

# **The Rockefeller Foundation, the League of Nations' Intellectual Cooperation Project, and the Idea of “Internationalism” during the Second World War**

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## **Abstract**

In this report, I focus on documents that highlight the relationship among the Rockefeller Foundation, the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC), linked to the League of Nations, and the refugee scholar Henri Bonnet, the French intellectual and director of the IIIC, in the early 1940s. After the Nazi invasion of Paris in the Second World War, the formulation of a temporary center of intellectual cooperation in the Americas was placed on the agenda. Brazilian physiologist Miguel Ozório de Almeida had been well acquainted with Henri Bonnet and he took part in the Committee for the study of the establishment of this center. The main objective of this research report is to take a fresh look at these debates.

## **Introduction**

During my research at the Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC), I came across records that enabled me to realize the relationships, conflicts, and exchanges among the Rockefeller Foundation, the League of Nations' intellectual cooperation project, the Division of Intellectual Cooperation of the Pan American Union, and the Brazilian academic community. This research was extremely enriching for my Ph.D. dissertation about Brazilian physiologist Ozório de Almeida's performance in national forums about the development of Brazilian intellectual life and his participation in international entities for intellectual cooperation (such as, the League of Nations' intellectual cooperation project and UNESCO). Ozório de Almeida was president of the Brazilian Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, linked to the League of Nations' intellectual cooperation project. In this position, he appropriated scientific internationalism, which marked international debates in this period, in order to help Brazil forge stronger scientific ties with other countries and develop its intellectual life. For him, the League of Nations' intellectual cooperation project was a forum to develop his internationalism.<sup>1</sup> Starting in the 1920s, Miguel Ozório de Almeida held a prominent place in discussions on the perspectives of development of Brazilian intellectual life at the Brazilian Academy of Sciences and at the Brazilian Academy of Education. So, it was this "man of science," involved in the transformation of Brazilian intellectual life, who participated in international organizations, defending scientific internationalism and the Brazilian contribution to the advancement of science.

In this report, I focus on documents about the Rockefeller Foundation and the refugee scholar Henri Bonnet, the French intellectual and director of the IIIC.<sup>2</sup>

## **International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation**

The League of Nations' intellectual cooperation project was effectuated through the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC), the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC), and 45 national

committees. Created in 1921, the ICIC was an advisory organization of the League and its first meeting was held in Geneva in October 1922, with Henri Bergson, Albert Einstein, Marie Curie, Salvador de Madariaga, and Paul Valérye as members. In 1924, France first put forward a proposal to create an international institute to make permanent the work of the committee, and the IIIC was subsequently inaugurated in Paris in 1926. The institute counted on financial support from the French government, as well as from other countries with national delegates.

The ICIC and IIIC were established to reflect on the role of the intellectual in society at a time of “crisis in intellectual life,” because of the consequences of the Great War and the tense international relations that marked the interwar period. They encouraged intellectual work, especially consideration of forms of financing for these activities.<sup>3</sup> For Daniel Laqua, these organizations were more than diplomatic entities because they served as forums for debate between individuals, and they combined academic or scientific activities with public interventions.<sup>4</sup>

For some intellectuals, the League of Nations’ intellectual cooperation project itself symbolized opposition to dictatorial regimes and the defense of freedom of speech. The project served as a forum for intellectuals and scientists to develop their internationalism and defend the funding and the autonomy of intellectual activities during the interwar period.

## **Henri Bonnet in the US: Making the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation “Universal”**

When the activities developed by the IIIC came to a halt due to the invasion of Paris by the Germans in 1940, Bonnet came to the US with the support of the Rockefeller Foundation (RF).<sup>5</sup> In July of that year, the RF approved a grant of 1500 dollars (a social sciences grant in aid) to H. Bonnet to come to United States for a period of six months to participate in discussions relating to the program of the IIIC.<sup>6</sup> After that, David H. Stevens, the RF director for the Humanities, signed a memorandum for “A grant in-aid of 6,000 dollars to the American Council of

Learned Societies to enable it to secure the services of Mr. Henri Bonnet over a two-year period beginning approximately November 15, 1940.”

Along with James Shotwell, president of the National Committee of the United States of America on International Intellectual Cooperation, Bonnet was involved with debates to maintain the activities of intellectual cooperation during the war. Bonnet’s relationship with members of national commissions of Latin American countries was seen as positive by staff members of the Rockefeller Foundation, who sought to keep him in the United States:

During his stay in this country Mr. Bonnet has been collaborating with Professor James T. Shotwell, the Chairman of the United States Committee on International Intellectual Cooperation, and with Dr. Waldo G. Leland, Director of the American Council of Learned Societies with regard to the international activities of the Council. In view of the growing importance of these activities Mr. Leland has requested the grant-in-aid now recommended to enable him to secure the services of Mr. Bonnet for the Council and for the United States Committee as a consultant on matters relating to international intellectual cooperation. Such an arrangement Mr. Leland and Mr Shotwell believe especially desirable because of the fact that the German government has now taken over the IIIC in Paris and has appointed a commissioner to continue its work. To reorganize activities of this kind in the Western Hemisphere, the United States Committee is now endeavoring to arrange a conference of all North and South American committees of intellectual cooperation, which will probably be held in Havana early in 1941. Mr. Leland and Mr. Shotwell feel that Mr. Bonnet’s knowledge of earlier work of this type would be invaluable in this effort, particularly because of his previous contacts with South American committees.<sup>7</sup>

The formulation of a temporary center in the Americas called “International Center of Intellectual Cooperation” was placed on the agenda. Brazilian physiologist Miguel Ozório de Almeida took part in the Committee for the study of the establishment of this center. The other members of the Committee were: James T. Shotwell (United States), Cosme de la Torriente y Peraza (Cuba), Julián Nogueira (Uruguay), Victor Lascano (Argentina), Francisco Walker Linhares (Chile), and Alfonso Reyes (Mexico). The appointed technical advisors were:

Malcolm Davis (United States), Henri Bonnet (France), Antonio Castro Leal (Mexico), and Mariano Brull (Cuba).<sup>8</sup>

The committee was created at the Second American Conference of National Committees on Intellectual Cooperation held in Havana on November 15-21, 1941.<sup>9</sup> At this conference, Brazil was represented by Ambassador João Carlos Muñiz, Ruy Ribeiro Couto, and Miguel Ozório de Almeida who presented the report, “Considerations on measures that should be adopted with the purpose of facilitating and coordinating the relations between the national commissions on intellectual cooperation in the Americas.” The Brazilian scientist highlighted the importance of:

Offering the International Institute on Intellectual Cooperation a shelter in a country in the Americas in such a way that it may resume its activities, even if partially. This would enable, among many other aspects, the continuity of the general work on intellectual cooperation without a too long discontinuity. This would also help us to organize on broader and more humane bases the very inter-American cooperation. Finally, we would thus clear all doubts about the real significance and deep meaning of the cooperation movement in the western hemisphere, making evident the principle of universal solidarity that should characterize it.<sup>10</sup>

The meeting “America in Face of the World Crisis” was held on November 23-25, 1941. The discussions were concerned about the risk posed to democracy, not only in Europe but also in the Americas, by the strengthening of authoritarian governments and the support by many intellectuals of anti-democratic thought. The meeting resulted in a manifest, which was signed and translated into Portuguese by Ozório de Almeida, with the purpose of defending democracy and opposing authoritarian regimes.<sup>11</sup>

Although these efforts to create an International Center of Intellectual Cooperation in the Americas, the establishment of this organization did not take place. In a 1942 letter, Ozório de Almeida explained the situation of the Intellectual Cooperation, from his point of view:

This is what there is concerning the International Institute on Cooperation. Despite all efforts, Henri Bonnet did not succeed in creating in the United States a Secretariat or whatever kind of organization that could give the impression of the Institute's real survival. He had absolutely no resources for this and the North Americans did not want to or could not support him with this issue. Therefore, the Institute has but a symbolic existence now. It has no place, no staff, it has nothing at all; it has only the representation of its director: H. Bonnet. At the Conference on Intellectual Cooperation in Cuba last November, with this situation clearly understood, a resolution was unanimously voted for the creation of a seven members Commission for the installation of the Institute of Paris in one of the American countries. I was elected as the Commission's president. A few weeks later the war with the United States started. The Commission could do nothing, and we are now taking steps for another decision under the new instances.<sup>12</sup>

After the liberation of Paris from German occupation, the International Institute on Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC) sought for the restoration of its activities. Ozório de Almeida received a letter from French politician Édouard Herriot inviting him to the IIIC's Administrative Council to be held in October 1945 in Lyon. In a letter from September 10, 1945 to Paulo Carneiro, Ozório de Almeida asked the Brazilian chemist, who was living in Paris, to attend the Council in his place in case he could not get the government's authorization and financial support in time to go himself to the event. The letter was written in French to "make things easier if by any chance there still is any kind of postal censorship"<sup>13</sup> and described the difficulties he was facing with the Brazilian government, which appeared not to give much importance to issues related to the international intellectual cooperation. Ozório de Almeida mentioned the request he received from the French fellows to support and legitimate the intellectual cooperation model that was being used by them in that Council. According to Herriot, the Council was being scheduled so that the IIIC would affirm its existence and the interest it still manifested regarding the intellectual cooperation cause before the London meeting to be held in November that same year, in which the shape of the new international organization on intellectual cooperation would be decided.

The post-war period opened new possibilities for international intellectual cooperation, especially with the debate on the creation and development of

UNESCO. UNESCO drew on the League of Nations' intellectual cooperation project; however, it sought distance from what was understood as defects and causes of the failure of the previous project, especially concerning its tendency considered elitist and Eurocentric.<sup>14</sup>

UNESCO inherited from the IIIC and ICIC some of the staff and cultural programs, such as the revision of school manuals, international university exchange, translation of literary works, the coordination of libraries and archives, among others. Furthermore, French intellectuals who participated in its creation followed a classical and European conception of culture, inspired on the IIIC, and conceived UNESCO's action mainly centered on the intellectual domain. However, the IIIC also played the role of a "countermodel" and many of UNESCO's founders, especially British and North American, tried to avoid that the new organization would reproduce the problems of its predecessor. Thus, UNESCO was created with the concern of attending the masses, not only an elite (the "*société des esprits*" of Paul Valéry), and with the objective of having a worldwide dimension instead of a European dimension only.

The previous actions of the IIIC were seen as elitists because they were restricted to a public composed of specialists and had little concrete achievements; besides, education was not included in its attributions. In contrast, UNESCO gave great importance to education and science, problems of the so-called "underdeveloped" countries, and modern mass communication techniques.<sup>15</sup>

Although the campaigns for Ozório de Almeida's application for important positions at UNESCO – including the position of UNESCO's director-general – were not successful, the scientist participated as a Brazilian delegate to the 1946 General Conference, previously mentioned, and to the 1949, 1950 and 1952 conferences.<sup>16</sup> During this period, he also presented the initial reports for the development of two UNESCO projects: the History of Humanity and the International Brain Institute.<sup>17</sup>

## Conclusion

Negotiations for the creation of a temporary intellectual cooperation center in the Americas soon after the occupation of Paris by Germany in June 1940 showed the increasing role of Latin American intellectuals in the international intellectual network since the interwar period; it demonstrates the role played by Brazilian Miguel Ozório de Almeida at that moment. Nevertheless, the failure of the initiative also points to the asymmetries that constituted the dynamics of international intellectual relations. Nevertheless, the intellectual cooperation project of the League of Nations was used as a forum for Brazilian scientist Ozório de Almeida's criticism of Getúlio Vargas's authoritarian government in that country and for his defense of intellectual work autonomy; it was also crucial for the strengthening of relations between Ozório de Almeida and international community. The research conducted at RAC allowed me to increase my understanding of the conflicts and alliances among the Rockefeller Foundation, the League of Nations' intellectual cooperation project, the Division of Intellectual Cooperation of the Pan American Union, and the Brazilian academic community.

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<sup>1</sup> Pumar, Leticia. Between National and International Science and Education: Miguel Ozório de Almeida and the League of Nations' Intellectual Cooperation Project In: Beyond Geopolitics: New Histories of Latin America at the League of Nations.1 ed. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2015, p. 169-184.

<sup>2</sup> See, Bonnet, Henri - refugee scholars (1940-1941), Rockefeller Foundation Archives (RF) RG 1.1 Series 200, box 48, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York.

<sup>3</sup>Brigitte Schroeder-Gudehus, Les scientifiques et la paix : la communauté scientifique internationale au cours des années 20 (Montréal: P.U.M., 1978).

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Laqua. "Transnational Intellectual Cooperation, the League of Nations, and the Problem of Order". *Journal of Global History* 6 (2011), 6: 223-247.

<sup>5</sup> Memorandum signed by David H. Stevens, Director for the Humanities, 20 November 1940, Bonnet, Henri - refugee scholars (1940-1941), RF. RG 1.1 Series 200, box 48, folder 554, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York.

<sup>6</sup> Memorandum signed by Joseph H. Willits. Bonnet, Henri - refugee scholars (1940-1941), RF. RG 1.1 Series 200, box 48, folder 554, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York.

<sup>7</sup> Memorandum signed by David H. Stevens, Director for the Humanities, 20 November 1940, Bonnet, Henri - refugee scholars (1940-1941), RF. RG 1.1 Series 200, box 48, folder 554, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York.

<sup>8</sup> E. E. Ware, Second American Conference of National Committees on Intellectual Cooperation. Havana, Cuba, November 15-22, 1941. Report to the National Committee of the United States of America on International Intellectual Cooperation (New York, 1942), 61.

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<sup>9</sup> R.F. R.G. 1.1 Series 100S, box 111, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York.; E. E. Ware, Second American Conference of National Committees on Intellectual Cooperation. Havana, Cuba, November 15-22, 1941; and Report to the National Committee of the United States of America on International Intellectual Cooperation (New York, 1942).

<sup>10</sup> Miguel Ozório de Almeida, “Considerações das medidas que devem ser adoptadas com o fim de facilitar e coordenar as relações entre as comissões nacionais de cooperação intelectual na América”, box 142.6, folder 1688, file 3528.3, 10, Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Historical Archives, Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>11</sup> The manifest was signed on November 25, 1941 by the following American and European intellectuals: Count Sforza, Henri Focillon, Henri Bonnet, Arnold Raestad, Henri Laugier, R. P. Mckeon, G. A. Borgese, Joseph W. Krutch, Stringfellow Barr, Marshall H. Stone, George F. Zook, Louis Adamic, W. E. Burghardt du Bois, Freda Kirchwey, Cosme de la Torriente, Afonso Reys, Miguel Ozório de Almeida, María Zambrano, Dantés Bellegarde, César Barja, Pedro Bosch Gimpera, Juan Marinello, Jorge Manach, Fernando Ortiz, Salvador Massip, Hermínio Portell Vilá. See, E. E. Ware, Second American Conference of National Committees on Intellectual Cooperation. Havana, Cuba, November 15-22, 1941. Report to the National Committee of the United States of America on International Intellectual Cooperation (New York, 1942), 37.

<sup>12</sup> Miguel Ozório de Almeida to Paulo Carneiro. 6 January 1942, Rio de Janeiro, Fundo Paulo Carneiro, Departamento de Arquivo e Documentação da Casa de Oswaldo Cruz/Fiocruz, Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>13</sup> Miguel Ozório de Almeida to Paulo Carneiro. 6 September 1945, Rio de Janeiro, Fundo Paulo Carneiro, Departamento de Arquivo e Documentação da Casa de Oswaldo Cruz/Fiocruz, Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>14</sup> Maurel Chloé. *L’Unesco de 1945 à 1974*. Thesis, Ph.D. in History. (École Normale Supérieure de Paris, Université Panthéon-Sorbonne – Paris I, Paris, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Curriculum vitae: Miguel Ozório de Almeida. Unesco 2.512 (3), Delegations of Member States – SCHM, UNESCO Archives, Paris.

<sup>17</sup> Pumar, Leticia. ‘Universalisms in Debate during the 1940s: International Organizations and the Dynamics of International Intellectual Cooperation in the View of Brazilian Intellectual Miguel Ozório de Almeida’. In: Diana Roig-Sanz and Jaume Subirana (eds.). *Cultural Organizations, Networks and Mediators in Contemporary Ibero-America*. 1 ed. London and New York: Routledge, 2020.