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# A WORKSHOP FOR PEACE

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Making a Place for the United Nations Headquarters

**BA HISTORY THESIS**  
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## *Abstract*

The United Nations Headquarters were created during the early years of the organisation, made to support the United Nations' mission for peace. This thesis will show that the location of and spatial dimensions of the UN cannot be overlooked in its history. By placing the United Nations in the United States, the creators of the UN were acknowledging the end of American isolationism and the beginning of a new world order. The designers of the UN Headquarters further solidified the UN as figurehead of a new future by building the Headquarters in a new modernist style that inspired new futuristic architecture. Their design would further solidify how the main bodies of the United Nations operate, and what role they play in international politics.

## Contents

Introduction .....	4
Chapter one: A New World.....	7
A "New" Internationalism .....	7
Pax Americana.....	9
Finding a Site.....	10
Chapter two: The Internationalist Vision Materialised .....	14
Creating a Place for Internationalism .....	15
Designing the Future .....	18
A Workshop for Peace.....	21
Chapter three: Working in the Workshop for Peace .....	23
A World Bureaucracy .....	23
Dissecting an Organisation .....	25
Conclusion.....	28
Bibliography.....	30

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## Introduction

For roughly a week once a year, New Yorkers have to deal with an influx of activity on the bank of the East river. During this time, the 1st avenue that passes the United Nations Headquarters is nearly completely closed off between East 40th Street and East 50th Street to allow world leader after world leader safe entry to the buildings that will house the annual meeting of the United Nations General Assembly. But even during the times of the year when not only the avenue but the buildings are open to the public, the United Nations Headquarters is filled to the brim with people working for world peace and prosperity. The New York site houses not only the General Assembly, but the year-round meetings of the Security Council and the continued efforts of the Secretariat to provide leadership, support and research to all of the United Nations' activities. The 18-acre plot of land next to the East River gives a spatialised dimension to the United Nations that not many have considered. Space and place are sociological concepts not many would think of using when looking at a global organisation, but that give a new outlook on the United Nations organisation and bureaucracy.

Whether it be iconicity of architecture or internationalism and the 'melting pot' persona New York has taken on, the relationship between the United Nations and New York has long been established as interactive.<sup>1</sup> But the buildings that now symbolise and encompass the United Nations were not built simultaneously with the careful crafting of the UN Charter, nor did they magically appear the day it was signed or ratified. From 1945 until the buildings were completed in 1952, the United Nations was essentially homeless. The United Nations Headquarters, completed in 1952, were created to be the new capital of the world and give the organisation a centralised place to host the assembly of its member states and leadership for its international work.

Former research into the United Nations has always gone in one of three directions: First, in looking into how the organisation became a part of a global structure of power and diplomacy, often by looking at either the writing or restrictions of the Charter or how other resolutions added to these.<sup>2</sup> This approach focuses the most on the power of states and the bodies of the UN. Second, in looking into the operational reality of the many people who work

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<sup>1</sup> Jessica Field. "United Nations Headquarters, New York: The Cultural-Political Economy of Space and Iconicity" in *Journal of History and Cultures*, (2012), page 22.

<sup>2</sup> i.e. Zaum, D. 'The Security Council, the General Assembly, and War: The Uniting for Peace Resolution' in *The United Nations Security Council and War: The Evolution of Thought and Practice*, (Oxford, 2010); 154-174.

for the United Nations, either in its peacekeeping efforts or its developmental, educational or health programs, and how these have changed as world politics have shifted.<sup>3</sup> Lastly, there is the study of the physical representations of the United Nations, either the architecture that houses it or the flag and emblems chosen to represent it.<sup>4</sup> The third is where this thesis will be situated. Where previous studies have simply looked at the United Nations Headquarters as they are, this thesis will seek to find the origin of its geographical position and the effect of monumentalising the optimism of the post-war push for peace into a place that can be visited, seen, and worked in. Therefore, this thesis will look at the following question:

How did the creation and design of the United Nations Headquarters between 1945 and 1952 symbolise the expectations for the organisation and how did it affect operational workings of the United Nations as an international institution?

In order to study this question, the thesis is divided in three parts. First, this thesis will examine the ideological framework of the United Nations that pulled the UN Headquarters to the United States, and how several key agents facilitated its settling in New York. Second, this thesis will examine the physical shape of the UN Headquarters: How did the Headquarters come to be a riverside complex with a Secretariat building, General Assembly building, Conference building and (later added) library? Who was responsible for the design that became so iconic it took over most of Manhattan? Why is the transformation of the headquarters site into an international territory significant? Third, this thesis will examine how the buildings and the organisation interact. Specifically, this part will examine how the buildings give meaning to the site and guidance as to what each body of the UN is for, and how it should operate. Through these different parts, this thesis can show how the location, style and layout of the United Nations Headquarters came to be, why this is important and what its continued effect is. The first workers of the UN would have had certain demands for their Headquarters, the designers certain expectations for how the buildings would be used. Because of this, the United Nations Headquarters is a physical representation of the spirit of the time, the hopes people had for the

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<sup>3</sup> i.e. Doucet, M. 'Global Assemblages of Security Governance and Contemporary International Intervention' in *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* (2016); 116-132.

<sup>4</sup> i.e. Field, Jessica. "United Nations Headquarters, New York: The Cultural-Political Economy of Space and Iconicity" in *Journal of History and Cultures*, (2012); 25-39;  
Biddiscombe, Perry. 'Branding the United Nations: The Adoption of the UN Insignia and Flag, 1941-1950' in *The International Historical Review*, (2019); 1-23.

United Nations as an organisation, and the expectations of how each branch of the organisation should operate and contribute to the United Nations' goals.

This thesis will rely on a plurality of sources to achieve its analysis. First, it will make use of the Headquarters Agreement, the UN Photo Library, UN multimedia material, and the autobiography of first Secretary-General Trygve Lie to analyse the history of the UN Headquarters. Secondly, it will utilise secondary sources that have compiled the opinions and work of New York officials connected to the UN Headquarters, as well as that of the main architects that worked on the project. Third, this thesis will make use of concepts in secondary literature such as American internationalism, international institutions, the concepts of space and place, and modern architecture, to analyse and contextualise the Headquarters.

## Chapter one: A New World

Before the two world wars, the United States of America were not well-known for getting involved in external conflict. Isolationism was a tradition dating back to first president George Washington's administration, making the United States prefer to interject in overseas' political business as little as possible.<sup>5</sup> At first glance, then, it might seem that the end of World War I and president Woodrow Wilson's arrival on the international scene was a sudden break with tradition. Mark Mazower in his book *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* tracks American internationalist ideas all the way back to the Peace Movement in Victorian times.<sup>6</sup> The General Peace Convention of 1843 in London had a significant American presence, an expression of "increasingly close ties linking American and British pacifists"<sup>7</sup>. However the failure of the Peace Movement to get European states to disarm and the lack of concrete results from conventions as the twentieth century neared caused most American pacifists to become disillusioned, and instead turn to arbitration and international law to tame the anarchy between states.<sup>8</sup>

### A "New" Internationalism

Woodrow Wilson did not believe in the power of arbitration and international law. According to Mazower, "[t]he idea that peace could be achieved so long as the lawyers got the details right struck him as absurd."<sup>9</sup> Even in the opening paragraph of the famous speech detailing his Fourteen Points, international conduct is not framed as being based on laws, but on the ideals of transparency, mutual respect, and a morally-driven wish for justice and world peace.<sup>10</sup> It was with this mindset that in 1919 president Wilson moved to create the predecessor of the UN, the League of Nations.<sup>11</sup> In the League of Nations, this new view of international politics was further shown in the democratic structure of the organisation, which the United

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<sup>5</sup> James A. Gazell, "Arthur H. Vandenberg, Internationalism, and the United Nations." in *Political Science Quarterly* 88, no. 3 (1973), page 377.

Stephen C. Schlesinger, *Act of Creation: The Founding of the United Nations: A Story of Superpowers, Secret Agents, Wartime Allies and Enemies, and Their Quest for a Peaceful World.* (Oxford: Westview Press, 2003), page 17.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea.* (The Penguin Press, 2012), page 31-38.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, page 32-33.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, page 66, 92.

Abba Eban, "The U.N. Idea Revisited" in *Foreign Affairs* 74, no. 5 (1995), page 40.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Mazower, *Governing the World* (2012), page 121.

<sup>10</sup> The Avalon Project. "President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points" (8 January, 1918), accessed 3-1-2020 on [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/wilson14.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson14.asp).

<sup>11</sup> Abba Eban, "The U.N. Idea Revisited" (1995), page 41.

Nations was set to inherit.<sup>12</sup> Based on the *trias politica* of Montesquieu that is embedded in nearly every parliamentary democracy in some way, the League had a legislature existing of an upper house, the council, and a lower house, the assembly. The secretariat was envisioned as a very weak executive branch, an administrative rather than a diplomatic post. Lastly, there was the Permanent Court of International Justice, a legalist idea that was forced on a deeply reluctant Wilson.<sup>13</sup> While this structure is said to be of British invention, it was the American president's support for such a League that pushed the British to adopt the idea of permanent peacetime commitments in the first place.<sup>14</sup> Despite this, the president's commitment to internationalism could not ensure Senate support, and the United States never joined the League of Nations Wilson had built.<sup>15</sup> Still, his ideas remained, now embedded in an organisation.

It must have been prominently on the mind of president Franklin D. Roosevelt when he set all his hopes on creating an international security organisation, working on it until his death in 1945.<sup>16</sup> Already during his bid for vice-president during the 1920 presidential campaign, Roosevelt spoke in favour of American membership to the League of Nations, but had to abandon such ideals in exchange for a successful bid for the presidency in 1932.<sup>17</sup> The final push was the Second World War. As American soldiers once again moved to free Europe from the Germans, this time whilst fighting a war on the other side of the Pacific Ocean as well, president Roosevelt started planning for peace.<sup>18</sup> Roosevelt became the architect of the new United Nations, first as a wartime alliance between the Allied forces, moving more and more in the direction of a new international organisation as the end of the war neared. The San Francisco Conference was planned before Nazi Germany even surrendered, and started weeks before Berlin fell. Still, Roosevelt did not make it to the Conference. He died 13 days before its start.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Mark Mazower, *Governing the World*, (2012), page 135.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, page 135-136.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, page 128-136.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, page 137.

<sup>16</sup> Stephen C. Schlesinger, *Act of Creation*. (2003), page 72.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, page 25, 28.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, page 44.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Isitt and Åke E:son Lindman. *United Nations: The Story Behind The Headquarters Of The World*. (Stockholm: Bokförlaget Max Ström, 2015), page 26.



## Pax Americana

Roosevelt's influence did not end with his death. It soon became apparent that the US delegates to the San Francisco conference started negotiations in a privileged position. Already at the Dumbarton Oaks conference in October 1944, it became apparent that the United States department of state had put the most thought into a possible proposal for the new organisation, and the plans made under Roosevelt's careful eye became the basic frame of reference for building the United Nations.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, decisions made by the Big Three between Dumbarton Oaks and San Francisco had great influence over discussions over the Charter, which also gave the United States considerable influence.<sup>21</sup> Even the timing of the Conference was not entirely on behalf of Roosevelt's failing health; his belief that the new United Nations Organisation should be made before the end of war was partially to prevent American public opinion sliding back towards isolationism and keeping the US from yet another peacetime organisation.<sup>22</sup> The Latin-American delegations to San Francisco were in close communication with the American delegation through Nelson Rockefeller, a young state assistant secretary of state from a family of millionaires who created a Pan-American voting block on certain issues to counter the Russians.<sup>23</sup> With both the Anglo-American connection and the Latin-American states on their side, the United States lead the world into a new international security organisation months before the new atomic bombs rendered war too risky, creating the start for a new world order. Even before the end of the Second World War, the beginnings of a new era of globalisation and Cold War between two new superpowers could be seen, and the United Nations was a part of this new world.

American participation was deemed as crucial for the new organisation's success just as much as the organisation's birth was a sign of new American leadership. This reflected in the choice for which nation was to host the new headquarters for the organisation. In his memoirs, the first Secretary-General Trygve Lie stated he always believed the new headquarters ought to be "as close as possible to the new economic and political center", and when the UN

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<sup>20</sup> Stephen C. Schlesinger, *Act of Creation*. (2003), page 47-48.

Evan Luard. *A History of the United Nations*. Volume I; *The Years of Western Domination 1945-1955*. (London: The Macmillan Press, 1982), page 25.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, page 33-36.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, page 35-36

Mark Isitt et al. *United Nations: The Story Behind The Headquarters Of The World*. (2015), page 26.

<sup>23</sup> Stephen C. Schlesinger, *Act of Creation*. (2003), page 129-130, 140.

Headquarters were finished, that “[n]ot only had we succeeded in building a workshop for peace, but the very strategy of peace had determined the structure’s location.”<sup>24</sup> A repetition of the League of Nations could not be afforded, and American participation was essential to ensure that.<sup>25</sup> Most European countries, influenced by traditional loyalties, first believed the seat of the United Nations should be in Europe. They favoured Geneva, where the League of Nations had built its own Palais des Nations, or another city away from the main powers, such as Vienna, Prague or the Hague.<sup>26</sup> However, the failure of the League as well as Europe’s recent past involving two world wars left Europe with a bad reputation for peace.<sup>27</sup> The New World, as the Americas used to be called, would provide a fresh start with a new world order that the Americans had finally started to accept.<sup>28</sup> In addition to that, the United States, especially the east coast, would be easily accessible to both the European and Latin American states, which in total made up nearly four-fifths of the membership at the time.<sup>29</sup> This is how the United States came to lead and host the new United Nations, after over a century and a half of isolationism.

## Finding a Site

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1946, New York City got a new mayor. The departing mayor, Fiorella La Guardia, left his city with the following statement on the UN Headquarters: “I am sure that when everything is considered – the facilities and communications, and everything that is needed – the United Nations Organisation will come to New York City.”<sup>30</sup> Unlike other US cities, including Chicago, San Francisco, Philadelphia and even Rapid City in South-Dakota, he refused to send representatives to London to market his city to the UN delegates starting to gather there.<sup>31</sup> He urged his successor not to let their city stoop to such lows either, and William O’Dwyer, inaugurated just ten days before the start of the First Session of the General Assembly on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 1946, followed his advice. Instead, O’Dwyer and the Parks

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<sup>24</sup> Trygve Lie. *In the Cause of Peace*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1954), page 57.

Ibid, page 124.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Evan Luard. *A History of the United Nations*. (1982), page 79.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, page 79.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Trygve Lie. *In the Cause of Peace*. (1954), page 57.

Stephen C. Schlesinger, *Act of Creation*. (2003), page 25.

<sup>29</sup> United Nations. “Growth in United Nations membership, 1945-present.” Accessed 5-1-2020 on <https://www.un.org/en/sections/member-states/growth-united-nations-membership-1945-present/index.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Pamela Hanlon. *A Worldly Affair: New York, the United Nations, and the Story Behind Their Unlikely Bond*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), page 5.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

and Planning Commissioner under both his and La Guardia's administration, Robert Moses, continued working on a plan for where to settle the United Nations should they come to New York.<sup>32</sup> Moses had great plans to settle the UN in Flushing Meadows, which he had personally transformed from a dumping ground to a lush park that became the site for the 1939 New York World's Fair.<sup>33</sup> Together with the architect for the main building of the World's Fair, Wallace Harrison, who had also designed the Rockefeller Center, they put together a book of proposals for the UN Headquarters.<sup>34</sup>

Despite these eager New Yorkers making grand plans and La Guardia's confidence, the United Nations' move to New York was no quick decision. At the First Session, the General Assembly passed resolution 25(I) stating that "[t]he permanent headquarters of the United Nations shall be established in Westchester (New York) and or Fairfield (Conn.) counties, i.e. near to New York City."<sup>35</sup> Neither of these far-off suburbs were satisfying to the city officials. Their plans had been overlooked, as the preparatory commission had decided a large metropolitan area should be avoided.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, the UN remained adamant to the end that they would not make the new centre of the world upon a former dumping ground.<sup>37</sup> For now, the general view was that the headquarters should be in a rural area, where a whole new international city or "United Nations district"<sup>38</sup> could grow for delegates to live in, where their children could go to school and the community could enjoy recreational facilities as well as doing their work.<sup>39</sup>

As much as the preparatory commission envisioned an independent international city as the centre of the world, Trygve Lie was quite fond of New York, and the Secretary-General had a lot of say in settling his organisation into interim headquarters. In his autobiography he wrote of his thoughts at the time: "The huge metropolis and international crossroads would in many

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<sup>32</sup> Pamela Hanlon. *A Worldly Affair*. (2017), page 5.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, page 10.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, page 6.

<sup>35</sup> United Nations General Assembly, Resolutions Adopted On the Rapport of the Permanent Headquarters Committee, A/RES/25(I), (1946).

<sup>36</sup> Pamela Hanlon. *A Worldly Affair*. (2017), page 10.

<sup>37</sup> Mark Isitt et al. *United Nations: The Story Behind The Headquarters Of The World*. (2015), page 31-32.

<sup>38</sup> United Nations, Report and Recommendations of the Inspection Group on Selecting the Permanent Site and Interim Facilities for the Headquarters of the United Nations, A/Site/2, (4 February 1946).

<sup>39</sup> Evan Luard. *A History of the United Nations*. (1982), page 82.

United Nations, Report and Recommendations of the Inspection Group (4 February 1946).

ways offer the best contact with the world at large.”<sup>40</sup> He also believed that once the temporary headquarters settled into a city, the chances of the organisation moving again would be rather low.<sup>41</sup> Convinced that despite their initial rejection housing the United Nations temporarily would help New York City regain a chance to become the centre of the world, mayor O’Dwyer closed the deal, and the United Nations started moving into their temporary quarters.<sup>42</sup>

By the time the First Session of the General Assembly recommenced on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October in New York, the Headquarters Commission could still not report a definitive site. The plans for a mini-city in the suburbs had been discarded, but finding an alternate site had not proven any easier. Trygve Lie set a deadline for New Year’s Eve, feeling the pressure for the organisation to become centralised instead of spread uncomfortably over the New York metropolis.<sup>43</sup> In a desperate last bid to keep the United Nations in his city, mayor O’Dwyer asked Robert Moses to make a list of five possible sites away from Flushing Meadows. Among them, Pocantico Hills, the Rockefellers’ estate in the countryside, and a small plot of land on East Riverside known as Turtle Bay.<sup>44</sup> Moses was unsure if the elder Rockefeller, John D. Rockefeller Jr., would be willing to give up his private land, but he was confident he could at least talk to his son Nelson Rockefeller about it. Nelson was a fervent supporter of the UN, and had been present at San Francisco.<sup>45</sup> They had worked closely together in searching for temporary housing for the United Nations, and Nelson’s determination to bring the United Nations to New York was no secret to Moses.<sup>46</sup> He was not to be disappointed. Gathering in his Rockefeller Center office along with architect Wallace Harrison, one of his younger brothers, Laurance, and his father, Nelson Rockefeller began a long discussion on whether they could give up a part of their estate. Rockefeller Jr. warned them it would mean the end of their peaceful country home, as the United Nations was sure to expand quickly. After gathering approval of the other brothers (an older brother called David reportedly asked if he could not just donate money instead before giving in), John D. Rockefeller Jr. finally told Nelson to look

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<sup>40</sup> Trygve Lie. *In the Cause of Peace*. (1954), page 60.

<sup>41</sup> Pamela Hanlon. *A Worldly Affair*. (2017), page 15.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, page 14-15.

<sup>43</sup> Mark Isitt et al. *United Nations: The Story Behind The Headquarters Of The World*. (2015), page 31.  
Pamela Hanlon, *A Worldly Affair*, page 17-19.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, page 44.

<sup>45</sup> Stephen C. Schlesinger, *Act of Creation*. (2003), page 128-130.

<sup>46</sup> Pamela Hanlon. *A Worldly Affair*. (2017), page 44-45.

at the other offered sites too, and only give up Pocantico Hills as a last resort.<sup>47</sup> He asked Nelson what the ideal site would be, according to him, and Nelson told him of Turtle Bay. Being a plot in Manhattan, it had been quickly dismissed as being much too expensive, but at this point Harrison could step in. He had been closely connected to William Zeckendorf, the developer who had offered the site to mayor O'Dwyer and Robert Moses and landed it on the list of potentials in the first place.<sup>48</sup> Harrison told the Rockefellers it could be bought for around 8.5 million dollars, and so the reluctant David Rockefeller got his wish: His father told Nelson to donate the money to buy the plot for the United Nations instead.<sup>49</sup>s



**[fig. 1] Secretary-General Accepts \$8,500,000 Gift for the Purchase of UN Site**

Trygve Lie, Secretary-General of the United Nations, receives from John D. Rockefeller III, on behalf of his father, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., a check for \$8,500,000 for the purchase of the 6-block Manhattan East River site where the United Nations will build its permanent Headquarters. Mayor of the City of New York, William O'Dwyer, is seen at left. The ceremony took place on the first anniversary of the Security Council in New York. 25 March 1947.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Pamela Hanlon. *A Worldly Affair*. (2017), page 45-47.

<sup>48</sup> Mark Isitt et al. *United Nations: The Story Behind The Headquarters Of The World*. (2015), page 28-29.

<sup>49</sup> Pamela Hanlon. *A Worldly Affair*. (2017), page 49.

<sup>50</sup> UN Photo Library, Photo #36622. Accessed 17-1-2020 on <https://www.unmultimedia.org/photo/detail.jsp?id=366/36622&key=2&query=headquarters%20%20AND%20ceremony&lang=&so=0&sf=date>

## Chapter two: The Internationalist Vision Materialised



**[fig. 2] Turtle Bay Area**  
View of the site of the future permanent Headquarters of the United Nations looking northeast toward the Queensboro bridge. In the front 42<sup>nd</sup> street can be seen. 12 December 1946.<sup>51</sup>

The plot that the Rockefeller donation bought was an 18-acre piece of land in Manhattan, next to the East River. It was bordered on the west side by 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue and went from 48<sup>th</sup> street in the north to 42<sup>nd</sup> street in the south [fig. 2]. It was a far cry from the 40-acre plots in the suburbs that had been examined a year earlier, but Trygve Lie was pleased with it. In his autobiography, he claimed agreement with a Colombian delegate, who he quoted as having said:

“The skyscrapers and chimneys of Manhattan will not hinder our work, as had been feared by some. On the contrary, they will continually remind us of the realities and of life. With a profoundly human significance, they will be for us a constant warning not to lose ourselves in the byways of vain and sterile academic discussion.”<sup>52</sup>

Thus the Secretary-General began the next steps in the undertaking of creating a headquarters for the UN. These involved two processes: buying the plot with the donated money including finalising agreements with New York and the United States regarding the territory’s ownership

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<sup>51</sup> UN Photo Library, Photo # 71614. Accessed 5-1-2020 on <https://www.unmultimedia.org/photo/detail.jsp?id=716/71614&key=23&query=headquarters&lang=&so=0&sf=date>.

<sup>52</sup> Trygve Lie. *In the Cause of Peace*. (1954), page 114.

and jurisdiction and designing the buildings of the Headquarters. It is these steps that are most fundamental in turning the United Nations Headquarters into a distinct *place*. In sociology, place is not just the name for a geographical location or spot in space. Place is what space becomes when it is filled with people, practices, objects, and representations.<sup>53</sup> Place is not merely a setting or backdrop, but an agentic player in the game – a force with detectable and independent effects on social life.<sup>54</sup>

### Creating a Place for Internationalism



**[fig. 3] Contract Signature for Purchase of UN Site**

Signing contract between United Nations and Swift Meat Packers and Wilson Meat Packers, for purchase of land within Headquarters site.

Left to right: George Cohen, Title, Guarantee and Trust; John Willenbick, lawyer; Oscar Schacter, Abe Feller, UN legal; Mr. Gale, Mr. Cooney, Mr. Harriman, Wilson Co.

Left to right back: Robert Fulton, lawyer; Judge Lewis A. Ackley; Neal J. Huff, Swift and Co.; unidentified; Joaquin

Cunanan; Herman L. McLeod, UN; unidentified; William Sie; unidentified; and Phyllis N. Backer, UN. 26 March 1947.<sup>55</sup>

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To begin with, the United Nations had to acquire full ownership of the plot of land. Trygve Lie must have moved fast, or at least kept a close planning. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of March 1947, John D. Rockefeller III officially handed over the Rockefeller gift on behalf of his father [fig. 1]. The next day, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March, UN legal signed the contracts with Swift Meat Packers and Wilson Meat Packers, for purchase of land within the Headquarters site [fig 3]. Less than

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<sup>53</sup> Gieryn, Thomas F. “A Space for Place in Sociology” in *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, (2000), page 465.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, page 466.

<sup>55</sup> UN Photo Library, Photo # 71059. Accessed 5-1-2020 on <https://www.unmultimedia.org/photo/detail.jsp?id=710/71059&key=358&query=signing%20headquarters&lang=&so=0&sf=date>.

a month later, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April, the leftover land within the Headquarters site that officially belonged to the city of New York was handed over in an open-air ceremony on a children's playground in the site.<sup>56</sup> But full ownership of the plot of land was not all that was needed. The United Nations Headquarters, as well as some of its other buildings in Geneva (the former League of Nations buildings), Vienna, and Nairobi, is an international territory.

Turtle Bay was not an empty slate of land, ready to be transformed into the centre of the world. Turtle Bay held stockyards and slaughterhouses, a few residential areas, and a tiny strip of land at the northside where Italian neighbours played bocce.<sup>57</sup> 51 families had to be moved out before demolition could begin, some 270 residents in total. The United Nations purchased four vacant apartment buildings in order to relocate them.<sup>58</sup> Demolition, the building process, the signing over of land: all of these processes were carefully documented by the new United Nations. In 1948, a film called "Clearing the Way for the United Nations" was released, explaining to the world and specifically New Yorkers what was happening in the former Turtle Bay area.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, internationalising the headquarters site was a publicised process. The UN press office circulated pictures of ceremonies held between March 1947 and January 1950, for the following events; On the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, Trygve Lie received the Rockefeller donation [fig. 1]. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of April, New York City officials turned over New York property within the site to the United Nations.<sup>60</sup> On the 8<sup>th</sup> of July, a ceremony was held for demolishing the first building on the site [fig. 4]. The 14<sup>th</sup> of September the next year, 1948, a ceremony was held to celebrate the start of construction on the site, and the acting Secretary-General Benjamin Cohen removed the first symbolic scoop of earth to start excavation on the site.<sup>61</sup> On the United Nations' fourth

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<sup>56</sup> UN Photo Library, Photo # 309330. Accessed 5-1-2020 on <https://www.unmultimedia.org/photo/detail.jsp?id=309/309330&key=370&query=signing%20headquarters&so=0&sf=date>

<sup>57</sup> Pamela Hanlon. *A Worldly Affair*. (2017), page 47.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

UN Photo Library, Photo # 84705. Accessed 17-01-2020 on <https://www.unmultimedia.org/photo/detail.jsp?id=847/84705&key=40&query=headquarters&lang=&so=0&sf=date>

<sup>59</sup> United Nations Department of Public Information. "Clearing the Way for the United Nations". (1948).

<sup>60</sup> UN Photo Library, Photo # 309330. Accessed 17-01-2020 on <https://www.unmultimedia.org/photo/detail.jsp?id=309/309330&key=5&query=headquarters%20%20AND%20ceremony&lang=&so=0&sf=date>

<sup>61</sup> UN Photo Library, Photo # 76177. Accessed 17-01-2020 on <https://www.unmultimedia.org/photo/detail.jsp?id=761/76177&key=0&query=#%2076177&lang=&sf=>



birthday, the 24<sup>th</sup> of October 1949, an outdoor General Assembly was held on the site as part of the cornerstone ceremony, during which Trygve Lie and Wallace Harrison buried copies of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights under the cornerstone [fig. 5]. President Truman also spoke at the ceremony. Finally, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of January 1950, the UN press service held a brief ceremony as they opened their offices in the Headquarters, commemorating the moment that the first press message was released reading “United Nations, New York” as



place instead of Lake Success.<sup>62</sup>

**[fig. 4] Demolition Begins on United Nations Permanent Headquarters.**

08 July 1947.<sup>63</sup>



**[fig. 5] Cornerstone Laying Ceremony Marks United Nations' Fourth Birthday.**

24 October 1949.<sup>64</sup>

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The territory in New York is governed by the Headquarters Agreement, which contains several important sections that highlight how the international territory works. All federal, state and local laws of the United States are in effect in the Headquarters district, and anyone found

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<sup>62</sup> UN Photo Library, Photo # 62177. Accessed 17-01-2020 on <https://www.unmultimedia.org/photo/detail.jsp?id=621/62177&key=38&query=headquarters%20%20AND%20ceremony&so=0&sf=date>

<sup>63</sup> UN Photo Library, Photo # 73092. Accessed 17-01-2020 on <https://www.unmultimedia.org/photo/detail.jsp?id=730/73092&key=10&query=headquarters%20%20AND%20ceremony&lang=&so=0&sf=date>.

<sup>64</sup> UN Photo Library, Photo # 117535. Accessed 17-01-2020 on <https://www.unmultimedia.org/photo/detail.jsp?id=117/117535&key=20&query=headquarters%20%20AND%20ceremony&lang=&so=0&sf=date>.

to be committing “unlawful acts” will be tried in a US court.<sup>65</sup> However, the United Nations can make regulations that may be contradictory to US law, in which case the UN regulation will take precedence and the US law will be considered inapplicable.<sup>66</sup> The Agreement bans any federal, state or local officers or officials of the United States to enter the Headquarters district to perform any official duties therein except with special permission of the Secretary-General.<sup>67</sup> Further sections detail that the United States will not impede the travel of aliens to the United Nations, diplomatic immunities of UN delegations, as well as how amenities such as water and electricity will be provided to the Headquarters.<sup>68</sup> One of the most important matters in regards to internationalism and the United Nations is section 19: “It is agreed that no form of racial or religious discrimination shall be permitted within the headquarters district.”<sup>69</sup> In a country that still segregated its population by the colour of their skin, it was important to note that the UN Headquarters would not abide by such rules. Discrimination in the US had been a concern from the moment it was considered as a host country, and as early as 1947 the UN encountered problems with racial discrimination as it tried to house its diverse, multi-racial staff in New York City.<sup>70</sup> The agreements governing the Headquarters gathered attention of contemporary scholars, and articles were published on the legal status of the United Nations and the United Nations Headquarters.<sup>71</sup>

## Designing the Future

As the ceremonies surrounding the site progressed, another important step toward building the UN Headquarters could begin. In January 1947, Trygve Lie appointed Wallace Harrison as head of the Board of Design Consultants, and Harrison began assembling an international team to work on the Headquarters.<sup>72</sup> His board was formed by 10 architects from 10 different countries, as well as consultants to Harrison who also had international

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<sup>65</sup> United Nations. “Agreement Between the United Nations and the United States of America Regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations.” Treaty Series no. 147 (26 June 1947), section 7.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, section 8.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, section 9.

<sup>68</sup> United Nations. “Agreement Between the United Nations and the United States of America Regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations.” Treaty Series no. 147 (26 June 1947).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, section 19.

<sup>70</sup> Pamela Hanlon. *A Worldly Affair*. (2017), page 77-78.

<sup>71</sup> i.e. Yuen-li Liang. “The Legal Status of the United Nations in the United States.” *The International Law Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (1948): 577-602.

Michael Brandon, “The Legal Status of the Premises of the United Nations,” in *British Year Book of International Law* 28 (1951): 90-113.

<sup>72</sup> Mark Isitt et al. *United Nations: The Story Behind The Headquarters Of The World*. (2015), page 35.

backgrounds.<sup>73</sup> The ten chosen architects were Gaston Brunfaut (Belgium), Sven Markelius (Sweden), Charles Le Corbusier (France), Howard Robertson (United Kingdom), G.A. “Guy” Soilleux (Australia), Ernest Cormier (Canada), Nikolai Bassov (USSR), Oscar Niemeyer (Brazil), Ssu-Cheng Liang (China) and Julio Vilamajo (Uruguay). Harrison lead this esteemed group of architects while being assisted by the partner of his architecture firm, Max Abramovitch (United States), as well as consultants from Greece, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. He had chosen architects who were confirmed international modernists, thus preventing a clash over styles from the beginning.<sup>74</sup> [fig 6].



**[fig. 6] Architectural Planning of United Nations Permanent Headquarters**

The 10-man Board of Design Consultants and other consultants appointed to assist Wallace K. Harrison in drawing up plans for the construction of UN Permanent Headquarters on the Manhattan East River site.

Board members standing in foreground are, left to right: Ssu-Cheng Liang, China; Oscar Niemeyer, Brazil; Nikolai Bassov, USSR; and Ernest Cormier, Canada. In second row, from left to right: Sven Markelius, Sweden; Charles Le Corbusier, France; Board Member Bodiensky, France, engineer, consultant to Director; Wallace Harrison; G.A. Foilleux, Australian Board Member; Max Abramowitz, United States; Director of Planning and consultants Ernest Weismann, Yugoslavia; Antoniades, Greece, and Matthew Nowicki, Poland. RKO Building. 18 April 1947.<sup>75</sup>

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On the team were two members of the Headquarters Commission who had inspected many sites for the United Nations. First, Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier, who was well-known in the world of architecture for both his rather radical opinions and an injustice he suffered at the hands of the League of Nations.<sup>76</sup> Le Corbusier had made a design for the Palais des Nations, which had supposedly been rejected because he had used the wrong ink on the

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<sup>73</sup> See fig. 6.

<sup>74</sup> Hein, Carola. “Envisioning the Center: World Cities and International Buildings as Precursors to the European Capitol Debate” in *The Capital of Europe: Architecture and Urban Planning for the European Union*. (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), page 33.

<sup>75</sup> UN Photo Library, Photo # 67357. Accessed 5-1-2020 on <https://www.unmultimedia.org/photo/detail.jsp?id=673/67357&key=84&query=headquarters&lang=&so=0&sf=date>.

<sup>76</sup> Mark Isitt et al. *United Nations: The Story Behind The Headquarters Of The World*. (2015), page 22.

submitted design, though many in the world of architecture believed it was because the League did not want to accept the futuristic design and instead went for something more traditional.<sup>77</sup> Second, Nikolai Bassov, an engineer from the Soviet Union who was almost rejected by Harrison because he was not an architect. However, the Soviet delegate to the UN convinced Harrison that the terms engineer and architect were interchangeable in the USSR, and Bassov was given his new UN appointment.<sup>78</sup> Another notable member of the team was Oscar Niemeyer, who had trained under Le Corbusier and ended up making the first step of separating the Secretariat building, the General Assembly building and the Conference building, which led to the final design. Niemeyer was especially well known in New York for designing the Brazilian pavilion of the 1939 New York World's Fair.<sup>79</sup>



**[fig. 7] Permanent Headquarters**

Artist's bird's-eye view of United Nations Permanent Headquarters on Manhattan East River site in relation to central area of Manhattan. Drawn by Chester Price. 19 June 1947.<sup>80</sup>

When thinking of New York City today, especially the iconic buildings in Manhattan, one might picture endless glass skyscrapers like the One World Trade Center and other such glass skyscrapers. But after World War II, the highest buildings in Midtown Manhattan were the Empire State Building, the Chrysler Building, and the Rockefeller Center, each built between 1928 and 1940 [fig. 7].<sup>81</sup> The modernist style Harrison wanted to pursue was based on the sleek lines and modern materials favoured in Europe in the 1920's and used in the 1939

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<sup>77</sup> Mark Isitt et al. *United Nations: The Story Behind The Headquarters Of The World*. (2015), page 22.

<sup>78</sup> Pamela Hanlon. *A Worldly Affair*. (2017), page 55.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, page 61.

<sup>80</sup> UN Photo Library, Photo # 36634. Accessed 5-1-2020 on <https://www.unmultimedia.org/photo/detail.jsp?id=366/36634&key=100&query=headquarters&lang=&so=0&sf=date>.

<sup>81</sup> Mark Isitt et al. *United Nations: The Story Behind The Headquarters Of The World*. (2015), page 15.

New York World's Fair. The international group of star architects coming together resulted in the International style, debuted in the Secretariat Building of the Headquarters, characterised by the glass curtain wall that quickly became a popular feature for office buildings in New York from the 1950's until the early 1980's.<sup>82</sup> Later also referred to as corporate architecture due to this new connection to offices, the glass curtain style became representative of a political and technical optimism in America, symbolising the start of a new beginning.<sup>83</sup> The glass of the UN's skyscraper invoked a sense of futurism at its debut, heralding a new era and transforming New York permanently. But Harrison was adamant that his team had not designed a symbol or icon. "The world hopes for a symbol of peace." He said as he presented the final design. "We have given them a *workshop* for peace."<sup>84</sup>

### A Workshop for Peace

The United Nations Headquarters became finalised in a design of three main buildings. Most prominently featured and already discussed was the Secretariat Building which became the start of an iconic era for glass high-rise buildings in New York. Second was the Conference Building, which contained the rooms for the Security Council, Economic and Social Council and the Trusteeship Council, all adjoined to one long hallway and overlooking the East River. [fig. 8 and 9] Last was the General Assembly Building, the most dynamic and sculptural of the three. Le Corbusier deemed the design unacceptable, sketching the three separated buildings as the dismembered female figure of a perfect sculpture after hearing and seeing Niemeyer's proposed design.<sup>85</sup> Second, there was a controversy about the dome. Initially not included in the design, it was US delegate Warren Austin who told Trygve Lie that if he wished to acquire a loan from the United States for the build of the Headquarters, "the building should have a dome".<sup>86</sup> Although not a part of the modernist vision, domes are a staple of American state congresses, and many Americans find it difficult to imagine a democratic institution without

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<sup>82</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, and Flood, Nancy, eds. *The Encyclopedia of New York City*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), page 54.

Alan Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), page 253.

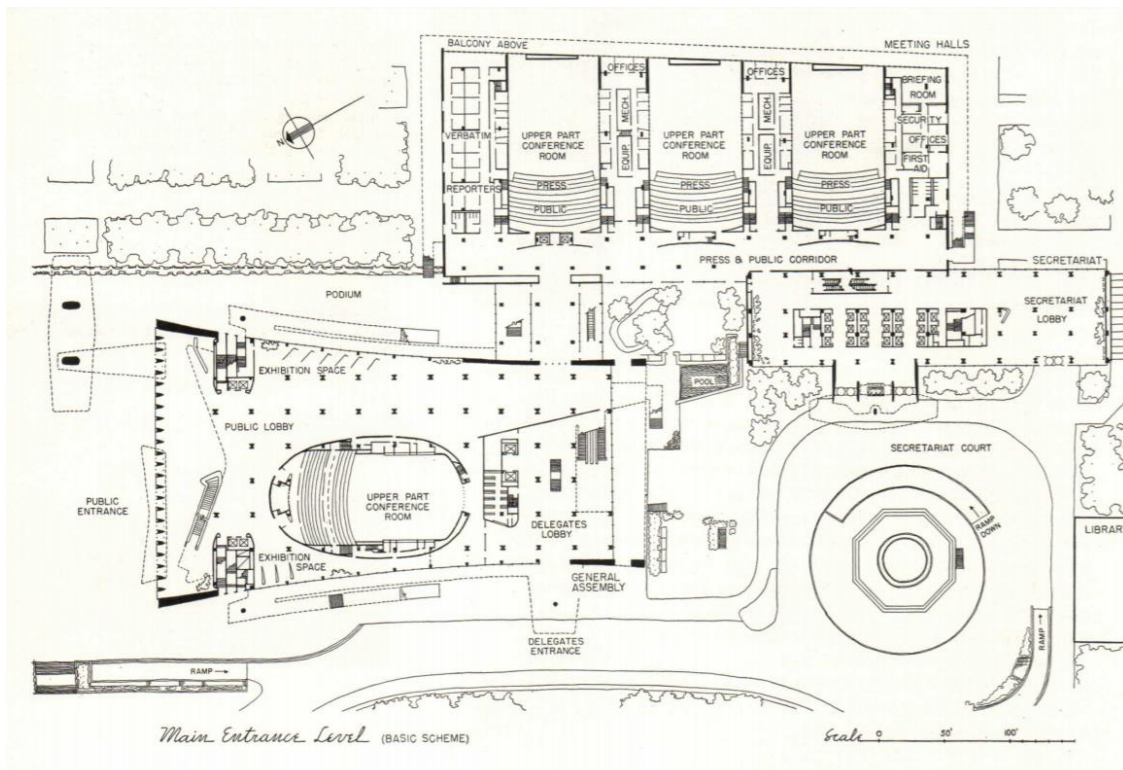
<sup>83</sup> Ibid, page 262.

<sup>84</sup> Mark Isitt et al. *United Nations: The Story Behind The Headquarters Of The World*. (2015), page 45.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, page 44.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, page 169.

one.<sup>87</sup> Once again, the United States made their power over the UN evident: The General Assembly got a dome.



[fig. 8] UN Headquarters Basic Scheme in *Progressive Architecture*, June 1950.<sup>88</sup>



[fig. 9] Aerial view of UN Headquarters.  
01 August 1985.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Mark Isitt et al. *United Nations: The Story Behind The Headquarters Of The World*. (2015), page 169.

<sup>88</sup> Artist Unknown. *Progressive Architecture*, (June 1950).

<sup>89</sup> UN Photo Library, Photo # 98189. Accessed 17-1-2020 on

<https://www.unmultimedia.org/photo/detail.jsp?id=981/98189&key=10&query=aerial%20headquarters&lang=&sf=>

### Chapter three: Working in the Workshop for Peace

Already in 1917, at his inaugural address, Woodrow Wilson proclaimed that “the great things remaining to be done can only be done with the whole world as a stage”.<sup>90</sup> With the United Nations, the world seemed to be looking for such a stage. Already at San Francisco, the United States spend millions of dollars on transforming the San Francisco Opera House into a glittering hall to house the Conference.<sup>91</sup> Where the League of Nations had not rushed for a Headquarters, taking the time to have a competition for the design and letting its Secretariat start with just five people in a single room, the UN was hard pressed to find itself a permanent seat.<sup>92</sup> As Harrison named his design a ‘workshop for peace’, he found the intrinsic importance of what his Board of Design Consultants had been doing: building the ultimate ‘place’ for a new organization. Place is not merely a setting or backdrop, but an agentic player in the game – a force with detectable and independent effects on social life.<sup>93</sup> This means that by examining a place, its practices and purposes, the intentions and expectations of the designers and builders will come to the forefront.

#### A World Bureaucracy

For the UN Headquarters, the design was given one most obvious feature to be examined. The Board of Design Consultants decided to separate three different parts of the UN’s organisational structure into different, though connected buildings. Build first, there was the skyscraper named the Secretariat Building. Second, there is the Conference Building, housing the three main Councils of the UN – Security, Economic and Social, and Trusteeship (which presently does no longer exist). Third, the General Assembly Building, housing the General Assembly as well as the Visitor Centre.<sup>94</sup> The interior design further separates the Secretariat from the Councils and General Assembly.

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<sup>90</sup> Abba Eban, “The U.N. Idea Revisited” (1995), page 50.

<sup>91</sup> Jessica Field. “United Nations Headquarters, New York” (2012), page 21-22.

<sup>92</sup> Mark Isitt et al. *United Nations: The Story Behind The Headquarters Of The World.* (2015),, page 22.

Mark Mazower, *Governing the World* (2012), page 145.

Trygve Lie. *In the Cause of Peace.* (1954), page 114-115.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, page 466.

<sup>94</sup> United Nations Visitor Centre. *Fact Sheet: History of the United Nations Headquarters.* Accessed 29-12-2019 on [https://visit.un.org/sites/visit.un.org/files/unhq\\_2019.pdf](https://visit.un.org/sites/visit.un.org/files/unhq_2019.pdf).

When it comes to size, it is clear that the Secretariat Building is by far the largest of the three. Containing 39 stories, it in no way can be characterised by a single room.<sup>95</sup> The Secretariat Building is the most straightforward representation of Wallace Harrison's workshop for peace. The building attests to the modernist ideas of pragmatic practicality. It was mostly designed to contain offices, office equipment, meeting rooms, and any other amenities needed for a continuously working Secretariat.<sup>96</sup> According to the 2019 Visitor Centre fact sheet, that is what it still does:

“Inside the building, while some modern conveniences are provided for efficient functioning of the staff, there is nothing elaborate and offices are generally small, with no wasted space. The glass in the aluminium-framed windows lets in a maximum of light over the 20 acres of office space and is specially designed to help retain solar heat.”<sup>97</sup>

As any office building, the UN's skyscraper was made to work in. At the start of 1949, the Secretariat counted around 2800 staff members working in New York.<sup>98</sup> The League's secretariat started with only the first Secretary, Eric Drummond, his assistant, a secretary and a housekeeper working out of a single room in London. At its height, it had less than 650 staff members.<sup>99</sup> Still, the League's secretariat formed a bureaucracy more powerful and diverse than any other international organisation had achieved before.<sup>100</sup> It was the League's civil servants that responded to humanitarian crisis's after First World War by becoming a central agency for European reconstruction, refugee resettlement, and other humanitarian efforts.<sup>101</sup> They cemented the connection between internationalism and technical expertise and proved to contemporaries that problems could be solved more satisfactorily by international groups of experts than on a national basis.<sup>102</sup> The legacy of the League thus made it possible for Trygve Lie to start not with a single room with four employees, but with a large call for workers from

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<sup>95</sup> United Nations Visitor Centre. *Fact Sheet*. Accessed 29-12-2019 on [https://visit.un.org/sites/visit.un.org/files/unhq\\_2019.pdf](https://visit.un.org/sites/visit.un.org/files/unhq_2019.pdf), page 1.

<sup>96</sup> United Nations Department of Public Information. "Clearing the Way" (1948), 15:13-16:22.

<sup>97</sup> United Nations Visitor Centre. *Fact Sheet*. Accessed 29-12-2019 on [https://visit.un.org/sites/visit.un.org/files/unhq\\_2019.pdf](https://visit.un.org/sites/visit.un.org/files/unhq_2019.pdf).

<sup>98</sup> Yuen-li Liang. "The Legal Status of the United Nations in the United States." (1948), page 577.

<sup>99</sup> Mark Mazower, *Governing the World* (2012), page 145.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, page 148.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.



all nationalities.<sup>103</sup> Both in search of interim headquarters and in designing, it was apparent that the new Secretariat would need ample office space to do its work.<sup>104</sup> Lie's Secretariat was the beginning of a long line of office workers filling these halls, each with their own area of expertise, native and proficient languages, and national background. The Secretariat formed a new cosmopolitan elite, an international group of people working in a cosmopolitan organisation for human rights and the wider satisfaction of human needs through developmental work.<sup>105</sup> Most importantly, the staff members of the Secretariat are completely independent from and not chosen or endorsed by their member state.<sup>106</sup> In fact, a Soviet proposal to make it a requirement for an individual's government to consent before appointment to the Secretariat was firmly shut down by the Preparatory Commission as they set up the recruitment guidelines for the Secretary-General.<sup>107</sup> Unlike delegates, staff members thus do not in any way represent their country of origin, aside from retaining it as a personal background. In conclusion, the Secretariat forms an international civil service, with employees who are accountable only to a supranational organisation and their mission for peace, and this is reflected in the Secretariat Building.

### Dissecting an Organisation

The other two buildings, the Conference Building and the General Assembly building, both have things in common as much as they stand apart. Opposite to the Secretariat Building, these two buildings are for meetings between delegates of different member states, the place where national interest becomes international action. Though both hold rooms designed for delegates to come together and discuss world matters, the two buildings have very different uses. For one, the Conference Building is in constant use by delegates performing their duties. The Security Council convenes as soon as a crisis occurs, day or night, all through the year.<sup>108</sup> Of the three main chambers in the Conference Building, the ones in use by this Council might be the most characterising for the entire building. Being widely regarded as the most powerful of the Councils, the Security Council has a trio of rooms that show its practices.<sup>109</sup> First, there

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<sup>103</sup> Evan Luard. *A History of the United Nations*. (1982), page 77-78.

<sup>104</sup> United Nations Department of Public Information. "Clearing the Way" (1948), 15:13-16:22.

<sup>105</sup> Luis Cabrera, "Introduction", in *Institutional Cosmopolitanism*. (Oxford University Press, 2018), page 2

<sup>106</sup> Evan Luard. *A History of the United Nations*. (1982), page 78.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Mark Isitt et al. *United Nations: The Story Behind The Headquarters Of The World*. (2015), 113.

<sup>109</sup> Ian Hurd. *International Organizations: Politics, Law, Practice*. Third edition. (Cambridge University Press, 2018), page 50.

is the Security Council Chamber, the first thing to come up in any search. With its horse-shaped table and the UN-blue delegates' chairs, as well as the public and press tribunes, it is clear that this is the most public and formal setting that the Security Council operates in.<sup>110</sup> There is art work adorning the walls, every detail meticulously thought out and designed, like a set or stage for a grand show. The other two rooms are smaller conference rooms not open to the public, which a tour guide might only allude to when showing visitors around the UN Headquarters – behind mysterious doors lie the rooms where delegates go for more private deliberation. The first still contains interpreters' booths, the large glass windows that can be found at the sides of most of the conference rooms in the UN Headquarters, and used to be unembellished until a renovation in 2013 when a Russian architect redesigned it.<sup>111</sup> The second is still void of any indication of onlookers and lacks any special design, uncharacteristic for the Conference and General Assembly Buildings.<sup>112</sup> As Abba Eban states in his article "The U.N. Idea Revisited": "Without phases of secrecy and avoidance of publicity, agreements are virtually impossible."<sup>113</sup> As the closest thing to an executive branch of government the UN was given, the Security Council has embedded within its home the option for privacy, so decisions can be reached quickly and without the risk of any of the member states losing face. Here, Harrison's vision of a workshop for peace is realised. Here, delegates of the member states workshop. It is this contrast between embellishing design and art filled halls that shows the paradox of the Councils, who operate both publicly and in secret, but which also shows the stark difference between the Secretariat and the General Assembly. One works nearly entirely unseen, only to be researched through statistics and reports, whereas the other can be followed word for word through television and press. The Councils are allowed to exist somewhere in between, with both the public and iconic Chamber and the private conference rooms.

The General Assembly Building is made to be a grand stage for world politics. Where the Conference Building has private conference rooms and an air of practicality that is made to work, the General Assembly Chamber was given the full air of a stage for all the world to see. The emblem of the United Nations is affixed above the heads of the president of the Assembly,

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<sup>110</sup> Mark Isitt et al. *United Nations: The Story Behind The Headquarters Of The World*. (2015).

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, page 128.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, page 126-129.

<sup>113</sup> Abba Eban, "The U.N. Idea Revisited" (1995), page 48.

with below them a grand podium for speakers to look out over the assembled delegates.<sup>114</sup> Along with the same press and public tribunes present in the Council Chambers, there is the northern entrance only to be used by popes or royalty, alluding to a performativity of the practises of the General Assembly.<sup>115</sup> The General Assembly Building is less a workshop, and much more a platform providing opportunity for grand speeches and steering rhetoric in international politics. In his assessment of international organisations, Ian Hurd poses that the General Assembly resolutions carry more power in their political influence than the legal obligations they carry.<sup>116</sup> This influence is in part produced by the prestige of the spectacle that an annual General Assembly produces, the visual image of a room filled with heads of state, and produces the impression of the resolutions carrying the opinions of an imagined ‘international community’.<sup>117</sup> The member states perform this annual ritual in a grand room with ordered seating and special platforms for speaking, under a dome representing democracy, with rituals such as entering through specified doors to symbolise their status or power, and in doing so give themselves, each other, and the United Nations the legitimacy to speak on the international issues they decide on. In short, the General Assembly Chamber was built to give status to an organisation whose other parts are too shrouded in secrecy to give the United Nations the openness and transparency Wilson had envisioned for international diplomacy in a world striving for peace. In addition to that, the General Assembly Building is home to the Visitor Centre, a space in the basement which includes the UN Bookshop, UN post office, UN gift shop, and a small cafeteria and offers exhibitions on matters related to the UN, providing a further impression of openness and transparency even for people who fall outside the international elite who get to meet in the building once a year. Before 2005, the North Lawn and the Visitor Centre were open for anyone to visit, without even requiring much of a security check. Only in this new age of terrorism did the United Nations close their site for security reasons and build a new, higher fence around the property.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> United Nations Department of Public Information. “Clearing the Way”. (1948). Accessed 4-1-2020 on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68lfjCORCIA>. 16:22-17:22.

<sup>115</sup> Mark Isitt et al. *United Nations: The Story Behind The Headquarters Of The World*. (2015),, page 192.

<sup>116</sup> Ian Hurd. *International Organizations*. (2018), page 52.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, page 52.

<sup>118</sup> Pamela Hanlon. *A Worldly Affair*. (2017), page 67.

## Conclusion

As this thesis has shown, the creation and design of a headquarters for an organisation as big as the United Nations is not as simple as picking a location and putting a few buildings on it. The space it inhabits, the functional use of these buildings, as well as the symbolism and facilitating of certain practises through the architecture, has an effect on how the organisation works, and how it has worked for over half a century now. A place is created, inhabited with meaning and on its own an agentic player in social life.

The creation and design of the United Nations Headquarters had three major consequences. First, the decision to place the Headquarters in the United States, and in New York specifically, had ramifications for the ideological framework the organisation worked in. By forcing the United States to commit to a new world order that would not allow a return to previous isolationist policies, the United Nations found itself becoming a sign for the new, permanent resurgence of American internationalism. The end of World War II and the start of the Cold War was the start of a new world order, and the United Nations is a sign of the United Nations taking the lead for the West and with Latin America. As the United Nations settled in New York, temporarily at first and permanently in the end, Trygve Lie was accorded his wish of being at the new economic and political centre.<sup>119</sup> New York's metropolitan area would keep the United Nations from becoming isolated from the world, swept away in academic discussion instead of intimately connected to the world it is trying to improve. The internationalisation of the site, making it an international territory, further solidified the UN's commitment to internationalism. Second, the United Nations Headquarters was given an air of futurism by its modernist Board of Design Consultants, who heralded a new era for the isle of Manhattan with the glass design of the Secretariat's skyscraper. The separation of the organisation between three buildings resulted in a physical representation that comes forward in the third consequence. This last point is that the separation of the organisation between the Secretariat Building, the Conference Building and the General Assembly building symbolised the different functions each of the bodies they housed had, and the different needs in correlation with them. From the architecture of the Conference Building, we can read the secrecy needed for the executive functions of the Councils, especially the sensitive issues discussed in the Security Council. From the architecture of the General Assembly Building, we can see the Wilsonian

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<sup>119</sup> Trygve Lie. *In the Cause of Peace*. (1954), page 57.

stage needed for the new era of world politics that began after World War II. From the architecture of the Secretariat Building, we can read the sheer capacity of people needed to work in the name of peace and development. The Secretariat Building tells us about the need for an independent international bureaucracy that is leading some of the biggest specialised agencies, special operations, and the need for constant independent and unbiased research of world affairs to keep the Councils aware of where issues may arise, and where they might want to act.

For these conclusions, this thesis is entirely basing itself on the structure of the United Nations Headquarters and the intentions and expectations of the people who worked towards building it. No surveys of Secretariat staff or delegations to New York have been utilised or made, and no conclusions can be made about whether the staff or delegations feel like either a cosmopolitan, international body or representatives of national interest. In addition to that, little of the renovations made after the completion of the Headquarters have been taken into account, meaning that regardless of the initial expectations discussed in this thesis, adjustments may later have been made that would otherwise affect the organisation, or that showed that the organisation in return also affected the building.

There are many more research projects in regards to the United Nations Headquarters that can and ought to be conducted. Further interesting aspects that require further research include the operation of the Headquarters district as an international territory, especially with the heightened security measures that come with the age of terrorism.<sup>120</sup> There is the interesting aspect of the renovations needed between the 1952 Headquarters and those that exist now, with over double the member states needing to be welcomed. Further, there is the sociological aspect of the separation between delegates and Secretariat workers, especially in regards to the political loyalties to their nations that they may or may not have, and to what extent the international character of the Headquarters affects them.

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<sup>120</sup> United Nations Visitor Centre. "Arrival". Accessed 5-1-2010 on <https://visit.un.org/content/arrival-0>.

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