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INTRODUCTION

THE 1814 CONGRESS of Vienna had not even begun when the idea of writing its history took hold. The initiator was the famously calculating French minister, the Prince de Talleyrand. The man cast in the role was Jean-Baptiste Gaétan Raxis de Flassan, the historian for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and author of studies on diplomacy and slavery. Flassan became one of an impressive retinue of delegates, invitees, and observers who rode into Vienna from across the European continent in the autumn of 1814. The history he wrote would be published much later, in 1829, by which time Flassan self-consciously eschewed any mention of the sociability that was integral to the congress. Absent were the salons, goings-on in boudoirs, and the sentiment that, through the twentieth century, came to dominate accounts of peacemaking and the remaking of Europe after Napoleon. Instead, Flassan favored an official history of reasoning men who represented the dominating imperial powers and who united Europe through law and the idea of mutual protection.¹

The story Flassan told of the Congress of Vienna offered only a hint of the intertwined social, economic, and political dimensions of the new international order that began to be invented in the spring of 1812, when Napoleon Bonaparte led an imperial army of conquest into Russian territory. The French attack ignited resistance and spurred the Russian tsar to forge a European coalition against Bonaparte's expansionism. It was not the first anti-French coalition of European powers, but it was the last. After more than two decades of wars on the European continent, the conflict between

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Russia and France might have tallied as just another skirmish. Instead, Sweden, Prussia, Britain, and Austria joined Russia and claimed victory over France and its allies, and over the future. Although the word “international” was still rarely used, these imperial governments imagined the politics between states and their own authority in that politics on an international scale. In the course of their wartime and peace negotiations, men and women from across the European continent and the English Channel elevated new ideas, practices, and institutions of multilateral negotiation. They invented a new culture of international diplomacy that expanded the possibilities of politics between states, from resolving territorial and fiscal disputes to advocacy for liberal principles, rights, and humanitarianism.

The diversity of views of what international politics might be only underlines the extent of political engagement. Naturally cautious, even cynical, European statesmen as well as emperors marveled at their own inventiveness and each took some personal credit. From 1814 to 1822, over eight years of postwar conferencing and five public congresses, and through a repertoire of ambassadorial conferences, Tsar Alexander felt he had helped generate “some new European conception” on the model of a “federative European system.”² British foreign secretary Viscount Castlereagh enthused over their discovery of “the Science of European Government . . . and almost the simplicity of a Single State.”³ At the heart of that “science” was the simple idea of cooperation through organized, bureaucratized forms of diplomatic consultation and negotiation between neighbors—or talking. Then there was their discursive focus. For Castlereagh, among the period’s innovations was a moral commitment to Europe’s future “security” or *sûreté* and *indépendance*, grounded in the prospects for peace, although he was less enamored of having to promote the international abolition of the slave trade under public pressure.⁴ We know from the Austrian foreign minister Klemens von Metternich’s private letters that he preened himself in the mirror of the new Europe they were making. Reflecting on these events later, Metternich celebrated what he believed was a general tendency “of nations to draw closer together and to set up a kind of corporate body resting on the same basis as the great human society which grew up at the heart of Christianity.”⁵

Later histories were not always attuned to Metternich's or Castlereagh's perspectives on peacemaking, although scholars have agreed that this period marked a threshold. In the 1990s, Paul W. Schroeder saw in the introduction of new peacemaking methods of consensus and law and, as importantly, the idea of loyalty to something beyond one's state a "decisive turning point."⁶ He depicted Tsar Alexander, Castlereagh, and Metternich as statesmen who, on the basis of their experience of the revolutionary wars, and their own coalition military campaigns against Bonaparte, intuited the importance of supporting "the existence of any international order at all, the very possibility of their states coexisting as independent members of a European family of nations." Schroeder even claimed that this transformation of "the governing rules, norms, and practices of international politics" was *more* consequential than the ideological earthquake of the 1789 French Revolution. Other historical accounts have been more restrained but still emphasize the weight given to "transnational affinities" and the idea of humanitarian intervention.⁷

Over the last two centuries historical versions of these same events have acknowledged the roles of key statesmen but concluded their efforts were "reactionary and shortsighted, contrary to the emerging liberal 'spirit of the age.'"⁸ From this perspective, the Coalition fought Napoleon in order to force Europe back to its pre-revolutionary *ancien*, even cosmopolitan, past, to keep at bay a modern national future. Similarly, when historians have incorporated social evidence of men and women mingling, dancing, and forming intimate relationships in the new diplomatic settings of postwar peacemaking, they have accentuated the aristocratic and dissolute tenor of the transformations taking place. The mixing of private and public is taken as the antithesis of a modern, professional culture of politics. Unless, that is, the presence of a diversity of actors is analyzed in relation to the history of structural shifts underway in gender, class, and race relations, in which case, private relations and sociability become part of a history of the complexity of politics rather than of political failure. From this perspective—and we find it in the most recent cultural histories of the congress—older framings of this period as stories of political progress from the old to the new, *ancien* to the modern, or even cosmopolitan to

the national appear reductively ahistorical, regardless of whether they are intended to serve an ideal or cynical view of peacemaking at the end of the Napoleonic wars.⁹

In tidying up the past, the impetus to anachronistic order and the temptation to smooth out wrinkles are certainly seductive. This international history studies the transformation in European politics at the end of the Napoleonic wars as a moment that breathes life into new ways of doing politics between states, when women as well as men, bourgeois as well as aristocratic, non-state as well as state “actors” engaged new political possibilities in unprecedented ways, to diverse ends. It also takes note of a contradictory, contiguous, contingent development: at this same moment of possibilities, the parameters of politics, whether within or between states, were being closely defined or “ordered” to determine what counted as politics and who could be political. In conjunction with developments taking place in national settings, women were determined to be beyond the pale of legitimate political agency; non-Europeans and non-Christians were eventually marginalized in political settings of peacemaking that were simultaneously European and international. When we include their conventionally discounted histories, the narrative of the invention of international order encompasses not only the ideas, practices, and institutions that remained influential but also long forgotten expectations of what international politics could become.



Almost a half century after the French invasion of Russia in 1812, Tolstoy’s magisterial fictional account *War and Peace* was deeply immersed in the social history of its setting—a familiarity that inspired his opening gambit: a Russian noblewoman welcomes guests to her soirée in St. Petersburg with an intentionally provocative comment on the rapaciousness of Napoleon Bonaparte’s foreign policy. She delivers her opinion in the universal French of elite society: “Well Prince, Genoa and Lucca are now nothing more than estates taken over by the Buonaparte family.”¹⁰ As early readers of *War and Peace* well knew, the fictional Anna Pavlovna Scherer, a St. Petersburg aristocrat, offered her warning nearly a

decade before a Russian-led European coalition finally defeated Napoleon. Tolstoy was not only setting up the inevitability of the confrontation to come but launching a narrative that closely interweaves private relationships and public events through the prism of the salon and women's involvement. Indeed, in a reflective section at the end of the novel, Tolstoy singles out the role in the defeat of France of an exceptional woman, the *grand dame* (as he calls her) Madame de Staël.¹¹ Tolstoy's acknowledgment of Staël's influence rehearses Bonaparte's own naming of Staël as his grand nemesis and her popular reputation during the Napoleonic wars as one of three great powers of Europe alongside the empires Britain and Russia.

Some scholars of peacemaking have followed Tolstoy's historical instinct and remembered women as political actors, although they have been split in their assessments. For historians who dismiss peacemaking at the end of the Napoleonic wars as a restoration, women are to blame.¹² Less common is the more inquisitive view laid out in the 1960s by the Austrian writer Hilde Spiel, who noted that neither before the Congress of Vienna nor after, not at the peace deliberations of Versailles in 1919 or San Francisco in 1945, had "a group of statesmen and politicians, assembled solely and exclusively to deal with matters of commonweal interest, labored so extensively and decisively under the influence of women."¹³ Recently, Brian Vick has convincingly argued for seeing women-led salons that took place alongside the formal conferencing of men as sites of "influence politics."¹⁴

At a time when the varnish of the international idea was still fresh, a large canvas of "non-state actors" imagined the possibilities of the politics between states as eagerly as politics within states. This repertoire of actors—beyond the small group of statesmen, monarchs, and foreign ministers who tend to dominate the view of this past—included, most flamboyantly, individual aristocratic and bourgeois women who, like Germaine de Staël, used their networks, wealth, reputations, and talent, as well as their social status as *salonnières* (hosts of gatherings in their homes) and *ambassadrices* (wives of diplomats). Certainly, Staël was exceptional in this setting, an intellectual who set a broad liberal political agenda for a cosmopolitan Europe built on the foundations of its national diversity. Still other women, such as Prussian Christian convert Rahel

Varnhagen, her compatriot Baroness Caroline von Humboldt, and the Swiss bourgeois Anna Eynard-Lullin, each marked out rival visions of the political future, even if to less effect, whether on the strength of their reputations as *salonnières* or as wives of better-known diplomatic delegates. From the origins of the “Concert of Europe” in 1814 to the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1853—a date often associated with the Concert’s failure—the ideas and activities of the Baltic *ambassadrices* Barbara Juliane von Krüdener and Dorothea Lieven exemplified a further paradox: while gender norms increasingly defined the illegitimacy of women as political actors, individual women continued to pursue political involvement on an international scale.

Adding individual women to the history of the invention of an international order, even an exceptional woman such as Staël, reinforces the importance of taking women seriously as political actors in general. This case for integrating women is backed by the fact that the female-led salon was recognized as the origin of the conversational practices that defined the diplomat’s art—and Staël’s salon was regarded as its highest form. Indeed, through the nineteenth century, the decline of the *salonnière*’s importance in the diplomatic sphere was caught up in the rise of a new professional, procedural, and bureaucratic approach to diplomacy, based on the sociability of men. As the political focus moved to the model of formal conferencing in both national and international contexts, women’s ambitions for being “political” shifted only to be accommodated elsewhere, mostly in the modes of philanthropy (or humanitarianism) and patriotism.

A second cohort of “non-state actors”—the banker and capitalist families empowered by their wealth and connections—was omnipresent in the informal sociability of postwar congressing. In the context of peacemaking, lines of influence connecting bankers and statesmen, economics and politics, do not always lead directly to outcomes, such as who got which territory. However, the political causes that benefited most from that influence included Jewish rights and the defense of Christians in the Ottoman Empire—causes that through the nineteenth century became associated with the philanthropy of the Europe-centered modern international order. The bourgeois ambitions of some bankers and capitalists,

and their family members, were as implicated in the ordering that reinforced the gendered separation of public and private spheres.

Since the eighteenth century, the promise of modernity has offered an expansive horizon of political expectations but delivered a voice only for some. Adding non-state actors to the history of peacemaking redefines our understanding of the politics between states in the early nineteenth century. In some histories, the peacemaking decisions taken by statesmen tally as conservative because they seem to thwart the progress of national causes. By contrast, seeing this period through the eyes of both state and non-state actors reveals that women were vocal advocates for the political significance of national patriotism in this period, for a range of unpredictable reasons, not always self-identification with the nation. This evidence points us toward a history of national and international, even imperial, political structures and cultures, as mutually reinforcing ideas. As we will see, a genealogy of international order takes us across a sea of competing connected discourses and concepts; it exposes categories of historical analysis often understood as opposite as more often apposite, of nesting local, national, European, cosmopolitan, imperial, humanitarian, and universal accounts of the interconnected past, present, and future.

In the early nineteenth century, women and men navigated a complex and confusing field of ambiguous political ideas and possibilities for political action. They self-consciously encountered the novelties that defined that field, including ways of identifying themselves. There were no absolute borders separating liberals from conservatives or secular from religious practices in their perceptions of the importance of politics between states. A new experience of empathy enlivened rationales for peacemaking rather than war, for engaging philanthropic-cum-humanitarian causes. Contemporaries noted the “scriptomania” that had taken hold and drove men to keep memoirs and diaries of the events they participated in and observed. Women were often regarded as emotionally disinclined to this form of subjectivity, but they too picked up pens and recorded their thoughts, often in letters to their families and friends. When Austrian archduke John contemplated the Vienna congress as a “mistake,” it was because it had generated too much introspection: “We have learned to know ourselves and our innermost thoughts,

and thereby confidence sinks low; whereas our weaknesses are only too glaring.” We might conjecture it was precisely the facility with which the boundaries between private and public could be breached that bothered him.¹⁵ For the historically inclined, however, these same personal documents are the tools that allow us to pick up the threads of a lost past, to weave the connected stories of women and men, the private and the public, into the history of the invention of an international order, to identify the elusive and often interwoven liberal and conservative strands of the politics at stake. Individual stories return us to another paradox intrinsic to this history: the women and economic actors who helped create political norms became invisible in the histories that tracked the rise of modern formalized diplomacy and international politics—because historians shared the new modern premise that international politics was the terrain of properly masculine political actors, whether diplomats, foreign ministers, presidents, kings, or emperors.



The history of international order has long been the territory of international relations scholars, usually focused on the organization of political authority. Historians have the advantage of being able to add close-up views, to account for change and inconsistency, success and failure, as well as the broader structural shifts that set our bearings. A voluminous corpus of historical work on the first half of the nineteenth century, for example, has provided the outlines of the gender, class, and civilizational ordering that occurred in the context of state-based national and imperial politics, and, as I argue, inevitably shaped the politics between those states.¹⁶ Taking a broader lens, Reinhart Koselleck’s work on time situates the end of the Napoleonic wars in the middle of a bridging century or *Sattelzeit*, between the ancien and modern worlds that began around 1750 and lasted a hundred years.¹⁷ On this chronology, the political ambitions heaped upon the invention of international order from 1812 are further evidence of a new capacity to imagine the future perched on an aspirational horizon of advancing and receding time.

The history of how an international order was invented at the end of the Napoleonic wars is as much about (in Schroeder’s terms) “the

transformation of European politics.” My focus is on how “Europe,” and a handful of European imperial powers, assumed authority for the world, who got to “do politics” and to “be political,” what was understood as a legitimate terrain of politics, and how that changed. In this book, the end of the Napoleonic wars is the origin of the modern international order, of transformations that occurred in the midst of (and inevitably contributing to) structural shifts in society, economics, and politics—whether changing methods of diplomacy wrapped in gender relations, moral and universal, sometimes liberal, principles, or the objective of permanent peace itself.

In all these contexts, change occurred as processes of ordering that differentiated civilizations. It is not inconsequential that, by the mid-nineteenth century, Russia had gone from leading the European coalition and even espousing a liberal political agenda for the international order to assuming the status of a pariah state, or that the Ottoman Empire had lost the privileges of its European status in the ancien system of diplomatic relations. From 1856, after the Crimean War, the Ottoman Empire was legally and economically excluded from equal status in the burgeoning system of international precepts and institutions—thanks to its victor European allies in the war against Russia.

I have chosen to tell the history of these transformations in European politics as part of the invention of international order “after Napoleon” in chapters that alternate between analyses of themes and individuals, in the context of points of historical controversy. The incorporation of individual lives and relationships is meant to help elaborate the “themes” as well as more general structural developments in the history of diplomacy, including multilateralism, liberalism, capitalism, religion, humanitarianism, war, and peace. For example, the chapters trace *how* a new diplomacy conceived as masculine in its formal bureaucratized procedures usurped the informal politics of the salon and women’s political agency. At the same time, the invention of international order harbored shifting gendered assumptions about appropriate forms of political subjectivity enmeshed in equally gendered conceptions of emotions and rationality in modern politics. These processes were gradual and uneven and they invaded private lives and relationships. The encroachment of capitalism on the politics of states and

between them fits here too, involving the agency of female and male non-state actors with distinctive class interests that had moral as well as commercial dimensions. We learn how economic developments prompted lively debate in the public sphere about rights, security, and the threat of economic inequality. In this same way, I track the importance of religion and the specific impact of Christianity on the secular practices of European diplomacy and on the oscillating status of Russia and the Ottoman Empire in this erstwhile European “society of states.”

As the chapters move between individual and structural analyses, they detail the shifts and paradoxes that emerged from the juxtaposition of an expanding scope of politics and the relative disempowerment of women and non-Christians, class and civilizational “others.” In historicizing these processes, connections, and paradoxes, I have employed the present tense when I want to understand the reactions and strategies of women and men who invested themselves in the new possibilities of the world around them. How did they begin to imagine an international politics? How were their experiences and lessons passed on to succeeding generations? What have we since remembered, and what have we forgotten?

The modern world takes for granted the idea of an international order, but even the possibility of international politics had to be invented. By asking, “What kind of ordering was embedded in the invention of the politics that could take place between states two hundred years ago?” we stand to learn more about the practices and assumptions that still temper the international order today, for better and for worse. Ultimately, my attention to invention reveals how international politics came to bear the imprint of the political culture of the modern liberal state, with its bourgeois gender and class norms, and its concurrently inclusive and exclusive universal, imperial and European, national and international foundations. Before we can arrive at this point, let me start at the beginning: What was the politics between states when European empires took up arms against French hegemony and the power of Napoleon Bonaparte? How did an international order begin to be invented, and whom can we credit or blame?

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