial surveillance reports, and such material suggests that while Algerians knew about developments at the league, they interpreted them “according to their own frames of analysis” (p. 125). Some fascinating analysis makes sense of various petitions sent to the league and associated individuals from Algerians. For example, a petition sent to Woodrow Wilson is situated as part of an older genre of political discourse, called “the complaint” or “*shikaya*,” which had been a common mode of engaging the authorities across the Ottoman Empire (p. 120). Ultimately, Asseraf convincingly makes the point that “knowing about the League was not the same as buying into liberal internationalism” (p. 125).

The final four chapters focus on the UN and its component bodies, such as UNESCO and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). Glenda Slugga is well known for her previous work on internationalism. Her chapter looks at the topic through the lens of celebrity, and particularly the fluctuating relationship between Hollywood and the UN. She explains the important role played by 20th Century Fox executive Darryl F. Zanuck and the United Nations Conference on International Organization in establishing a link between the two worlds, which coincided with the “apogee of internationalism” in the postwar period (p. 140). The chapter also features an array of familiar Hollywood faces, such as Orson Welles and Rita Hayworth. Although there was undoubtedly altruism, Slugga shows that financial motives were also apparent in some of the efforts to direct the Hollywood system in the direction of supporting the UN. Brendebach’s chapter focuses on another fault line: the tension between earlier Western-dominated conceptions of UNESCO and those that emerged from the global South in the 1970s. The 1960s debate over international communications presented them as an information network based

on a system of nation-states and promoted a communications policy that would develop in a piecemeal fashion, state by state. New approaches in the 1970s, however, presented communications as borderless and as being embedded in infrastructures and markets. Similar to the New International Economic Order, a New World Information and Communication Order was seen as a means for Third World nations to achieve parity with First and Second World nations.

The final two chapters focus on specific UN campaigns, with Monika Baár appraising the UN's international years and Simone Müller evaluating UNEP. Baár argues that the emergence and proliferation of the "UN years" was a new form of PR campaigning (p. 183). They were meant to shape public opinion and expand the scope of the UN both horizontally and vertically, and, again, a shift from a Western to a more global focus can be discerned. Covering a range of media, including magazine articles, photos, radio and television programs, posters, congresses, mega-concerts, and documentaries and feature films, such years as those for Human Rights (1968), Women (1975), the Child (1979), and Disabled Persons (1981) succeeded in gaining lots of exposure. However, Baár shows that by the second half of the 1980s their impact had begun to fade. In Müller's account of the media strategy of UNEP, conversely, "in-depth and well-founded analysis alongside scientific facts, not short-term media excitement" was thought to be the key to good environmental governance (p. 225). Again, however, there was a shift from targeting politicians and other elites in the earlier years, to increasing investment by UNEP into public outreach via media channels, such as radio and film, by the 1980s. The chapter ends by calling for more research on the topic to uncover how effective such efforts have been.

Overall, this volume is a useful starting point for exploring the interaction between two important spheres of human activity that became centrally important—nationally, transnationally, and

globally—in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: international institutions and the media. The variety of topics, approaches, and forms of media on show provide plenty of inspiration for future research. Interventions from a specifically media history perspective would provide a useful accompaniment to those grounded more in a focus on international institutions. The most important insight of the collection as a whole is undoubtedly that more "information did not necessarily strengthen public or political support for international initiatives. Communications that reached a broader circle of recipients did not necessarily bolster international institutions" (p. 2). This is an apt topic of inquiry at a time when international and transnational institutions, such as the UN and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, are coming under increasing attack from many directions, and where, in the case of Brexit, media campaigns against the organization were far more effective than media efforts to champion its benefits. Learning from past mistakes is now a vital task.

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