

**Wuthering Heights:  
Legal Materialities, Summit Diplomacy, and the Making of the World Stage at the  
Beijing International Convention Center in 95’**

Daniel R. Quiroga-Villamarin\*

*In this sense, throughout the summits, women have remained as sherpas, the porters carrying the heavy baggage, and have not yet been allowed the privileges of mountaineers who define the rules of the game.<sup>1</sup>*

*Working as secretaries but also as librarians, these women were the ones who ensured that the League of Nations documents would be produced and archived professionally [...] these women did not think of themselves as furniture.<sup>2</sup>*

**Abstract**

Even before the United States President Truman urged the attendants of the 1945 United Nations Conference on International Organization to see themselves as “architects of the better world,” the field of global governance has proven to be a fertile ground for metaphors drawn from architecture. Indeed, in the collective imagination of practitioners and scholars alike, the international legal order appears as a vast and towering edifice: a veritable “legal architecture” of globality that overlooks “areas” of governance sustained by figurative and normative “pillars.” But international law’s castles, of course, were not built solely in the air. For the metaphorical use of architectural language only hides international law’s profound lack of engagement with the material and concrete spaces in which the “international” is produced, contested, and disputed. In fact, one can read Enloe’s reproach against international historians for treating the League of Nations’ female secretaries as furniture not only as a testament to the need for further engagement with the everyday workings of international diplomacy, but also as an example of the problematic invisibility of material objects such as cabinets, “walls, envelopes, rooms, and other spatialities of law” in international legal history. Thus, in this paper, I interrogate the material and spatial sociotechnical arrangements that shaped the Beijing 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women. While much has been written on the legal documents debated and adopted, there is scant attention on how space itself constrained and enabled those who attended this world stage. I argue that exploration into the history of infrastructures of global governance, as opposed to the traditional histories of legal concepts or leading diplomats, can shed more light into the contentious inner workings of transnational lawmaking in, and beyond, Beijing 95’.

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\*PhD student & Teaching Assistant, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies.

[daniel.quiroga@graduateinstitute.ch](mailto:daniel.quiroga@graduateinstitute.ch)

<sup>1</sup> Hilary Charlesworth, “Women as Sherpas: Are Global Summits Useful for Women?,” *Feminist Studies* 22, no. 3 (1996): 537–47, 546.

<sup>2</sup> Cynthia H. Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, 2nd (completely revised and updated) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 4-5.

## 1. Introduction: Spatiality and Materiality in International Legal History

In the last two decades, international legal scholars have (re)discovered the importance of history as a key element for the discipline.<sup>3</sup> This “turn to history” has not come without controversies. Orford suggests it would be more precise to talk about a turn to history as method while Simpson aptly noted the twin rise of “an obsessive concern with historical method” and a “jamming together of method and politics.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, a quick glance of the recent rise of historiographical interventions in the field shows an ever-growing awareness of the methodological and political challenges of delving into the past from a legal perspective.<sup>5</sup>

However, as I argued in my MA dissertation, one glaring blind spot of this emerging literature is that most of the scholarship produced under this turn has adopted, implicitly or explicitly, the methodological tools from intellectual history - and the so called “Cambridge School”<sup>6</sup> - as the sole permissible approach. Even its harshest critics tend to assume the history of ideas or concepts is the only methodology available for contemporary legal history.<sup>7</sup> For

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Skouteris, “Engaging History in International Law,” in *New Approaches to International Law: The History of a Project*, ed. José-María Beneyto and David Kennedy (The Hague: TMC Asser Press, 2012), 99–122.

<sup>4</sup> Anne Orford, “International Law and the Limits of History,” in *The Law of International Lawyers: Reading Martti Koskenniemi*, ed. Wouter Werner, Marieke De Hoon, and Alexis Galán (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 297–320; Gerry Simpson, “Introduction to Symposium on the Trajectories of International Legal Histories: Doing Things Differently There,” *Leiden Journal of International Law* 31, no. 4 (December 2018): 817–19, respectively.

<sup>5</sup> Martti Koskenniemi, “A History of International Law Histories,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of International Law*, ed. Anne Peters and Bardo Fassbender (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 933–71; Mathew Craven, “Between Law and History: The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 and the Logic of Free Trade,” *London Review of International Law* 3, no. 1 (2015): 31–59; Jennifer Pitts, “The Critical History of International Law,” *Political Theory* 43, no. 4 (August 2015): 541–52; Ignacio de la Rasilla, “The Problem of Periodization in the History of International Law,” *Law and History Review* 37, no. 1 (2019): 275–308; Liliana Obregón, “Writing International Legal History: An Overview,” *Monde(s)* 7, no. 1 (2015): 95–112; Liliana Obregón, “Peripheral Histories of International Law,” *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 15, no. 1 (2019): 437–51; Valentina Vadi, “International Law and Its Histories: Methodological Risks and Opportunities,” *Harvard International Law Journal* 58, no. 2 (2017): 311–52; Valentina Vadi, “Perspective and Scale in the Architecture of International Legal History,” *European Journal of International Law* 30, no. 1 (2019): 53–71; Janne E. Nijman, *Seeking Change by Doing History* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam - Inaugural Lecture 591, 2017); Martin Clark, “Ambivalence, Anxieties / Adaptations, Advances: Conceptual History and International Law,” *Leiden Journal of International Law* 31, no. 4 (2018): 747–71; Doreen Lustig, “Governance Histories of International Law,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Legal History*, ed. Markus D. Dubber and Christopher Tomlins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 858–82; Jean d’Aspremont, “Critical Histories of International Law and the Repression of Disciplinary Imagination,” *London Review of International Law* 7, no. 1 (2019): 89–115; Kate Purcell, “On the Uses and Advantages of Genealogy for International Law,” *Leiden Journal of International Law* 33, no. 1 (March 2020): 13–35; Matilda Arvidsson and Miriam Bak McKenna, “The Turn to History in International Law and the Sources Doctrine: Critical Approaches and Methodological Imaginaries,” *Leiden Journal of International Law* 33, no. 1 (March 2020): 37–56.

<sup>6</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, “On the Unglobality of Contexts: Cambridge Methods and the History of Political Thought,” *Global Intellectual History* 4, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 1–14, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Anne Orford, “International Law and the Limits of History,” in *The Law of International Lawyers: Reading Martti Koskenniemi*, ed. Wouter Werner, Marieke De Hoon, and Alexis Galán (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 297–320; Anne Orford, “On International Legal Method,” *London Review of International Law* 1, no. 1 (2013): 166–97, <https://doi.org/10.1093/lril/lrt005>; Anne Orford, “Scientific Reason and the Discipline of International Law,” in *International Law as a Profession*, ed. Jean d’Aspremont et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 93–114; Anne Orford, “The Past as Law or History? The Relevance of Imperialism for Modern International Law,” in *International Law and New Approaches to the Third World: Between Repetition and Renewal*, ed. Mark Toufayan, Emanuelle Tourme-Jouannet, and Hélène Ruiz (Paris: Société de législation comparée, 2013); Alexandra Kemmerer, “‘We Do Not Need to Always Look to Westphalia . . .’ A Conversation

both better and worse, we have come to consider intellectual history as *the* benchmark for the discipline. Unsurprisingly, Moyn notes that many scholars read Pitts’ book as “the culmination of a campaign to revive international law as a topic of study and to integrate it into accounts of the histories of intellectual life and political thought.”<sup>8</sup> In this vein, Scarfi defined international legal history as “the intellectual history of legal ideas in international relations,”<sup>9</sup> while Singh acknowledged that “[i]t goes without saying that much of the scholarship on the history of international law takes instructions from the Cambridge School.”<sup>10</sup> This methodological hegemony is problematic for several reasons. To be clear, I am not suggesting that intellectual history lacks critical potential. I have myself used this type of approach to raise questions about the contingency of the international legal order.<sup>11</sup> I have, however, become increasingly concerned that the apparent widespread adoption of one particular technique of doing history may have eclipsed other alternative ways of approaching historical work.

Therefore, in my more recent work, I have drawn from the material turn in history,<sup>12</sup> the “renewed materialisms” in the humanities<sup>13</sup> and science and technology studies (STS)<sup>14</sup> to rethink new methodological directions for international legal history that go beyond the study of diplomats, doctrines, and discourse. I argue that a more materially oriented approach –that interrogates the intersections between the built and the imagined– could provide insights on

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with Martti Koskenniemi and Anne Orford,” *Journal of the History of International Law* 17, no. 1 (2015): 1–14; Martti Koskenniemi, “Epilogue: To Enable and Enchant – on the Power of Law,” in *The Law of International Lawyers*, ed. Wouter Werner, Marieke De Hoon, and Alexis Galan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 393–412.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Moyn, “Book Review: Boundaries of the International: Law and Empire, by Jennifer Pitts,” *Political Theory* 47, no. 2 (2019): 273–78, 275. See Jennifer Pitts, *Boundaries of the International: Law and Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> Juan Pablo Scarfi, *The Hidden History of International Law in the Americas: Empire and Legal Networks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), xx.

<sup>10</sup> Prabhakar Singh, “Book Review: Lauren Benton and Lisa Ford. Rage for Order: The British Empire and the Origins of International Law, 1800–1850 Andrew Fitzmaurice. Sovereignty, Property and Empire, 1500–2000,” *European Journal of International Law* 28, no. 3 (2017): 975–86, 976–7.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Ricardo Quiroga-Villamarín, “‘An Atmosphere of Genuine Solidarity and Brotherhood’: Hernán Santa-Cruz and a Forgotten Latin American Contribution to Social Rights,” *Journal of the History of International Law* 21, no. 1 (2019): 71–103.

<sup>12</sup> Frank Trentmann, “Materiality in the Future of History: Things, Practices, and Politics,” *Journal of British Studies* 48, no. 2 (2009): 283–307; Tony Bennett and Patrick Joyce, eds., *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History and the Material Turn* (London: Routledge, 2010); Timothy J. LeCain, *The Matter of History: How Things Create the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Tom Johnson, “Legal History and The Material Turn,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Legal History*, ed. Markus D. Dubber and Christopher Tomlins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 497–514.

<sup>13</sup> Diana H. Coole and Samantha Frost, eds., “Introducing the New Materialisms,” in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 1–43.

<sup>14</sup> Sheila Jasanoff, “Reconstructing the Past, Constructing the Present: Can Science Studies and the History of Science Live Happily Ever After?,” *Social Studies of Science* 30, no. 4 (2000): 621–31; John Tresch, “Cosmologies Materialized: History of Science and History of Ideas,” in *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, ed. Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn (Oxford University Press, 2014), 153–72.

the role of material infrastructures,<sup>15</sup> commodities,<sup>16</sup> and non-human actants<sup>17</sup> in the past, present, and future of global governance.

In this light, the international conference complex seems like a promising venue for a socio-historical materialist inquiry.<sup>18</sup> For the international lawyer, the conference locale seems to be an uninteresting place. While spectacular activities might unfold in it due to the appearance of great lawyers, the room itself seems like an empty recipient, devoid of any political implications. Like the fish who can’t realize it is surrounded by water, perhaps, our discipline dwells within conference spaces up to the point that we have come to see them as natural and self-evident environments of international interaction.<sup>19</sup> But, as the spatial turn in broader social sciences has shown, “space is not simply a container for human action, but also an artifact of human existence [... and] a mode of intellectual production deserving of interpretation on its own right.”<sup>20</sup> This warning gains even more salience when one considers that the “globe itself is not a purely geographical space but a constituted political and cultural space.”<sup>21</sup>

While there has been some promising scholarship that brings insights from critical geography<sup>22</sup> into international legal discussions in the past few decades,<sup>23</sup> there is virtually no

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<sup>15</sup> Brian Larkin, “The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42, no. 1 (2013): 327–43.

<sup>16</sup> Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3–63.

<sup>17</sup> Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> Lauren Benton, “Beyond Anachronism: Histories of International Law and Global Legal Politics,” *Journal of the History of International Law* 21, no. 1 (2019): 7–40.

<sup>19</sup> Andrea Bianchi, *International Law Theories: An Inquiry into Different Ways of Thinking* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>20</sup> John Randolph, “The Space of Intellect and the Intellect of Space,” in *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, ed. Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 212–31, 225. See also Laura Chiesa, *Space as Storyteller: Spatial Jumps in Architecture, Critical Theory, and Literature* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2016); Paul Stock, ed., *The Uses of Space in Early Modern History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>21</sup> Samuel Moyn, “On the Nonglobalization of Ideas,” in *Global Intellectual History*, ed. Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 187–204, 196.

<sup>22</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden: Blackwell, 1991); Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, 2nd ed., Radical Thinkers (London: Verso, 2011); Marijn Nieuwenhuis and David Crouch, eds., *The Question of Space: Interrogating the Spatial Turn between Disciplines* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, Ltd, 2017).

<sup>23</sup> Nicholas K. Blomley, David Delaney, and Richard T. Ford, eds., *The Legal Geographies Reader: Law, Power, and Space* (Oxford, UK ; Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2001); Chris Butler, “Critical Legal Studies and the Politics of Space,” *Social & Legal Studies* 18, no. 3 (September 2009): 313–32; Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, *Spatial Justice: Body, Landscape, Atmosphere* (London: Routledge, 2015); Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, “Law’s Spatial Turn: Geography, Justice and a Certain Fear of Space,” *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 7, no. 2 (June 2011): 187–202; Carl Landauer, “Regionalism, Geography, and the International Legal Imagination,” *Chicago Journal of International Law* 11, no. 2 (2011): 557–95; Luis Eslava, “The Materiality of International Law: Violence, History and Joe Sacco’s The Great War,” *London Review of International Law* 5, no. 1 (2017): 49–86; Luis Eslava, *Local Space, Global Life: The Everyday Operation of International Law and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Luis Eslava, “Istanbul Vignettes: Observing the Everyday Operation of International Law,” *London Review of International Law* 2, no.

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work on the politics and poetics of conference spatialities. Indeed, the materiality of internationally-oriented built-environments is conspicuously absent from the literature in the growing literature on the history of internationalisms, international organizations (IOs), and international law-making.<sup>24</sup> In fact, one can read Enloe’s reproach against international

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1 (2014): 3–47; Stuart Elden, “Legal Terrain—the Political Materiality of Territory,” *London Review of International Law* 5, no. 2 (2017): 199–224; Juan M Amaya-Castro, “Teaching International Law: Both Everywhere and Somewhere,” in *Liber Amicorum in Honour of a Modern Renaissance Man: Gudmundur Eiríksson*, ed. Juan Carlos Sainz Borgo et al. (Universal Law Publishing, 2017), 521–36; Nikolas M. Rajkovic, “The Visual Conquest of International Law: Brute Boundaries, the Map, and the Legacy of Cartogenesis,” *Leiden Journal of International Law* 31, no. 2 (2018): 267–88.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Virally, *L’O.N.U., d’hier à Demain* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1961); Inis L. Claude, *Swords into Plowshares: The Problems and Progress of International Organization*, 4. ed (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984); David Kennedy, “The Move to Institutions,” *Cardozo Law Review* 8, no. 5 (1987): 841–988; David Armstrong, *The Rise of the International Organisation: A Short History* (London: Macmillan, 1993); Pierre Gerbet, Victor-Yves Ghebali, and Marie-Renée Mouton, *Le Rêve d’un Ordre Mondial: De La SDN à l’ONU* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1996); Richard Tuck, *The Rights of War and Peace: Political Thought and the International Order from Grotius to Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Kal Raustiala, “The Architecture of International Cooperation: Transgovernmental Networks and the Future of International Law,” *Virginia Journal of International Law*, no. 1 (2003 2002): 1–92; Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World*, First paperback printing (Berkeley, Calif. 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Weitz, “From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions,” *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (2008): 1313–43; Emma Rothschild, “The Archives of Universal History,” *Journal of World History* 19, no. 3 (2008): 375–401; Sunil Amrith and Glenda Sluga, “New Histories of the United Nations,” *Journal of World History* 19, no. 3 (2008): 251–74; Martti Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law 1870–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea, 1815 to the Present* (London: Penguin Books, 2013); Lauren A Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Benedict Kingsbury and Benjamin Straumann, *The Roman Foundations of the Law of Nations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Matthew Craven, Sundhya Pahuja, and Gerry Simpson, eds., *International Law and the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Sundhya Pahuja, *Decolonising International Law: Development, Economic Growth, and the Politics of Universality* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Sandrine Kott, “Towards a Social History of International Organisations: The ILO and the Internationalisation of Western Social Expertise (1919–1949),” in *Internationalism, Imperialism and the Formation of the Contemporary World: The Past of the Present*, ed. Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo and José Pedro Monteiro (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Sandrine Kott, “Les organisations internationales, terrains d’étude de la globalisation. Jalons pour une approche socio-historique,” *Critique internationale* 52, no. 3 (2011): 9–16; Sandrine Kott, “Internationalism in Wartime. Introduction,” *Journal of Modern European History* 12, no. 3 (August 2014): 317–22; Sandrine Kott and Joëlle Droux, *Globalizing Social Rights: The International Labour Organization and Beyond*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Victor Yves Ghebali and Robert Kolb, eds., *Organisation internationale et guerre mondiale: le cas de la Société des Nations et de l’Organisation internationale du travail pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Bruxelles: Bruylant, 2013); Luigi Nuzzo and Miloš Vec, eds., *Constructing International Law: The Birth of a Discipline*, Band 273 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2012); Bob Reinalda, *The Routledge History of International Organizations from 1815 to the Present Day*, First issued in paperback (London New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013); Gerry J. 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(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Chris Tudda, *Cold War Summits: A History, from Potsdam to Malta*, New Approaches to International History (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015); Ludovic Tournès, *Les États-Unis et La Société*

historians for treating the League of Nations’ female secretaries as furniture not only as a testament to the need for further engagement with the everyday working of IOs, but also as an example of the problematic invisibility of material objects such as cabinets, “walls, envelopes, rooms, and other spatialities of law” in international legal history.<sup>25</sup>

Until now, questions of space and materiality in global governance have been solely studied by either the ethnographer’s thick description<sup>26</sup> or the aesthetic gaze of the architect.<sup>27</sup> These contributions, however, do not usually engage with the work of international lawyers or global historians. The stage is set for an interdisciplinary inquiry that draws from these very different bodies of literature to provide a more complex understanding of the “everyday geographies” (Sullivan 2017) of international law-making.<sup>28</sup>

## 2. Beijing 95’: Summit Diplomacy and the making of the World Stage

In this paper (which corresponds roughly to chapter X of my PhD dissertation), I bring these theoretical insights into the study of the space of the Beijing International Conference

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*Des Nations (1914-1946): Les Systèmes Internationaux Face à l'émergence d'une Superpuissance* (Berne: Peter Lang, 2016); Susan Block-Lieb and Terence Charles Halliday, *Global Lawmakers International Organizations in the Crafting of World Markets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Amy L. Sayward, *The United Nations in International History*, New Approaches to International History (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017); Guy Fiti Sinclair, *To Reform the World: International Organizations and the Making of Modern States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Stefan Kadelbach, Thomas Kleinlein, and David Rot ~~aaaaaaaaah-~~Isigkeit, eds., *System, Order, and International Law: The Early History of International Legal Thought from Machiavelli to Hegel* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017); Luis Eslava, Michael Fakhri, and Vasuki Nesiiah, eds., *Bandung, Global History, and International Law: Critical Pasts and Pending Futures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Michel Marbeau, *La Société des Nations: vers un monde multilatéral: 1919-1946* (Tours: Presses universitaires François-Rabelais, 2017); Simon Jackson and Alanna O'Malley, eds., *The Institution of International Order: From the League of Nations to the United Nations* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018); Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo and José Pedro Monteiro, eds., *Internationalism, Imperialism and the Formation of the Contemporary World: The Pasts of the Present* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Thomas Weiss and Sam Daws, eds., *The Oxford Handbook on the United Nations*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Andreas Fickers and Gabriele Balbi, eds., *History of the International Telecommunication Union: Transnational Techno-Diplomacy from the Telegraph to the Internet* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2020).

<sup>25</sup> Timothy Hyde, “Boundaries, Walls, Envelopes, Rooms, and Other Spatialities of Law,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Law and Humanities*, ed. Simon Stern, Maksymilian Del Mar, and Bernadette Meyler (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 235–54.

<sup>26</sup> Magnus Marsden, Diana Ibañez-Tirado, and David Henig, “Everyday Diplomacy,” *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 34, no. 2 (2016): 2–22; Ronald Niezen and Maria Sapignoli, eds., *Palaces of Hope: The Anthropology of Global Organizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Miia Halme-Tuomisaari, “Methodologically Blonde at the UN in a Tactical Quest for Inclusion,” *Social Anthropology* 26, no. 4 (November 2018): 456–70; Annelise Riles, “The Sociality of the Platform,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Law and Humanities*, ed. Simon Stern, Maksymilian Del Mar, and Bernadette Meyler (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 255–72.

<sup>27</sup> Jean-Claude Pallas, *Histoire et architecture du Palais des Nations (1924 - 2001): l'art déco au service des relations internationales* (Genève: Nations Unies, 2001); Keller Easterling, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space*, Paperback edition (London: Verso, 2016); Keller Easterling, *Enduring Innocence: Global Architecture and Its Political Masquerades* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2008); Mark Crinson and Richard J Williams, *The Architecture of Art History: A Historiography* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019); Mark Crinson, *Rebuilding Babel: Modern Architecture and Internationalism* (London New York: I.B. Tauris, 2017); Duncan Bell and Bernardo Zacka, eds., *Political Theory and Architecture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020); Gordana Fontana-Giusti, *Foucault for Architects* (London: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>28</sup> Robert E. Sullivan, *The Geography of the Everyday: Toward an Understanding of the Given* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017).

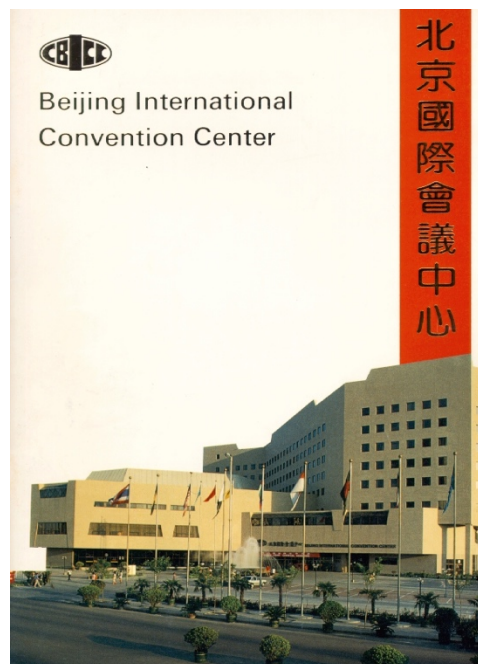
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Center (BICC) in the context of the 1995 World Conference on Women. If, as Spivak claimed, “[w]omen are being used for the representation of [North-South] unity - another name for the profound transnational disunity necessary for globalization [... this] conference[ is] global theatre,” then in this paper I am interested in exploring the global stage which sustained such theatrical activities.<sup>29</sup> In this vein, I approach the spatial arrangements and socio-technical layouts of the BICC to see how they reflected (contested) visions of global governance.



Image I: Plenary Hall at the BICC, UN/DPI Photo.<sup>30</sup>

To do so, I aim to read the traditional archival sources (related to the outputs of the leading state and NGO delegations) of the conference side by side with the available information regarding the material conditions of these concrete interventions.



<sup>29</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Woman’ as Theatre: United Nations Conference on Women, Beijing 1995,” *Radical Philosophy* 75, no. 1 (1996).

<sup>30</sup> Taken from <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/images/plenary.jpg> (last accessed on October 26, 2020).

Image II : the BICC, UN/DPI Photo.<sup>31</sup>

Due to covid-related complications and the early stage of my doctoral research, I have not been able to fully carry out the archival research related to this chapter. If possible, I am also interested in interviewing a small number of leading practitioners that were involved in this space to enrich the historical narrative. Like Johns, I am motivated by a “quasi ethnographic orientation”<sup>32</sup> that tries to piece together the lived experience of those who inhabited and negotiated within these spaces. A phenomenon I am particularly interested in is the movement of the negotiations through different places. Hence, I will focus on how the conversation was strategically shifted from certain rooms to plenary halls or to informal settings, to the advance or chagrin of certain actors. For instance, I will pay particular attention to the sessions that were held in the Great Hall of the People instead of the BICC. From this perspective, it seems pertinent to wonder why -and how- did negotiators try to dance from one location to another?



Image III: Secretary General Gertrude Mongella at the Great Hall of the People,  
UN/DPI Photo taken by Yao Da Wei.<sup>33</sup>

Another issue I am interested in addressing is the material resources and constraints offered by the translation services to those involved in these meetings.



<sup>31</sup> Taken from <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/images/bicc1.jpg> (last accessed on October 26, 2020).

<sup>32</sup> Fleur Johns, *Non-Legality in International Law: Unruly Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 20.

<sup>33</sup> Taken from <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/images/100220.jpg> (last accessed on October 26, 2020).



Image IV: Meeting in Beijing, UN/DPI Photo taken by Chen Kai Xing.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, another interesting question would be to focus on the ways the materiality of space enabled or barred participation of access to the deliberations. If recent work by feminist geographers have showed how urban and architectural planning often follows the needs and visions of men, then the construction of conference spaces might not be too different.<sup>35</sup>



Image IV: Meeting in Beijing, UN/DPI Photo taken by Chen Kai Xing.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Taken from <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/images/120703.jpg> (last accessed on October 26, 2020).

<sup>35</sup> Leslie Kern, *Feminist City: Claiming Space in a Man-Made World* (London: Verso, 2020).

<sup>36</sup> Taken from <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/images/140321.jpg> (last accessed on October 26, 2020).