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# Triggers of Mobility: International Congresses (1840–1914) and their Visitors

**Abstract:** *This article seeks to assess in which ways tracing mobilities provides new insights into the strategies pertaining to transnational knowledge exchange related to social reform in the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. It follows four visitors to international congresses in the period around 1900 to evaluate to what extent their movements were likely to effect change at the international, national or local level. In order to structure the analysis I have identified two “frames”, i.e. two pairs of opposing aspirations, which emerged in the transnational social reform debates of the turn of the century: (1) the tension between international and national (sometimes also local) ambitions; (2) the interplay of state intervention and civil society organisations in providing welfare. The four actors occupied different but by no means fixed positions on these axes.*

## Introduction

In his famous opening address to the International Peace Congress of 1849 in Paris, Victor Hugo highlighted increasing speed and reduced distances as a leap towards global fraternity: “Thanks to railroads, Europe will soon be no larger than France was in the middle ages. Thanks to steam-ships, we now traverse the mighty ocean more easily than the Mediterranean was formerly crossed”. And he completed his speech with the prediction that soon “the electric wire of concord shall encircle the globe and embrace the world”.<sup>1</sup> Mobility, in other words, was thought to be the key to universal peace.

This kind of faith in progress was not only widespread among peace activists such as Hugo, but characterised the convictions of visitors to a wide range of international congresses which since the 1840s – with gradually increasing frequency – were organised in European and American cities. The Belgian minister of the interior, Ferdinand Piercot, opening the first international statistical congress of 1853, solemnly declared that “statistics would strengthen the bonds between nations and the sense of brotherhood, and peace, which protects mankind from

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<sup>1</sup> *Report of the Proceedings of the Second General Peace Congress Held in Paris on the 22nd, 23rd and 24th of August, 1849.* London 1849, 12.

the resurgence of foolhardy national rival, would be deepened everywhere”.<sup>2</sup> Half a century later, around 1900, enthusiasm was just as great, if not greater, in joyous expectation of the promises the new century would have in store. At the occasion of the World Exhibition of 1900 held in Paris the French government allowed 127 congresses of that year to bear the title “official”, and was widely believed to have thus contributed to intellectual and social development on a global scale, as the Italian Prince of Cassano observed:

L'oeuvre des congrès internationaux deviendra le facteur le plus puissant du progrès moral et matériel, elle se transformera en une sorte de corps délibérant international chargé d'aider et d'éclairer les législateurs du monde entier.<sup>3</sup>

To dwell on the point, therefore, that the growing numbers of international congresses were nodes of mobility and change, would be superfluous. They almost invariably managed to attract visitors from many different countries. Altogether, the international visitors to 24 selected congresses from the period 1876–1912 travelled over ten million kilometres to reach their destinations.<sup>4</sup> But what do all these movements mean? To what extent did the high hopes of the organisers correspond with the intentions and experiences of the participants? Mobility is rarely a goal or a “deliverable” good in itself. This essay, therefore, seeks to assess in which ways tracing mobilities provides new answers to questions related to transnational knowledge exchange in the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Following the *leitmotif* of this volume, I have taken four biographical snapshots of congress visitors to evaluate to what extent the movements of congress participants were likely to effect change at the international, national or local level.

I have selected my four protagonists from a sample of thousands of participants in 24 international congresses on social reform from the period 1876–1912. This initial sample includes congresses on six themes (each theme represented by

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Nico Randeraad: *States and Statistics in the Nineteenth Century. Europe by Numbers*. Manchester 2010, 14.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Anne Rasmussen: *Les Congrès internationaux liés aux Expositions universelles de Paris (1867–1900)*, in: *Mil neuf cent. Cahiers Georges Sorel* 7 (1989), 34.

<sup>4</sup> This is a rough calculation based on data in our Nodegoat-powered database, which includes information on the distances between home and destination cities of congress visitors. See [tic.ugent.be](http://tic.ugent.be) for a summary of this digital humanities project. The database is described in greater detail in Thomas D'haeninck, Nico Randeraad and Christophe Verbruggen: *Visualizing Longitudinal Data. Rooted Cosmopolitans in the Low Countries, 1850–1914*, in: *BD2015, Biographical Data in a Digital World 2015. Proceedings of the First Conference on Biographical Data in a Digital World 2015*, Amsterdam (9 Apr. 2015). URL: <http://ceur-ws.org/Vol-1399/> (17 July 2015).

four congresses, spread over the period): poor relief, penitentiary reform, hygiene, global health, statistics and peace.<sup>5</sup> Representativeness with regard to the sample was not my first concern, although the four selected individuals evidently shared an interest in reform issues and were prepared to travel for it. The journeys made in their lifetime are a vivid illustration of an urge to get professionally mobile. My account concentrates on Victor Desguin from Belgium, Louis Guillaume from Switzerland, Henri Monod from France and Wilhelmus Hubertus Nolens from the Netherlands. The four of them participated in one or more congresses of the sample, sometimes in congresses related to different themes, but also in ones that were not included in the original sample. To some extent they belonged to an international congress elite and regularly occupied functions in what at the time was called the “bureau de congrès”. It is not unlikely that the four knew each other, or at least met once, but rather than assessing their common profile I intend to explore how they “used” their attendance at international congresses in different ways.

It is safe to say that my protagonists were social reformers, albeit in different ways, and it was certainly not their primary identifier. The realm of social reform is vast. It has been felicitously compared to a “nébuleuse réformatrice”, a galaxy without a clearly identifiable core or sharply defined borders.<sup>6</sup> The above-mentioned themes of the congress sample reflect this diversity. I understand social reform as the wide variety of attempts to counter the adverse effects of industrialisation and globalisation that emerged in the nineteenth century. In other words, following Topalov, I see social reform as a “reform field”, in the Bourdieuan sense, where politics and policies, ideas and practices, instruments and actors, all dealing with reform issues, were located.<sup>7</sup>

In order to structure my analysis I have identified two “frames”, i.e. two pairs of opposing aspirations, which emerged in the transnational social reform debates of the turn of the century: 1. the tension between international and national (sometimes also local) ambitions; 2. the interplay of state intervention and civil society organisations in providing welfare. My four actors occupied different

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<sup>5</sup> The sample includes personal data concerning the transnational participants in 24 international congresses from the period 1876–1912, i.e. the persons travelling to another country to attend a congress. The dataset has been compiled for a larger project on the transnationalisation of social reform. For further insights into the approach, see Chris Leonards and Nico Randerad: Transnational Experts in Social Reform, 1840–1880, in: *International Review of Social History* 55, no. 2 (2010), 215–239.

<sup>6</sup> Christian Topalov (ed.): *Laboratoires du nouveau siècle. La nébuleuse réformatrice et ses réseaux en France, 1880–1914*. Paris 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Id.: Le champ réformateur, 1880–1914. Un modèle, in: *ibid.*, 461–474.

positions on these axes but, as I intend to show, their ideas and opinions were by no means fixed and could change over time depending on the broader context. Following insights of the Chicago School on collective behaviour I intend to find out how these actors gave meaning to their presence at international congresses, and how others acknowledged or dismissed their authority. Interventions made during the congresses play a central role in the analysis, but these will be placed against the wider social, political and cultural background of the selected persons.

This article ties in with the boom of research into the history of transnational networks, in particular the scholarship on cross-border transfers and exchanges related to social integration, public health and peace.<sup>8</sup> Mobility is a natural companion of transnational history. I hope to offer a modest contribution to the “new mobilities paradigm” and various new approaches in the genre of biography, not so much by trying to historicise their conceptual innovations (which, particularly in the case of the future-oriented mobility agenda, would be slightly forced and perhaps counterproductive) but rather by showing the value of transnational arenas for historians studying the lives and mobilities of “activists beyond borders”.<sup>9</sup>

## Internationalism-Nationalism-Local Activism

International congresses were not for internationalists only. Most international congresses dealt with issues that could only be solved at the national level or at least needed national consensus before international steps were possible. Some congresses, such as those of the Red Cross, were more likely to pursue an internationalist agenda, but even there national Red Cross societies lay in wait to appropriate humanitarian ideals for national purposes.<sup>10</sup> Internationalism existed in many guises and was seldom a purpose in itself. By now, numerous studies

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<sup>8</sup> For a recent overview with numerous references, see Pierre-Yves Saunier: *Transnational History*. Basingstoke 2013.

<sup>9</sup> The term is coined by Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink: *Activists beyond Borders. Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. Ithaca, NY 1998. See also Sydney Tarrow: *Strangers at the Gates. Movements and States in Contentious Politics*. Cambridge 2012. For some contemporary research stemming from the “new mobilities paradigm”, see Weert Canzler, Vincent Kaufmann and Sven Kesselring (eds.): *Tracing Mobilities. Towards a Cosmopolitan Perspective*. Farnham 2009.

<sup>10</sup> John F. Hutchinson: *Champions of Charity. War and the Rise of the Red Cross*. Boulder, CO 1996.

have underlined the multifarious, unsteady and sometimes contradictory nature of internationalism.<sup>11</sup>

Scientific universalism was the alleged common denominator of all international congresses, from statistics to welfare and from chemistry to demography. During congress sessions, the appeal to science could often briefly unite opponents, but it could not stop or fundamentally bend the nationalist orientations of scientists.<sup>12</sup> It was no different for politicians and administrators who claimed to have faith in science. They too appropriated scientific truths for their own agendas.

There was not just an intricate nexus between internationalism and nationalism but, as the “transnational turn” in recent historiography has shown, local experiences and interests could also add to the jumble of connections. Bernard Struck and others have justly drawn attention to the multiplicity of scales on which transnational history takes place. This perspective enables the analysis of the different spatial scopes of individual actors’ movements ranging from local micro-scale to national and global macro levels.<sup>13</sup> Following this approach I start out from the interconnectedness of local activism, national reform agendas and the transnational circulation of ideas and practices related to welfare and social reform. Despite the increasing salience of national and transnational exchanges of ideas about social reform, the main orientation of the transnational actors continued to be the local (urban) level.

Before the expansion of the municipal governments under the welfare state, the Church and private organisations were the main providers of social assistance and sanitary infrastructure. It was hardly a surprise, therefore, that many representatives of local government and religious and secular welfare institutions found their way to the social welfare (*bienfaisance*) and hygiene congresses. These

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**11** See, for example, Madeleine Herren: *Hintertüren zur Macht. Internationalismus und modernisierungsorientierte Außenpolitik in Belgien, der Schweiz und den USA, 1865–1914*. München 2000; Martin H. Geyer and Johannes Paulmann (eds.): *The Mechanics of Internationalism. Culture, Society, and Politics from the 1840s to the First World War*. Oxford 2001; Mark Mazower: *Governing the World. The History of an Idea*. London 2012; Glenda Sluga: *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*. Philadelphia 2013; and Daniel L. Laqua: *The Age of Internationalism and Belgium, 1880–1930. Peace, Progress and Prestige*. Manchester 2013.

**12** Elisabeth Crawford: *Nationalism and Internationalism in Science, 1880–1939. Four Studies of the Nobel Population*. Cambridge 1992; Ralph Jessen and Jakob Vogel (eds.): *Wissenschaft und Nation in der europäischen Geschichte*. Frankfurt 2002; Geert Somsen: A History of Universalism. Conceptions of the Internationality of Science from the Enlightenment to the Cold War, in: *Minnerva* 46, no. 3 (2008), 361–379.

**13** Bernard Struck, Kate Ferris and Jacques Revel: Introduction. Space and Scale in Transnational History, in: *International History Review* 33, no. 4 (2011), 573–584, esp. 577.

were topics that had been put on the agenda of international congresses early on. Brussels had hosted the first international hygiene congress in 1852 and the first international welfare congress in 1856. The ruling liberals in Belgium were particularly keen on displaying their performances in these areas. Not only the standard bearers at the central level, such as Auguste Visschers and Edouard Ducpétiaux, were prominent participants, but also mayors, aldermen, communal councillors and high officials from the larger cities such as Brussels, Liège, Antwerp and Ghent frequently made an appearance.

Victor Desguin (1838–1919), medical doctor and long-term member of the municipal council of Antwerp, made his entrance onto the international scene by becoming a member of the *Association Internationale pour le Progrès des Sciences Sociales* (1862–67) when he was serving in the army as a battalion doctor.<sup>14</sup> Academic recognition was important for the young Desguin. In 1864 he won first prize in a competition on rheumatism held by the *Académie Impériale de Médecine* of Paris.<sup>15</sup> But he had political aspirations as well. In 1876 he was elected as a liberal to the provincial council of Antwerp, followed by his election into the municipal council in 1879, a seat he held until 1918. Between 1892 and 1918 he was also a member of the municipal executive as alderman for education and public health, acting as mayor during three short intervals.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, he was a member of various local and national learned societies in Belgium. In 1877 he was among the founders of the *Société royale de médecine publique de Belgique*, an organisation that assembled medical and non-medical experts on public health questions.

Desguin's membership of the local masonic lodge *Les Amis du Commerce et la Persévérance Réunis*, his involvement in the *Société de Médecine d'Anvers* and his contacts with doctors in other cities profiling themselves as hygienists fuelled his ambitions to engage himself in aid and assistance to the poor and the destitute in Antwerp.<sup>17</sup> In order to carry out a hygienist agenda he needed access to political

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**14** Christian Müller: The Politics of Expertise. The Association Internationale pour le Progrès des Sciences Sociales, Democratic Peace Movements and International Law Networks in Europe, 1850–1875, in: Davide Rodogno, Bernard Struck and Jakob Vogel (eds.): *Shaping the Transnational Sphere. Experts, Networks and Issues from the 1840s to the 1930s*. New York 2015, 131–151; Carmen Van Praet and Christophe Verbruggen: “Soldiers for a Joint Cause”. A Relational Perspective on Local and International Educational Leagues and Associations in the 1860s, in: *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 130, no. 1 (2015), 4–24.

**15** *Bulletin de l'Académie impériale de médecine* 29 (1864–65), Vol. XXX, 178.

**16** PPA1 1830–1921 et al., Victor Desguin, in: *ODIS*. Record last modified date: 6 June 2006. URL: [http://www.odis.be/lmk/PS\\_115](http://www.odis.be/lmk/PS_115) (17 July 2015).

**17** Joris Vandendriessche and Kaat Wils: Een traject van onderhandeling. Hygiënisme als wetenschap, Antwerpen 1880–1900, in: *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 128, no. 3 (2013), 3–28.

power, and in order to gain political support he needed a programme that would attract the urban middle classes. Food safety, clean drinking water, medical inspection of schools and prevention against infectious diseases were themes that went well with the electorate. Desguin made sure he supported all these causes.

International congresses played an important role in Desguin's career path. At first he played safe and mixed with his peers at the fourth international medical congress held in Brussels in 1875. He presented a paper on the physiological effects of alcohol.<sup>18</sup> Desguin's next, bolder step was to put the consumption of alcohol in a much wider perspective at the international hygiene congress held in Brussels in 1876. While his paper, based on research in different countries, was as meticulous as his medical contributions, his focus had shifted to the societal consequences of alcoholism. He discussed the tasks of the central state, local government and private initiative in dealing with alcohol problems. For his own country he emphasised the urgency for following the example of the British, Swedish, Americans and French in establishing a national temperance society. Within a short time he had transformed himself from army doctor to champion of hygienism. From then on he was a respected guest at the international hygiene and demography congresses up until the 15th, which took place in Washington, DC in 1912.

Initially, his appearance at international congresses helped him to establish himself as an expert in hygienic measures in his home town. Once he had obtained a safe seat in the municipal council of Antwerp the combination of political authority and medical expertise added weight to his public appearances. It is interesting to note that in the list of participants included in the congress proceedings, Desguin is often also listed as member of the *Académie royale de médecine de Belgique* or the *Société royale de médecine publique de Belgique*. Apparently, such organisations were even better suited to lending authority to speakers than functions in local government. Later in his career, by virtue of his office as alderman, he frequently attended congresses held in Antwerp or Brussels as president, vice-president or honorary member, even if the topics were unrelated to medicine or hygiene. Eventually, seniority and standing came to count at least as much as expertise.

The participation in international congresses also worked the other way round. Congresses not only boosted individual careers, but also conferred prestige on the institutions delegating people to them. At the sixth international hygiene and demography congress held in Vienna in 1887, Desguin commented at length

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<sup>18</sup> *Congrès périodique international des sciences médicales, 4<sup>me</sup> session – Bruxelles – 1875*. Brussels 1876, 38–48.

on the medical inspection of public schools, which the city of Antwerp had institutionalised in 1882. The “Antwerp model” of school hygiene thus earned a certain reputation at the international level.<sup>19</sup> Like many other cities that sent representatives to international congresses, the local government of Antwerp expected Desguin to report on his foreign trips. Hence, Desguin frequently elaborated on his congress visits in the municipal council. Sometimes, these reports were separately published, not just to honour the author but no doubt also to highlight the city’s successes in organising public health services. The municipal executive ordered 50 copies of Desguin’s paper for the Vienna congress to be distributed to local libraries.<sup>20</sup> The international stage, therefore, was not only a platform for a good cause, but could also serve the careers of delegates and was used to promote the interests of local governments and learned societies.

In the period in question, quite a few medical doctors in urban areas reinvented themselves as hygienists. Louis Guillaume (1833–1924) was one of them. When, in 1856, he started a medical practice in Neuchâtel, not far from his home town of Les Verrières, he could not have expected one day to become the author of a much-read book on hygiene, the head of the federal bureau of statistics of Switzerland and the undisputed leader of the international prison congress. In the tense situation in Neuchâtel during the international crisis of 1856–57, when local royalists sought to re-establish old links between the Principality and the Kingdom of Prussia, he stood as a candidate for the local council, a seat he held until 1860. He dedicated his free time to taking long walks in the Jura Mountains and loved teaching the children in local schools about the wonders of nature. He found an outlet for his passion for the study of nature in the *Club Jurassien*, which he helped to found in 1865, soon followed by a (still existing) non-specialist periodical *Le Rameau du Sapin*. Guillaume was also active in the local historical society and was editor of its journal, the *Musée neuchâtelois*. In short, there was very little to suggest that his reputation would ever outgrow his native region.

Like Desguin, Guillaume nourished a strong sense of mission in matters of hygiene, and it was this drive that led him to push the boundaries of his profession. In 1864 he published his lectures on school hygiene.<sup>21</sup> Though not the first book on the topic, it proved to be a great success, not only among the authorities and citizens of Neuchâtel but also throughout Switzerland and even beyond. It

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<sup>19</sup> Joris Vandendriessche: Medische expertise en politieke strijd. De dienst medisch schooltoezicht in Antwerpen, 1860–1900, in: *Stadsgeschiedenis* 6, no. 2 (2011), 125.

<sup>20</sup> Victor Desguin: *L’inspection médicale dans les écoles*. Bruges 1888; see also Vandendriessche, *Medische expertise*, 126.

<sup>21</sup> Louis Guillaume: *Hygiène scolaire. Considérations sur l’état hygiénique des écoles publiques présentées aux autorités scolaires, aux instituteurs et aux parents*. Geneva 1864.



was translated into several languages, and it may well have stimulated Desguin's interest in this field. The seemingly biggest career change came in 1870, when he was appointed director of the new cantonal prison of Neuchâtel. The fact that his brother-in-law, Eugène Borel, was at the time head of the justice department of the cantonal government no doubt contributed to this appointment. Though Guillaume had gained some experience in penitentiary matters as prison doctor and active member of the local sanitary commission, he still had to make a name for himself as a prison governor. He chose the international route to do so.

He had the good fortune that, shortly after his appointment, the international prison congress reconvened after a long interruption of 25 years, although penal reform had been on the agenda of several welfare congresses held in the 1850s. He secured backing from his fellow Swiss governors by drafting a report on the state of the prison system in the country, and joined the international executive committee of the congress, which – unlike similar committees at other congresses – continued to meet at regular intervals, chiefly to prepare the next congress. During the congress, held in London in July 1872, Guillaume showed deep commitment to the various reform causes that were passed in review, and became a symbol of goodwill and reform-mindedness. He was widely believed to uphold the spirit of the international penitentiary reform movement that was taking shape. At the first preparatory meeting of the international penitentiary commission held in Brussels in 1874 he was installed as secretary-general, an office he would hold until the 1910 congress in Washington.

Yet congresses and preliminary meetings were events that interrupted the daily lives of the participants only briefly. Sometimes, delegates stayed on for a few days, for a site visit or a professional encounter, but since they were usually on duty as official representatives they headed home directly after the congress. Their day-to-day work remained largely confined by the routine of ministerial offices, welfare institutions, prisons and the like, and did not become transnationalised in practice. Internationalism was lived by the fireside. Mobility was a long detour homewards and not meant to function as a linear movement from one locality to another one.

This is not to say that mobility was pointless or that internationalism was an illusion. The concepts need to be seen in the context of the means of communication that were available in the nineteenth century. After his visit to London, Guillaume returned to Neuchâtel to resume his duties at the local prison. It was there that Enoch C. Wines of the United States National Prison Association came to visit him on his European tour. Those who came from far away were more likely to stay longer. The two had met in London. Wines was commissioned by the chairman of the National Prison Association to seek cooperation from governments of European states and to visit as many penal and reformatory institutions as pos-

sible. He stayed a few days as guest of Guillaume, and was thoroughly introduced to the system adopted at the Neuchâtel prison. From his account it becomes clear that Guillaume personally supervised the around 80 inmates with extraordinary concern, fully committed to their moral improvement. On Sunday mornings, before church, the director would give a lecture on a matter of general interest to the prisoners and the employees, preceded by a few comments on “minor morals”.<sup>22</sup> By and large, Guillaume’s methods resembled the progressive Crofton system, developed in Ireland and aimed at encouraging good conduct, which was gradually gaining ground in Switzerland and which Wines wanted to promote in the United States.

Guillaume would continue as prison governor until 1889, when he applied to be director of the Federal Statistical Office of Switzerland. This again seemed a radical career change, but already at the penitentiary congress in London he had underlined the importance of statistics “as a guide to prison reformers”. He did not expect immediate results, but “in twenty, thirty, or fifty years, they would allow the keystone of the arch to be supplied”.<sup>23</sup> For many reformers statistics were the key to accomplishing their goals. It was no coincidence that social reform issues figured so prominently on the agenda of the international statistical congresses. Because of his new function Guillaume also became “membre titulaire” of the International Statistical Institute established in 1885 as successor of the international statistical congress, and regularly attended its meetings. Throughout the rest of his active life he continued to publish about hygiene, penal reform, education, and statistics. A strong belief in the possibility of moral advancement continued to characterise his publications and professional activities.

Perhaps more than any other person selected for this study, Louis Guillaume personified the multifariousness of social reform around 1900. For him, there were no clear boundaries between the “professions” he practised, medical doctor and prison director, educator and statistician. While such cross-overs were not uncommon in the nineteenth century, the more remarkable element of his biography was the transnational scope of his activities. This “transnational agency” was not intentional or exclusive in the sense that Guillaume wanted to transcend national borders in order to create a new space, but rather to initiate or support reform movements where these were most active, at the local and national level.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Enoch C. Wines: *Report on the International Penitentiary Congress of London Held July 3–13, 1872*. Washington, DC 1873, 224.

<sup>23</sup> *Prisons and Reformatories at Home and Abroad Being the Transactions of the International Penitentiary Congress Held in London July 3–13, 1872*. London 1872, 451.

<sup>24</sup> See, Denis Kitzinger: Towards a Model of Transnational Agency. The Case of Dietrich von Hildebrand, in: *International History Review* 33, no. 4 (2011), 669–686.

## State and Civil Society

It is tempting to look at the history of social reform in the nineteenth century as a dichotomy between state-led regulation on the one hand and activism emanating from civil society on the other. These apparently incompatible ways of providing care and assistance are also recognisable in the broadly defined state traditions or welfare state models that political scientists so easily embrace.<sup>25</sup> There is, to simplify things, an Anglo-Saxon model emphasising *laissez-faire* and decentralisation of decision-making, and a continental Napoleonic model privileging bureaucracy and hierarchical intervention. Quite a few polemical discussions at international congresses from the last quarter of the nineteenth century seem to confirm this divide. The organisers of one of the biggest events, the international welfare congress held in Paris during the world's fair of 1900, even decided to explicitly refer to the two camps by calling it *Congrès international d'assistance publique et de bienfaisance privée*.

Around 1900, however, the contrasts were less stark than the caricatured antithesis of political beliefs leads us to suspect. At the international congress of public and private welfare in 1900, the vast majority of participants sought a third, middle way, following traditional distinctions between types of indigents (able bodied, disabled, sick, elderly, etc.), which were held to be more conclusive for determining who would have to deal with them, rather than uncompromising ideological stances.<sup>26</sup> In a wider perspective Peter Baldwin has convincingly argued that historians and social scientists should try not to regard state and civil society in isolation from each other, “as two dueling monads”, but rather to focus attention on the interaction between the two.<sup>27</sup> Similar functions were often pursued in different ways. To put it differently, we should concentrate on what Michael Mann has called the “polymorphous crystallisation” of the modern state, with considerable differences between and within nation-states in terms of functions and scope of the state in relation to civil society.<sup>28</sup> Also, the political system as such does not predict how well states accomplished particular tasks. For instance, in trying to get a grip on the spread of cholera, liberal systems were often

<sup>25</sup> For a critical historical perspective, see Pauli Kettunen and Klaus Petersen (eds.): *Beyond Welfare State Models. Transnational Historical Perspectives on Social Policy*. Cheltenham 2011.

<sup>26</sup> Christian Topalov: *Langage de la réforme et déni du politique. Le débat entre assistance publique et bienfaisance privée, 1889–1903*, in: *Genèses* 23 (1996), 30–52.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Baldwin: *The Victorian State in Comparative Perspective*, in: Peter Mandler (ed.): *Liberty and Authority in Victorian England*. Oxford 2006, 53.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Mann: *The Sources of Social Power. Vol. II: The Rise of Classes and Nation-States, 1760–1914*. Cambridge 1993, 75–88.

at least as effective as more authoritarian ones. By comparing ways in which states have dealt with contagious diseases, Baldwin comes to the conclusion that the issue was often not of interventionism versus *laissez-faire*, but rather of different forms of intervention.<sup>29</sup>

This approach lends itself very well to an attempt to characterise the professional activities of Henri Monod (1843–1911), regular participant in the assistance, hygiene and sanitary congresses in the period around 1900. He made a career in the French ministry of the interior, first at a regional level (ultimately as prefect of various departments) and later in the central ministry in Paris. As long-standing director of the section for public welfare and hygiene (1887–1905), where he earned the nickname of “state philanthropist”, he was able to campaign energetically for new legislation in these fields. It would be misleading, however, to look upon his mission as purely state-centred. As we shall see, many of his projects hovered between state intervention and placing societal actors in positions of responsibility.<sup>30</sup>

Monod’s family background contributed to forming his views on the organisation of welfare and sanitation, and he was first to recognise this. In a genealogical study he prepared for a family reunion he boasted that his ancestors originated from quite a few different countries: France of course, but also Switzerland, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Denmark.<sup>31</sup> There were many Protestant pastors among his forefathers. Many of them were forced to flee with their families across borders to save their possessions or even their lives. Through his mother Suzanne Smedley, born in Liverpool, he nourished a partiality to all things British and, of course, acquired a second language naturally. A transnational outlook and a caring attitude were part of the family tradition. That there must have been an element of truth in this cross-generational socialisation is proved by the career of his niece, Sarah Monod (whose mother also happened to be British), who would become a prominent prison reformer and feminist leader.

Trained as a lawyer, Henri Monod started his administrative career in the secretarial staff of the 1867 Paris world’s fair. After the Franco-Prussian war he entered the civil administration and made an extraordinarily rapid career. At 34 he had already reached the rank of prefect, an office he would hold in various departments, ultimately in Finistère (1885–87), where he was confronted with a severe outbreak of cholera. His transfer to Quimper, the department’s capital,

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<sup>29</sup> Peter Baldwin: *Contagion and the State in Europe, 1830–1930*. Cambridge 2005 [1999], 535.

<sup>30</sup> See Pierre Rosanvallon: *Le modèle politique français. La société civile contre le jacobinisme de 1789 à nos jours*. Paris 2004.

<sup>31</sup> Henri Monod: *La famille Monod, origines, extension (Réunion de famille, 2 novembre 1908)*. Nancy 1909.

was probably no coincidence. Monod had developed a strong interest in the fight against contagious diseases and was eager to put his ideas to the test. A visit to the international hygiene exhibition in London in the summer of 1884 had been instrumental in fanning the flame. He had made the trip together with his friend Joseph Gibert, a medical doctor based in Le Havre and initiator of the first municipal bureau, and Jules Siegfried, then mayor of the same city and also a regular visitor of international congresses. “Ce voyage”, he would later write, “mes conversations avec ces deux hommes généreux, m’ont engagé sur la route que depuis lors j’ai suivie”.<sup>32</sup>

The path Monod would take was to return to Paris, accept a slightly lower salary, and fully dedicate himself to the administration of public welfare and hygiene.<sup>33</sup> Trying to learn from foreign experience continued to mark his professional attitude. He was a member of the organising committees of the international congresses on public welfare and on hygiene and demography that took place in Paris in 1889. He was not just looking out from the inside, but would also go abroad to attend congresses within the vast field of his office, such as the hygiene and demography congress of Budapest held in 1894 and the child protection congress of Geneva held in 1896.

Monod tried to frame his stance on welfare and hygiene by making a strong plea to science. Looking back at the fight against cholera in Finistère, he showed that traditional administrative action was not enough, and underlined how important it had been to rely on scientific advice:

Dans la lutte contre les épidémies, qu’il s’agisse de les prévenir ou de les combattre, et généralement en tout ce qui touche à l’hygiène publique, l’administrateur a un rôle modeste et nécessaire : il doit être et peut seulement être l’auxiliaire de l’homme de science. Ce serait de sa part grande témérité d’entreprendre sur ce qui est le domaine propre du savant.<sup>34</sup>

International congresses were an important supplier of scientific truth. By attending a congress, politicians, officials and scientists could prove they had become companions in impartial knowledge. Being able to refer to statistics reinforced their claims to truth. Authoritative publications could further enhance the stature of an expert. In his monograph on the cholera epidemic in Finistère, Monod made sure he ticked these boxes. International sanitary and hygiene congresses were

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<sup>32</sup> Henri Monod: *La santé publique*. Paris 1904, 87 (quoted in Lion Murard and Patrick Zylberman: *L’hygiène dans la République. La santé publique en France, ou l’utopie contrariée 1870–1918*. Paris 1996, 185).

<sup>33</sup> I am zooming in here through a biographical case study of Monod, on an episode in the early phase of the French welfare state more extensively discussed in Topalov, *Langage de la réforme*.

<sup>34</sup> Henri Monod: *Le choléra (histoire d’une épidémie, Finistère 1885–1886)*. Paris 1892, 5.

presented as crucial moments in reaching consensus about the origins and combating of the disease. Statistics provided the necessary numerical backbone. And he could refer to his own publications in the field, such as *Les mesures sanitaires en Angleterre depuis 1875 et leurs résultats*, which he had published as a monograph in 1891 after presenting it to the *Société de médecine publique et hygiène professionnelle* and pre-publishing it in the *Revue d'Hygiène*. Monod wanted his authority to be beyond doubt.

Speaking at congresses required special qualities. A certain mastery of languages helped. Native French speakers obviously had an advantage, since their language continued to be the *lingua franca* of the international scene. Monod's bilingualism was an additional asset. But he also needed a degree of versatility, first to be able to act as a mediator between the various camps among the French and second to furnish him with sufficient international prestige. Again the appeal to science and reliance on the outcomes of international congresses proved useful. In a speech at the international hygiene exhibition in Le Havre in 1893 he pointed to recent scientific advances, and tried to follow in the footsteps of resolutions made at the sanitary conference held earlier that year in Dresden. In matters of hygiene it was apparently easier to play the scientific card than to call for welfare provision. At the international welfare congress of 1889, held in his home town, Monod played another trump card: the history of the French state since 1789 and its "sacred obligation to provide relief". Since he was mainly talking to a French audience, he cleverly resorted to the old republican spirit to show which way the state was meant to go: "si l'initiative privée doit garder son rôle, un rôle important, c'est pourtant l'État qui devra fixer et diriger l'organisation générale".<sup>35</sup> His call for efficiency raised a storm of applause, according to the proceedings. There was, however, a clear reservation: "L'assistance publique, à défaut d'autre assistance, est due à l'indigent qui se trouve, temporairement ou définitivement, dans l'impossibilité physique de pourvoir aux nécessités de l'existence".<sup>36</sup> Public welfare, therefore, was only meant for the helpless young, the elderly and the sick.

By the next international welfare congress in Paris (1900) the bifurcation of public and private relief in France had become a *fait accompli*. In his opening speech, mainly directed towards the French majority in the audience, Monod again went back to the French Revolution and its emphasis on the duties of the state *vis-à-vis* the needy. He was pleased to confirm that the route he had laid out a decade ago had proved to be the right one. It had even been advantageous for private welfare: the number of institutions that had acquired the title "d'utilité

<sup>35</sup> *Congrès international d'assistance tenue du 28 juillet au 4 août 1889. Vol. I. Paris 1889, 284.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 286.

publique” (in the public interest) had markedly increased. New organisations had also emerged, such as marine hospitals, sanatoria, and shelters for pregnant women. His mildly triumphalist speech was clearly geared to the occasion. A year later, in an article for the *Revue philanthropique*, he allowed himself to be more critical, both with regard to the efficiency of the public services and to the mentality of the advocates of the private charities. He found it odd that a Catholic organisation, exclusively providing for people of that confession, could call itself *Office central des œuvres de bienfaisance*.<sup>37</sup> As to his own role as civil servant, he believed he was often falsely attacked or put in the wrong camp. He was wary of people who saw him merely as a defender of public welfare, or solely as an enemy of private relief. The fault-finding between representatives of private charity and welfare functionaries reflected petty personal animosity rather than the relations in real terms, he thought: “L’assistance n’est le plus souvent que de la bienfaisance régularisée, et il arrive que la bienfaisance se réduit à n’être qu’une administration”.<sup>38</sup> In the end, despite the numerous misunderstandings, he continued to believe that an enlightened balance between different forms of relief was the best way forward.

Monod was a good example of the “hesitant Jacobinism” that characterised the administrative elite of the Third Republic in France.<sup>39</sup> As prefect he had learned at first hand that the powers of the state were neither all-encompassing nor unidirectional. In the often complex political reality of the departmental administration, inflexible interventionism was bound to fail, or would have marginal effects, without sufficient support of local elites. His “multi-level” fight against the cholera epidemic had amply demonstrated this. In Paris, forcing through one’s projects was even more difficult than in the provinces, not least because in the polarised political culture of the Third Republic it was always imperative to be on one’s guard against political enemies. Consultation and mediation often yielded better results than showing administrative muscle.

This approach also worked at the international level, where unanimous decisions were extremely hard to arrive at, particularly if they were meant to accom-

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<sup>37</sup> Henri Monod: Bienfaisance privée et assistance publique (notes), in: *Revue philanthropique* 5, no. 9 (1901), 129–151, esp. 137.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>39</sup> Sudhir Hazareesingh: Vincent Wright and the Jacobin Legacy in Historical and Theoretical Perspectives, in: *id.* (ed.): *The Jacobin Legacy in Modern France. Essays in Honour of Vincent Wright*. Oxford 2002, 1–20; Sabine Rudischhauser: Regulierte Selbstregulierung im Frankreich der III. Republik. Zivilgesellschaft und “jakobinischer” Staat, in: Peter Collin et al. (eds.): *Regulierte Selbstregulierung in der westlichen Welt des späten 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts*. Frankfurt 2014, 149–188.

plish meaningful change. For Monod, international congresses were platforms to continue the political struggle at home. It helped that two important welfare congresses were held in Paris (in 1889 and 1900) at crucial moments in the development of new social legislation in France. He did not need to travel far to drive his point about public and private relief home. For other causes, however, he was prepared to leave familiar territory. In 1903, at the international hygiene congress in Brussels, he strongly supported the establishment of an International Office of Public Hygiene, eventually founded in 1908 in Paris. By then, Monod had left public service. It must have been a bitter moment for him that while he was presiding over the international congress of hydrology, climatology, geology and therapy using physical agents, held in October 1905 in Venice, the council of ministers decided that it was time for the “state philanthropist” to resign.<sup>40</sup>

Whereas Monod, motivated by a prudent Jacobin approach, strove for an entente between state and civil society initiatives, the Dutch priest and politician Willem Hubert Nolens (1860–1931) based his conception of state-society relations on Catholic doctrine. The encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, issued by Pope Leo XIII in 1891, coincided with Nolens’ own decision to give his life a spin towards politics. He was ordained as a priest in 1887 and had obtained a doctorate in political science and law at the University of Utrecht in 1890. Part of his PhD dissertation addressed the social question and made an appeal to employers to understand that they were connected to the workers by another tie than just the financial.<sup>41</sup> It was this progressive view of labour relations that continued to characterise his ideas and initiatives as a politician, a university professor and an internationalist.

In 1896 he was elected to the Second Chamber for the district of Venlo, a seat he would hold until his death. In 1910 he became leader of the parliamentary party of the Catholics and had an important say in the formations of all new governments throughout the 1910s and 1920s without ever entering a cabinet himself. He was member (1902) and later president (1913) of the Dutch Mine Council. Between 1909 and 1925 he occupied the chair of labour legislation at the University of Amsterdam.

In the conciliatory climate surrounding *Rerum Novarum*, the minds of many Catholic intellectuals in Europe turned to internationally concerted action in favour of workers’ protection. In the 1890s Nolens often accompanied the Catholic leader Herman Schaepman to the annual congresses of the German Catholics. In this period the organisers of these events frequently put social reform issues

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<sup>40</sup> Murard and Zylberman, *L’hygiène dans la République*, 450.

<sup>41</sup> Jacobus Petrus Gribling; Nolens, Willem Hubert (1860–1931), in: *Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland*. URL: <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/bwn1880-2000/lemmata/bwn1/nolens> [12-11-2013] (17 July 2015).



on the agenda and invited speakers from other countries. In that way they not only fuelled the programme of the Catholic *Zentrum* party in Germany, but also inspired the Dutch Catholics to follow their path. Both Schaeapman and Nolens had an academic background and became advocates of a further democratisation of Dutch politics, hoping that they would be able to bind a large proportion of the working class to Catholic candidates (a fully-fledged Catholic party had yet not been formed). In August 1897 the two Dutch Catholic leaders took off to Fribourg in Switzerland to attend the fourth international scientific congress of Catholics, where one of Nolens' heroes, the *Zentrum* politician and professor Georg Friedrich Freiherr von Hertling, would give a lecture. In 1906 Nolens published a translation of Hertling's *Naturrecht und Socialpolitik* (originally published in 1893). From Fribourg, Nolens and Schaeapman travelled to Zurich to participate in the international workers' protection congress.

To some extent the Zurich congress was a sequel to the workers' protection (*Arbeiterschutz*) congress organised by the German Emperor Wilhelm II after his turn towards a more integrationist social policy, but it also followed in the footsteps of earlier Swiss initiatives to come to some sort of international arrangement with regard to workers' protection. A wide variety of politicians, officials, employers and workers' representatives were invited to discuss child and women's labour, the length of the working day, Sunday rest and the establishment of an international bureau for workers' protection. What was often not possible at the national level was realised at this congress: a fruitful exchange of ideas and opinions between liberals, socialists, Catholics and Protestants. It seems that the Dutch representatives did not play a prominent role in the deliberations, but it gave Nolens the opportunity to expand his network.

The Belgian government had planned a similar congress in Brussels in September 1897, on the occasion of the international exhibition, to take stock of the progress made since the Berlin congress of 1890. The Brussels congress had a more official character and was to a greater extent aimed at bureaucrats, university professors and employers than its more "democratic" Swiss counterpart. Nolens presented a rather formalistic paper on Dutch social legislation, mainly consisting of articles from laws and regulations, but otherwise he appears not to have contributed to the debates. The congress also discussed whether it was expedient to create an international labour office. The majority of the participants, however, was not inclined to press ahead on this issue.

During the subsequent international congress for workers' protection held in Paris in 1900 the decision was finally taken to establish an International Association for Labour Legislation (IALL). A fully-fledged organisation proved unfeasible, but the non-governmental association was nevertheless given a permanent office and received subsidies from various national governments and the Vatican.

The seat of the new association was opened in Basel in 1901. The IALL was a mixed transnational community of experts *and* representatives of trade unions, and national employers' and workers' organisations, which thrived on its ability to navigate carefully between labour and capital.<sup>42</sup>

Nolens was present in 1900 at the *Musée Social*, where the founding congress took place, and in 1901 in Basel, when the association started its activities. Given his involvement in the realisation of the international association it was only logical that he would also obtain a seat on the board of the Dutch section established in February 1901. After the death of the first president, A. Kerdijk, in 1905, Nolens was appointed in his place. He would keep this function until the dissolution of the Dutch association in 1926. In this position he would frequently participate in the international gatherings of the association. His prominent role in the early days of Dutch and international bodies dealing with labour legislation made him the obvious person to lead the Dutch delegation to the annual International Labour Conferences after the First World War. He became a close friend of Albert Thomas, the director of the International Labour Office, and was instrumental in furthering relations between the ILO and the Vatican.<sup>43</sup>

Nolens did not limit his international activities to labour legislation issues. He was active in the *Comité permanent international des assurances sociales*, founded in 1889 (renamed *Association internationale des assurances sociales* in 1908), and the *Association internationale pour la lutte contre le chômage*. In these cases Nolens also acted as *trait-d'union* between the international bodies and their Dutch sections. He was involved in the Interparliamentary Conference and in the international peace and arbitration initiatives of the 1900s, which put The Hague on the map as the international capital of peace. From 1900 he also regularly attended the international public and private welfare congresses (in Milan and in Copenhagen, twice in Paris). At the 1910 congress in Copenhagen he acted as president of one of the sections, but otherwise the congress proceedings do not indicate that Nolens was active in the discussions. In the Netherlands he was not known for his oratory skills, and it seems that he did not force himself into the spotlight at the international level either. His strength, however, both nationally and internationally, lay in his ability to connect people and to act as trustworthy mediator.

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<sup>42</sup> Sandrine Kott: From Transnational Reformist Network to International Organization. The International Association for Labour Legislation and the International Labour Organization, 1900–1930s, in: Rodogno, Struck and Vogel, *Shaping the Transnational Sphere*, 239–258.

<sup>43</sup> Jacobus Petrus Gribbling: *Willem Hubert Nolens, 1860–1931. Uit het leven van een Priester-Staatsman*. Assen 1978, 267–287.

Nolens was a man of faith and was generally held to be an effective political broker. He was blessed with a rare talent in politics: the art of controlling his personal ambition, which not only helped him in the compromise and consensus seeking political culture of the Netherlands, but also gave him a head start in international contacts. The encyclical *Rerum Novarum* had given him the inspiration and the tools to search for practicable compromises with regard to social security and poor relief. He welcomed a role for the state in these fields whilst trying to assure that all societal parties involved would get a say in the supervision and execution of the arrangements that were offered. In this sense state and society could be brought into relative harmony. This strategy fitted in well with the mainstream ideas circulating within the transnational social reform community in the two decades before the First World War. The Vatican acknowledged his efforts, and appointed him in 1916 to the post of protonotary apostolic, which allowed him to choose a heraldic device. Nolens opted for “*Utrique fidelis*” (faithful to both), thereby expressing his commitment to church and state.

## Conclusion

This study has examined the transnational mobility of four social reformers of different national backgrounds and political leanings. Their participation in international congresses received particular attention, since these were stages *par excellence* on which to test to what extent mobility, exchange, and reform were bound up.

The discussion of the relationship between internationalism, nationalism and local activism followed the various spatial orientations of the reform ideas of Victor Desguin of Antwerp and Louis Guillaume of Neuchâtel. Both had degrees in medicine and developed a keen interest in hygienism. The determination to bring about change in their respective environments (the city of Antwerp and the prison of Neuchâtel) led them to orientate themselves internationally. Since in the second half of the nineteenth century the national states provided very little in this field, local reformers often looked across borders. Desguin was a regular visitor to the international hygiene congresses, while Guillaume became the long-standing secretary-general of the international prison congress. Their contributions to the congresses not only helped them to further the cause of hygienist and penal reform across nations, but also – and perhaps more visibly – strengthened their position at home. Whereas sanitary reform in Antwerp remained Desguin’s main sphere of action, Guillaume extended his scope to the federal statistics of Switzerland.

Turning to the transnational biographies of Henri Monod from Paris and Willem Hubert Nolens from Venlo, the focus shifted to how they used international platforms to advocate a division of labour between state and civil society in providing elementary social security. Monod, the son of a Protestant pastor, served the French state for almost 40 years and was imbued with a strong sense of administrative mission. This should not, however, be mistaken for a blind urge to centralise welfare and sanitation (his main fields of action) whenever a window of opportunity occurred and to create top-down structures wherever possible. As Monod's activities at the international level highlighted, his principal aim was to develop synergies between public and private arrangements, central and local government, and administrative and scientific expertise. The Catholic priest Willem Hubert Nolens similarly exerted himself to bring parties together in order to find compromises that worked. He did not draw his inspiration from a deep trust in the goodness of the state, but accepted its functionality for practical purposes. Like Monod, he strove for effective interaction between state and societal actors. His conciliatory Catholic background and heightened sense of the realities of the political order, also internationally, made him particularly qualified to act as go-between.

The main advantage of this biographical approach to mobility is that it makes it possible to recognise and to compare the strategies of protagonists at international congresses. They shared a willingness to champion public causes, such as sanitation, poor relief and social security, at a transnational level. Even though they no doubt believed in the expediency of international agreements on these issues, they also regarded the outcomes of the congresses as supporting their struggles at home.

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