Legacies beyond empire : reflections on doing international history from Geneva

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G. Balachandran

Switzerland, unlike other parts of Europe including its closest neighbours, has had no history of overseas expansion. Its businesses engaged in colonial commerce. The merchants, migrants, and missionaries dispatched to European colonies were complexly involved with colonial societies and governments. Since the mid-nineteenth century norms originating in Geneva have acquired the status of soft or hard law in the hybrid inter-imperial/international system built around the League of Nations and the United Nations. Switzerland also has a history and disposed of a self-image of independence and autonomy described in relation to the big powers of the time, some of them empires. The Swiss tradition of neutrality seemed to embody this independence, which particularly during the cold war was available to be valorized in anti-great power terms. Framed by such seeming dualities, my essay reflects on Geneva and Switzerland as liminal, counter-imperial spaces for teaching and researching histories of the non-Western world and their imbrications with the West.

Switzerland, unlike other parts of Europe including its closest neighbours, has had no history of overseas expansion. Its businesses engaged in colonial commerce. The merchants, migrants, and missionaries dispatched to European colonies were complexly involved with colonial societies and governments. Since the mid-nineteenth century Geneva- and Swiss-based personages were active in promoting new norms in Europe some of which acquired the status of soft or hard law in the hybrid inter-imperial/international system of which the League of Nations in Geneva became an embattled institutional-political core. It is commonplace to

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view the League as a project to perpetuate Western empires through other means. The United Nations, of which Geneva became a major host and vocal protagonist though Switzerland itself did not join it until 2002, remains a work in progress.

Switzerland also has a history and disposed of a self-image of independence and autonomy described in relation to the big powers of the time, some of them empires. This possessed an anti-imperial edge. In some colonies the Swiss legend of William Tell competed with Old Testament legends such as David and Goliath to supply subversive idioms and metaphors for anti-colonial hope and protest. The Swiss tradition of neutralism seemed to embody this independence, which particularly during the cold war was available to be valorized in anti-great power terms. Switzerland was invited to the 1961 Belgrade summit that launched the non-aligned movement. Switzerland did not attend. There is even some question whether it replied to the invitation.

Framed by such seeming dualities, my essay proposes to offer a personal, and to some perhaps idiosyncratic, sociography of an Indian historian at a leading Swiss institute during a fluid and transformative period not merely in the institute's history, but also of post-cold war Switzerland and its external environment, the wider global milieu, as well in the social sciences and the humanities. It is impossible to do justice to this vast terrain or even map its intersections. Yet it seems worthwhile to reflect on Geneva and Switzerland as liminal, counter-/imperial spaces for teaching and researching histories of the non-Western world and their imbrications with the West.

This is not a conventional historical paper, instead a reflective, contextual, and as I wish again to emphasize personal, intellectual / institutional / historical / historiographical essay. In the next two sections I recount my academic background, and then Geneva and the Graduate Institute's rapidly changing institutional milieus over the last decade or so. The following section extends these reflections to disciplinary configurations in the social sciences as they relate to international and area studies, and returns against this backdrop to a discussion of Geneva as a milieu for academic research. Multilateral institutions and international organizations being a prominent part of this milieu and of Geneva's identity, the fifth section reflects on historical scholarship on international organizations. This section's focus on the latter's 'intellectual histories' is deliberately selective. Such histories, I suggest, depoliticize ideas, eliding their frequently insurgent contexts of production and displacing them onto 'experts' and 'epistemic communities' in sanitized international bureaucracies. They thus emblematize a tendency to which histories of in-

ternational organizations and international and global history, more broadly, are susceptible, namely displace and appropriate for the metropolitan west and the bureaucratic institutions dominated by it, productive/creative agency, sites, and contexts from the rest of the world. Such elisions and appropriations, and more generally dis-embedding ideas from their social and historical contexts of articulation, are recognized to create problems for post-Skinnerian histories of ideas debated even in detached 'ivory towers' of philosophy or the academe. Histories of 'ideas' propagated by powerful or resourceful international bureaucracies beholden to powerful state and private benefactors belong to bureaucratic rather than intellectual histories, scrubbed as they are of the contexts and histories of their dispersed production, and subject subsequently to filtering, appropriation, and translation within the corridors of power. The last section concludes the essay.

Encountering Geneva

My graduate coursework was in economics. I became a historian thanks almost to a chance archival encounter with L/F/5/36, a file at the India Office Library and Records (IOLR, now part of the British Library as its Oriental and India Office Collections or OIOC) in London. At the IOLR to research raw monetary and trade data for my PhD dissertation testing monetary and structuralist models of the 1930s depression in India, I stumbled on L/F/5/36 the very first afternoon, lying in wait, apparently forlorn and unclaimed like a magical Jumanji in the eponymous film (Columbia Tristar, 1995, dir. Joe Johnston).

It was smooth. L/F/5/36 was a bound and printed volume, so no poring over smudgy handwritten manuscripts under an archivist's watchful eyes. It delivered a near complete paper trail of the Pittman silver agreement, i.e. the 1916–1917 wartime deal between the US and Britain to sell the US Treasury's surplus stocks of silver to India. The deal augmented world liquidity by remonetizing silver as full-bodied currency in India, where the metal was exported at an unsustainably revalued parity of one dollar per ounce (against a prevailing market price before the deal of 68 cents) to finance its supplies of raw materials, at reduced and regulated prices, that Britain and later the US required for the war.

L/F/5/36 led to other files including at the British treasury and the foreign office. Together they uncovered a dizzying array of unlikely protagonists scripted into a single plot: canny Indian peasants making smart hedging or investment bets that threatened the world's money markets, colonial merchants, the colony's small but vocal and inflation-weary

middle-class; a colonial government whose fiscal and political foundations were shaken by the war; anxious UK government officials (including John Maynard Keynes at the British treasury) trying to keep public borrowing cheap and the sterling stable at the same time; hardnosed London bankers chafing at the monetary and exchange controls this necessitated; US bankers keen to cash in on UK loans in New York yet skeptical about Britain's wartime finances and suspicious of the old colonial power; US mid-Western silver producers, vociferous neo-populists betting on a boom in silver prices which they saw as just comeuppance for the 'goldbugs' who had conspired through the 1880s and 1890s to demonetize silver and relegate it to idle, depreciating hoards; eastern US industrial elites who wanted to keep the entente powers' military orders coming and raw materials flowing from India; US bankers seeking to stabilize Britain's external financial position (including minimizing its wartime debt to India) yet expand their own postwar financial footprint at Britain's expense, and so on.[1] This history was already and at once so colonial, inter-/imperial, inter-/transnational, and global without the need even to speak those names.

I was hooked. The files dealt with international finance before it acquired the discursive and other trappings of 'science', and an esoteric veil over its operations. Facing the challenge of financing an unprecedented war effort, London policy-makers made no effort to hide their gloom and despair at the impossibility of reconciling Britain's finances, the colonial Indian government's monetary and political predicament, and the ambivalences and compulsions of US politics, laying out in bluntly bullionist terms the wartime choices and sacrifices confronting Britain and its empire, and the hopes and threats the US represented.[2] An eye-opener for someone trained in economics, the files presented me with two analytical options. One was to draw a 'scientific' veil over this bullionist prose to recode British motivations, actions, policies, and outcomes in the familiar discourse of economics. The other was to trace the constitution of this discourse and its tottering route to hegemony from the 1920s when a skeptical US notably, was much too important to be stigmatized as a deviant. From the late-1920s this discourse began to infiltrate the British-led, and London and British empire-stacked, gold delegation of the financial committee of the League of Nations, growing entrenched

1 G. Balachandran, John Bullion's Empire. Britain's Gold Problems and India between the Wars, Richmond 1996, ch. 3.

2 Also see British National Archives (BNA), T170/95, inter-departmental committee to consider dependence of the British empire on the United States, final draft report, Oct. 1916.

after it was appropriated by the US following World War II and expressed into the Bretton-Woods system and its institutions.[3]

Geneva and its international institutions were never then in my sights. My PhD dissertation and monograph relied on UK, US, and colonial Indian government records, and the archives of the Bank of England and the New York Federal Reserve. Aiming to consolidate a financial empire unraveling from World War I, the public and 'private structure(s) of international cooperation' – i.e. 'public-private' partnerships and institutional arrangements emerging from bilateral, imperial, or multilateral negotiations at the occasional conference, and scores of meetings involving businessmen and statesmen – were of much greater consequence than what officials sidelined to the League of Nations thought up.[4]

I did use the archives of Geneva-based international organizations (the ILO and ICRC) for my subsequent research on Indian seafarers in world shipping, mainly though on account of already being there.[5] Looking back, I was fortunate to encounter Geneva, the League, and so on from the outside and looking in (rather than from the inside and looking out) because I may not otherwise have been so keenly aware that to the world of powerful empires, these were mere sideshows, sometimes handy instruments. Real power lay elsewhere. This recognition, reinforced perhaps by a postcolonial sensibility, meant that neither bureaucratic or institutional vanity nor local patriotism would easily persuade me otherwise.

The story of the League of Nation's gold delegation, of which Britain was the principal if not the only driving force, offers a neat illustration. The dark bastard-child of the Bank of England, ever the target of neighbourly suspicion and snigger and at risk of being disowned by its parent, the 'duplicitous' and neurotic Bank of England governor Montagu Norman, Britain's principal aim in instituting the gold delegation as Patricia Clavin and Jens-Wilhelm Wessels astutely observe was to «exploit its dominance of the League of Nations» to get round US and French objec-

3 Balachandran, John Bullion's.

4 Michael J. Hogan, Informal Entente. The Private Structure of Cooperation in Anglo-American Economic Diplomacy, 1918–1928, New York 1977; Richard H. Meyer, Bankers' Diplomacy. Monetary Stabilization in the 1920s, New York 1976; Dan Silverman, Reconstructing Europe after the Great War, Cambridge (MA) 1982; Frank C. Costigliola, Awkward Dominion. American Political, Economic and Cultural Relations with Europe, 1919–1933, New York 1984; idem, Anglo-American Financial Rivalry in the 1920s', in: Journal of Economic History 37/4 (1977); William Buiter, Richard Marston (eds.), The International Coordination of Economic Policies, Cambridge 1985; Barry Eichengreen, Golden Fetters. The Gold Standard and the Great Depression, New York 1992.

5 G. Balachandran, Globalizing Labour? Indian Seafarers and World Shipping, c. 1870–1945, Delhi/New York 2012.

tions to its «financial objectives» of a «general gold exchange standard based on sterling». This project all but in name to colonize the post-1920 system of national monies along lines Britain had successfully though not without contest attempted in its empire, required complex political and discursive manoeuvres. These included glossing Britain's financial problems as the world's problems to naturalize solutions best suited to its own interests; publicly addressing a topic like gold without unduly alarming other monetary authorities or rattling financial markets; politically avoid provoking the US even whose central bankers had grown greatly wary (and weary) of British financial motives; giving plausible public deniability and cover to Montagu Norman and the Bank of England; give the delegation itself the cover of disinterested, and as far as possible geographically dispersed, 'expertise' while stuffing it with loyal 'experts', and so on.[6] Even in a project so potentially 'multilateral' and branded by its own multilateral identity, the League was a convenient site and proxy instrument, not even an agent let alone a principal.

The institutional milieu

I joined the Graduate Institute of International Studies (or HEI as it then was) in 2000 as a professor in its International History and Politics (or HPI after the French histoire et politique internationales) unit. Until the 1980s HEI was more or less a single multi-disciplinary entity. In the 1990s it was reorganized into largely disciplinary departments (euphemistically called 'units'). Some of the scars from the reorganization were fresh when I arrived. As the 'residual' of the institute after economics and law became distinct units, HPI prided itself on sustaining the former's original cross-disciplinary spirit.[7] After political science separated to become a distinct unit, this pride fed off a conception of 'poli-

6 Patricia Clavin, Jens-Wilhelm Wessels, Another Golden Idol? The League of Nations' Gold Delegation and the Great Depression, 1929–1932, in: International History Review 26/4 (2004), pp. 768–773; also see Balachandran, John Bullion's, ch. 7; idem, Power and Markets in Global Finance. The Gold Standard, 1890–1926, in: Journal of Global History 3/3 (2008), pp. 313–335.

7 Interestingly, this cross-disciplinary spirit seems at least at first to have been impervious to ideological divisions, HEI's neo-liberals (discussed below) being on the dissenting side, along with Friedrich A. Hayek, of the 'economistic' domination of neo-liberal thought in the 1950s and 1960s: Angus Burgin, The Great Persuasion. Reinventing Free Markets since the Great Depression, Cambridge (MA) 2012. Besides, thanks to Wilhelm Röpke, the neo-liberalism that endured at HEI after Ludwig von Mises fled Geneva for the US in 1940, seems to have carried a strong streak of the German social market economy tradition: Andrea Franc, The importance of Switzerland for the neoliberal movement before, during and after World War II, unpublished conference paper, p. 3. I am grateful to Andrea Franc for permission to cite her paper.

tics' as an encompassing field of study or endeavor. History would be its mode of analysis, not merely a chronicle of a past made useable because of its yielding unremittingly to the present. Together history and politics offered a space and means of inquiry that hardening disciplinary configurations might preclude.

In 2000 HPI was going through a period of renewal. Like other units at the Institute, we taught mainly in two programmes – the final two years of the University of Geneva's four-year license in international relations and the specialized two-year diplôme des études approfondi (DEA) in international history and politics. (There was, so far as I can recall, no specialized PhD coursework.) Shortly afterwards the skeleton Centre of Asian Studies (CAS) at the Institute and the University of Geneva jointly introduced a largely piggyback MA in Asian Studies.

At the end of their fourth year, license students opting for International History and Politics as one of their majors took an oral exam based on a syllabus a significant part of which covered the foreign policy of 'great powers'. Italy was one of the 'great powers' in the syllabus. China was added in the late-1990s at the initiative of a newly arrived Chinese colleague who for a long time relished relating this as an instance of the HEI's western bias. Shortly after joining the institute I was asked whether I wished likewise to elevate India. Needless to add I declined.

Perhaps this invitation was meant to be ironical or made in jest. Still there was no mistaking the hospitality and friendship with which I was received at HPI. HEI and HPI could boast considerable expertise on India and more generally on South Asia. Professor Gilbert Etienne (who sadly passed away as this paper was being revised) had retired only recently, and few could match the thoroughness of his knowledge of Indian development, especially rural and agricultural development, and his depth of experience in the sub-continent. My advertised fields embraced colonialism, imperialism, and international economic history. But I was also an Indian historian and had shortly before arriving in Geneva completed a history of the Indian central bank. Anywhere else this potential for transgression would have secured for me a cool reception. But not at HPI where within two years of my arrival, my offer to teach the first year obligatory DEA class on the Evolution of the International System was gladly accepted despite my relative newness to the subject. What is more, I was given a free hand to redesign the syllabus and steer it away from its Eurocentric, diplomatic and great power preoccupations and perspectives. Drawing on some recent critical historical and postcolonial readings, I took the opportunity to reinvent the course as a connected poli-

tical and cultural history of Western world dominance, in the process learning a great deal myself, or certainly taking away more from the course than what I first brought to it. I proceeded to teach this course for the next four years, until the DEA was transformed into a Bologna MA. It was crucial to my 'formation' as a historian and in some ways made me, huge flaws and all, the historian I happen to be today.

The license and DEA programmes both fell victim to the Bologna process which Switzerland adopted earlier and in more thorough-going fashion than many other countries signing up to it. From 2007 the Institute gave up the DEA for the Bologna MA and its annual calendar made up of two unequal 'semesters' from late October to late-June, for a semester system running from September to May. When the University of Geneva replaced the license with the three-year Bologna BA in international relations, the Institute became a purely 'graduate' school in fact as well in name, and introduced a two-year semi-professional interdisciplinary MA in international affairs (MIA). In 2007 HEI merged with the Graduate Institute of Development Studies (IUED) to become the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (or IHEID in its French acronym). The ex-IUED's MA in Development Studies (MDEV) was revised to complement the MIA degree and added to the new Institute's menu of MA degrees. The former development studies faculty was for the most part integrated into existing units (now 'departments'), a PhD in development economics introduced, that in development studies discontinued, and a department of Anthropology and Sociology of Development created. HPI shed 'politics' to become a department purely of 'international history'. With the disciplinary reorganization of the institute more or less complete, the CAS ceased existence in 2012. A shoestring mélange assembled from existing offerings and skewed unevenly across languages, regions, disciplines, and approaches the MA in Asian studies, despite attracting some very good students and being taught by some excellent colleagues, remains peripheral to the new IHEID's concerns. A Geneva international studies research network (RUIG in French) was formed as a funding entity in the early-2000s and subsequently absorbed into an expanded Swiss international studies network (SNIS). Partnerships with international organizations remain a prerequisite condition of eligibility for SNIS funding. Whereas earlier higher education in Geneva attracted little private gift-giving, within the last few years the Graduate Institute has succeeded in raising millions of Swiss francs of private money for scholarships, chairs, research centres, student housing, and its own stunning new home set in the midst of what is expected to be a sprawling network of public buil-

dings devoted to the study, research, and promotion of 'international Geneva'.

This summary is purposely breezy to convey something of the nature and pace of transformations that the Geneva institutional milieu in the field of international and area studies underwent in the last decade. These transformations were not merely institutional, they were also political (in both its English and French meanings), cultural, and intellectual. There is a common impression about Switzerland that it is conservative and slow to change because decisions are made by consensus and liable to be held up by stakeholder vetoes. Geneva is often claimed to be particularly resistant to 'restructuring' perhaps because it has historically had an influential left or perhaps because it is 'French'. Yet I cannot think of another academic milieu in a democratic country where major transformations with such far-reaching consequences, whether for better or worse, would have been possible at so many levels and within such a short period of time. Or, saturated from the start with such an air of inevitability that most discussions of them quickly withdrew into whispering backrooms.

Some of it could undoubtedly be put down to leadership. Still this begs two questions of relevance here – i.e. the 'worldview' driving these transformations, and secondly, figuring what gave, what endured or was reinforced, and what was reinvented in their course. These are large questions lying beyond the address of individual experiences and life-stories or indeed the remit of a single individual or essay.

Intellectual and research milieus

They may still serve though as prisms.

The disciplinary reinforcement of the institute prefigured the changes that followed over the next two decades, and took place against a complex political, cultural, and institutional backdrop. The end of the cold war subjected Switzerland's idea of itself and its role in the world to searching cross-examination. Its cold war neutrality celebrated earlier as unique risked turning now into a liability, being even regarded in some quarters as amoral, mercenary, or on the 'wrong' side of history. So too, Switzerland's small size which was to an extent offset during the cold war by its outsized mediatory role. Likewise small, the HEI which was founded in 1927 with support from the Rockefeller foundation as the principal European institution for the study of the emerging 'science' of international relations, was always a live conduit for changing political,

institutional, and disciplinary realignments. It became so once again in the 1990s.[8]

By the 1980s, after Foucault and Said, the humanities and the social sciences could no longer avoid confronting 'difference'. Anthropologists, cultural studies scholars, geographers, and historians, notably, took this opportunity to explore colonial and other power-laden genealogies of difference and in general to critique or decenter Eurocentric epistemological and other premises of modern knowledge production. Going beyond simplistic modernity/tradition dichotomies and modernization frameworks, 'area' scholarship grew deeper, recognizing and affirming the complexity of non-Western cognitive traditions and epistemologies, wrestling with challenges of intercultural translation, and exploring plural resolutions however derivative (such as 'multiple' and 'alternative' modernities).[9]

Mainstream economics (and rational choice political science) mostly took an opposite and less overtly self-reflective route. Until about the 1970s, the theory and practice of economics in many nations where 'economy' seemed to resist dis-embedding from 'society' remained, if not resolutely diachronic, at least deeply marked by classical political economy and its pronounced emphasis on distributional conflict (and hence on pasts and politics). However from the 1980s, product labels on the 'new classical economics' being shipped to the developing world by the Bretton-Woods twins among others in pre-boxed stabilization or structural adjustment plans, claimed the universal validity of its axioms, models, and prescriptions. These claims, as such things can do, became hegemonic within the discipline as a whole. The consequent rejection, as 'area studies', of approaches emphasizing diversities in histories, experiences, meanings, and trajectories meant that economics as a discipline became pronouncedly more deaf where other disciplines (anthropology, geography, history, etc.) became self-consciously more dialogical.

Coincidentally or reactively, these disciplinary 'resensibilizations' (to import a French coinage) happened more or less in tandem in western Anglophone academia. By illuminating contrast in India, of which I can speak from direct experience, the dialogical turn happened first. It did

8 For an interesting account of the Institute's early years and its relations with the Rockefeller foundation against the background of projects to institute the 'science of international relations' at the heart of strife-torn Europe, see Heather Fabrikant, The birth of international relations as a social science discipline. Woodrow Wilson, John D. Rockefeller Jr. and the «spirit of Geneva», unpublished DEA dissertation, Geneva 2004.

9 Dilip Gaonkar, Alternative Modernities (A Public Culture Book), Durham (NC) 2001; Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, Multiple Modernities, New Brunswick (NJ) 2002, the latter originally an issue of Daedalus 129/1 (2000).

not also leave economics alone. Attempting to combine micro-theoretic rigour with a degree of self-reflectivity, many economists remained active in cross-disciplinary conversations including in such incomparable journals as the *Economic and Political Weekly* whose scholarly readership and roster of contributors cut across disciplines and spanned the world. An openness toward history, political economy, and socio-cultural perspectives remains even today a characteristic of an older generation of Indian economists and the brightest of the younger ones employed in respectable university economics departments around the world, though not perhaps those in proliferating think tanks reliant on project funding. In political science, despite being taught in most good undergraduate and graduate programmes, rational choice approaches remain a minority pursuit in India.

To my knowledge in Geneva – I can claim to speak even less of Switzerland as a whole – one significantly finds this sequence in reverse or muted. Despite producing some distinguished economists, neoclassical economics took a long time to strike deep roots in France where modular derivatives such as 'social economics' mimicked and reinforced the oft-made distinction between French and Anglo-American capitalism. HEI figures prominently in intellectual and institutional histories as a lively hub of exiled neo-liberals. This was particularly the case for the 1930s when Austrian economists such as Friedrich A. Hayek and Ludwig von Mises spent various periods at the Institute on their way to Britain or the US. One such prominent exile Wilhelm Röpke remained at the Institute until his death in 1966, and Hayek returned on various occasions to Geneva. HEI was also a destination for Chicago economists such as Milton Friedman, Robert Mundell (who visited every summer from 1965 to 1975), and Jacob Viner.[10] The Chicago school was of course rather different in the 1960s than it has since been made out to be, though Friedman's presidentship of the Mont Pélerin Society (1970–1972) might appear to make it moot whether this difference was philosophical or strategic.

10 On the HEI as a hub of European neo-liberalism, see Franc, The importance of Switzerland for the neoliberal movement, pp. 4f.; also Burgin, The Great Persuasion. Despite HEI's location as a carréfour of neo-liberal thought particularly in the 1930s, its founder and co-director William Rappard did not always find it easy to reconcile this opportunity (and his own intellectual sympathies with neo-liberalism) with the Rockefeller foundation's insistence – one of its officials dismissed Rappard's faculty as made up of European 'exiles and misfits' – on 'practical science' such as the study of 'colonial possessions as assets and liabilities': Fabrikant, The birth of international relations as a social science discipline, pp. 90–92.

By 2000 HEI was a long way from being a base camp for Mont Pélerin. Still neoclassical economists held undoubted sway at HEI albeit with some enhanced boundary-securing reflexes. Such reflexes by their nature overspill boundaries. The rather limited room for manoeuvre available to the humanities and social science disciplines in the Geneva environment magnified them and shaped conversations across the boundaries they reinforced. The resulting impoverishment of 'area-studies' scholarship and sensibilities signaled and reinforced an increasingly unreflective disposition to filter out historical and other diversities, and claim and entrench the 'universality' of a small set of economistic categories. This trend may yet change should Europe itself subside into an aberrant 'area' rather than the presumed abode of the 'universal', though the nature of this 'area' and its implications for historical and social science scholarship in this part of the world will depend, naturally enough, on the claimed future abode/s of purported 'universals', new and old.

For a country of its size Switzerland can boast a remarkable density of universities and research centres producing some excellent work. It offers a hospitable environment for research – an irony I relish and retell often is of archival research for my monograph on deep-sea mariners being funded by the national research funding agency of a landlocked nation (i.e. the Swiss National Science Foundation; though not many know that Geneva is perhaps the world's greatest maritime trading centre which does not actually have a seaport). While being small and unevenly spread, the geographical range of research and scholarship in history, and interest therein, is also quite unusual for a country without an imperial past.

Geneva is not a great seat of government. To the uncharitably disposed, behind Geneva's reputation for discretion as a banking and trading centre lies a deliberate preference for operating at the shadowy edges of more tightly regulated environments. As is well known, Geneva celebrated and made important contributions to enlightenment thought. Informed perhaps by a darkly pragmatic if at bottom whiggish belief in the constant need for human striving for improvement, mid-nineteenth century Geneva burghers pioneered a tradition of intellectual and diplomatic engagement to relieve some darker consequences of the enlightenment (notably in the waging and conduct of war). While I am not competent nor fortunately is it relevant here to relate a history of enlightenment or international Geneva, it seems plausible that Geneva's hospitality toward multilateral institutions, and international, intergovernmental, and global nongovernmental organizations arose from and/or reinforced such sensibilities. For nearly a century now Geneva

has held a ringside seat in international affairs and a privileged view of multilateral efforts to deal with them. Many states-women/men and important decision-makers spend or have spent a part of their careers in Geneva, or have passed regularly through the city. In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries Geneva was a place of exile for European anarchists and revolutionaries. And somewhat later an important destination, alongside Berlin, London, Moscow, Paris, and Zurich, or a prominent stop on the itineraries of radical activists from the colonies en route to Paris and Weimar Berlin. The Geneva neighbourhood of Eaux-Vives seems in particular to have been favoured by colonial radicals perhaps because of its proximity to Annemasse and Annecy where their newspapers were produced with assistance from France's syndicalist printers. Now, about a century later, civil society activists from the emerging world and the 'global south', to use a handy expression, throng Geneva; and however they may be viewed on the ground in their own countries, giving expression to resistant and creative sensibilities that might otherwise be lost in the bureaucratic welter of its multilateral institutions and international organizations. Switzerland's international banks and businesses have lately shown interest in supporting humanities and social science research. As already noted, for various lengths of time in the 1930s Geneva (and the HEI) attracted neo-liberal intellectuals such as Friedrich A. Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, and Wilhelm Röpke.

Intellectual histories and international institutions

Geneva thus offers a rather unusual milieu for transacting in humanities and social science knowledge. It can help nourish research in diverse ways. Students' MA, PhD, or post-doctoral research interests are not uncommonly stimulated by internships or other Geneva work experience. Especially where it involves NGOs, or distant sites, social movements, and so forth, such experiences can bring plural sensibilities and perspectives into what can otherwise appear to be a rather self-enclosed, if not self-absorbed, normative universe. The acuity that comes with leveraging such experiences and combining them with cutting-edge theory (rather than merely method) is often the source of some of the best research at the Graduate Institute.

Nor is even the world of multilateral institutions and international and intergovernmental organizations a monolithic one. Some intergovernmental organizations, such as say the South Centre, play a critical inside-outside role with respect to multilateral institutions and their agendas. International organizations can end up with overlapping man-

dates, making sometimes for an interesting diversity of perspectives and approaches. Even when institutions are created, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), in order to entrench historically contested ideas into permanent laws and norms, the resulting arrangements can turn out to be unexpectedly porous. The potential and limits of such porosity remain moot even without the risk of powerful states changing the rules of the game midway to reassert their dominance, or the risk of bureaucratic institutional logics trumping dissenting political logics. (For example, WTO negotiations since the late-1990s reveal both insurgent dissent with some success in wresting more transparency and reform, and successful backroom manoeuvres by powerful states to reverse these gains.) Yet the porosity could be important for its own sake and for helping to reflect real world issues and conflicts on to a relatively accessible stage. This porosity (its potential, effects, limits, or its absence including resistance thereto, the politics of closure, and so on) can be of particular significance for historians interested in multilateral institutions.

To ignore it could be to risk confusing multilateral institutions for the real world.

The latter remains an ever-present danger in Geneva. Multilateral institutions and international organizations have gained new importance in recent years. There are many reasons for this, not least the end of the cold war, a growing planetary acknowledgement of our connected lives and shared futures, and a healthy suspicion of the role of great powers in the international system. For whatever it is worth historical interest is surely bound to follow and expand. Multilateral governance is however deeply fraught. To its ardent champions it is a moral, virtuous, and undisputed 'good', something even of a historical telos. To some skeptics it signifies a loss of hard-won sovereignty, to others a source of disempowerment, to still others a new form of empire. However in the end these are abstract, stylized positions. Everything that may be understood in Geneva to be about multilateral governance, from its normative justifications to its consequences, is subject to dizzyingly layered contestations around the world involving equally dizzying arrays of protagonists. Contestations embrace norms, processes, and constitutions. The multilateral sphere may indeed be invoked, or be seen to be invoked, in many of them: for referents, as a source of knowledge, consciousness, and practices, as a public, or indeed at times as legislator, as well as in juridical and executive roles. The contextual nature of these drafts, engagements, and roles alert us to the contextual roles of multilateral institutions, whether as instruments, sites, sources, subjects, objects, and so on. At the same time, because of their worldwide traffic through hybrid translations and

re-/appropriations, the norms, ideas, goals, practices, and so on whose provenance may seem to some to bear 'multilateral' markings, may hold other sources, resonances, and meanings for others. There is therefore also the risk of epistemic closures, if not of violence, in expressing these contestations and the ideational and political traffic they channel, in the telos or language of multilateral governance. Most historians are aware of the haunting presence of nation as the telos of history, and attempt in various ways to wrestle with it. In this telos history and nation are both 'universal'. It only requires more such practiced presumption to vault political-institutional forms promoting 'multilateral' or 'global' governance as history's ultimate, if not next, telos (or when challenged, celebrate them as heroic achievements that cannot be allowed to be reversed).[11]

The importance of the last point for historical scholarship on multilateral institutions and international organizations, particularly in Geneva, cannot be overstated. Such scholarship is still in relative infancy, its methods and challenges under-theorised even by the standards of the profession. Accounts chronicling individual multilateral institutions and international organizations have multiplied. Many are official histories or benefit from privileged access to an institution's materials. The World Bank set the ball rolling in the 1980s with its official history. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) followed not long afterwards. Though written by academic figures (not all however historians), they unavoidably reflected their sponsoring institutions' own stories and perspectives.[12] For its part the United Nations (UN) came up with its 'intellectual history project' (UNIHP). Initiated in 1999 the UNIHP focussed, at least at first, on «ideas launched by the UN system in the areas of social and economic development».[13]

Whether multilateral institutions and international organizations represent meaningful historical subjects is a matter of opinion. The implications of the dual character of multilateral institutions and international

11 For a notable example of such presumption and its genealogy in nineteenth-century European empires, see Robert Cooper, Post-modern State and the World Order, London 2000. The celebratory rhetoric has been particularly loud of late with regard to the WTO; on the abiding telos of the nation in international, transnational, and global histories, see G. Balachandran, Claiming Histories beyond Nations. Situating Global History, in: Indian Economic and Social History Review 49/2 (2012).

12 Devesh Kapur, John P. Lewis, Richard Webb, The World Bank. Its First Half Century, Washington D.C. 1987; Harold James, International Monetary Cooperation since Bretton Woods, Washington D.C. 1996.

13 The quote is from the blurb on what appears in its web version as the back cover of Richard Jolly, Louis Emmerij, Thomas G. Weiss, The Power of UN Ideas. Lessons from the First Sixty Years. This presents a 'summary of project findings' and was published in 2005. The web version (last consulted 27 December 2013) is available at http://www.unhistory.org/publications/.

organizations (i.e. as unrepresentative managerial bureaucracies answering only perhaps to their most powerful backers, both public and increasingly private, and as institutions accountable in some form to their political membership) may be debated. Besides, this genre of scholarship commands an outsized presence in Geneva where a substantial and perhaps still growing proportion of research tends to be concentrated in one way or another on international organizations. Historians from other parts of the world circulating through Geneva sharing similar interests can reinforce mistaken impressions about the centrality of international institutions to the wider world of historical scholarship. To a point where research on international institutions can become an end in itself, and divorced from the historical/historiographical, theoretical, conceptual, methodological, and such other debates agitating the wider historical profession.

Such dangers may be readily seen in 'intellectual histories' which seem interestingly enough to have emerged as a major sub-genre in the historical scholarship on international institutions. Much of the remainder of the essay explores this preoccupation. The rationale for this choice will I hope become clear in the subsequent pages.

The idea of an international bureaucracy as a progenitor of ideas, rather than policies and practices, sits rather oddly with the familiar division of intellectual labour in the West. This may be why there is such an obvious disconnect between intellectual histories of international institutions and recognized traditions in intellectual history scholarship.[14] The knowledge-making role of colonial bureaucracies is better recognized, but so too the power-laden, hegemonic nature of this knowledge and its cognitive frameworks and processes rooted in difference. It is instructive for the purposes of this essay to frame this difference as one between Western, civic-political, enlightenment norms (which made knowledge the domain of the philosopher in the West); and behavioural motivations and norms in the colonies and the necessity for regulating them, which were believed to justify routine recourse to colonial criminal and penal laws (and which consequently made knowledge the province of the colonial administrator or the 'ethnographic state').[15] Some

14 For an accessible and still useful discussion of «some ground rules for the study of intellectual history» by five historians among them John G. A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner, see Stefan Collini, What is Intellectual History?, in: History Today 35/10 (1985).

15 Nicholas Dirks, Castes of Mind. Colonialism and the Making of Modern India, Princeton 2001; for knowledge abstracted and then refracted back through practices associated with criminal law, see Radhika Singha, A Despotism of Law. Crime and Justice in Early Colonial India, Delhi 1998, especially ch. 5. African and Asian suspicions of the

of these insights have been usefully deployed to understand knowledge-making in the West along axes of class, and about post-colonial societies. Post-positivist scholarship, however this may be described in individual disciplines, has been influential in situating knowledge in relation to its contexts of production. Intellectual historians have lately grown concerned with the tensions between a desire for historically «unified frameworks of meaning» and the «social and textual forces disrupting totalizing desires».[16] Let alone engage with such concerns, 'intellectual histories' of international institutions can, not uncommonly, echo technocratic genealogies simplistically abstracting ideas from their political and related settings.

The UNIHP betrays many unexplained oddities, among them that a political body could presume to an 'intellectual' history and that a pioneering historical project about a multilateral institution whose principal objective is collective security should focus on 'social and economic development'. These oddities however disappear when set in their bureaucratic-institutional context. Whatever role the 1960s and 1970s UN aspired to in economic development has been eclipsed since the 1980s by the IMF and World Bank, and undermined further since 1995 by the WTO. At the same time the UN's post-cold war role as a collective security organization did not particularly endear it to developing countries. Putting 'social' ahead of 'economic' was another costless populist poke at the neo-liberal orthodoxy of the 1990s World Bank and IMF.

UN agencies such as the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) are justly celebrated for their contribution to development thinking. Many well-known economists worked for the UN for brief periods, particularly in its early decades. For a brief period in the 1950s and 1960s the UN General Assembly (UNGA) became a hotbed of mobilization by an emerging alliance of developing countries from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and of heated debates over decolonization, development (including the 'right' to development), and issues with a close bearing on development possibilities, such as sovereignty over natural resources, economic sovereignty, and so on. Developing countries notched up some notable successes, such as the establishment of a permanent UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) in 1964 as a subsidiary organ of the UNGA, and after they came together

Rome treaty and the international criminal court have deep roots in their colonial experiences.

16 Judith Surkiss, Of Scandals and Supplements. Relating Intellectual and Cultural History, in: Darrin M. McMahon, Samuel Moyn (eds.), Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History, New York 2014, p. 101.

as the G 77 (Group of 77 which worked in close coordination with the non-aligned movement), the passage of the resolution on the new international economic order at a special UNGA session in 1974.

Narrowly-conceived histories of ideas empty the UN stage of these historical and political actors, and fill it with bureaucratic actors. Besides the UN was no ivory tower. Consequently the UNIHP volumes dealing with development, for instance, have necessarily to appropriate the work and reputations of economists who spent only brief periods at the UN. Both propositions may be illustrated by a short account of the UNIHP's treatment of the Prebisch-Singer hypothesis on terms of trade and economic diversification (hereafter PSH).

Hans Singer was a notable exception among economists of repute for his long working stint at the UN, from 1946 to 1968. John Toye and Richard Toye, co-authors of one of the UNIHP volumes, name Singer as the 'original' discoverer of PSH.[17] It is clear however even from the Toyes' own account that Raul Prebisch and Hans Singer arrived at their findings independently though it is not entirely implausible that perhaps some three to four weeks before putting the finishing touches to his own final report to the May 1949 Havana conference of the ECLA, Prebisch may have come across Singer's report on 'Post-war Price Relations in the Trade between Undeveloped and Industrialised Countries' to a UN subcommission on economic development.[18] The Toyes make a great deal more of this slender, circumstantial, and unproven link in the actual UNIHP volume in which PSH is described as 'Hans Singer's thesis of secular decline in the terms of trade for primary commodities' that Prebisch «repeated … *con brio* in Latin America».[19] It is possible to hazard why the Toyes stake so much on this rather pointless controversy: Prebisch had been with ECLA for barely a few weeks at the time of the Havana conference, which would suggest that much of what went into his report had little to do with his UN stint. Singer, in contrast, had been some three years at the UN whose secretariat may have encouraged the study on which his report was based.[20] Yet in pursuing their search for an 'original' discovery (a precondition, as we know, for asserting 'ownership'

17 John Toye, Richard Toye, The Origins and Interpretations of the Prebisch-Singer Thesis, in: History of Political Economy 35/3 (2003), pp. 437–467.

18 Raul Prebisch's report to the Havana conference was published in 1950 as «The Economic Development of Latin America and Its Principal Problems».

19 John Toye, Richard Toye, The UN and Global Political Economy. Trade, Finance, and Development, Bloomington 2004, p. 11.

20 This could explain why Toye and Toye took such pains to suggest that Prebisch had been going down a different path until three weeks before his final report; Toye, Toye, The Origins, pp. 441–445, 447.

over any kind of intellectual property) to its trivial impasse, the UN's intellectual historians mention but fail to recognize the wider context and inspiration even for Singer's intellectual endeavor, let alone Prebisch's association. India's decolonization had a major bearing on Singer as it set him thinking whether the willingness of colonial powers to «relinquish control of their colonies» signified their faith in the ability of «the international economic system … [to] spontaneously generate the same world division of labor that had previously been enforced militarily and politically». Besides, Singer's findings might have been buried in obscurity after the UN sub-commission rejected his report's radical conclusions had Prebisch not incorporated them in a 'dramatized' form in his Havana report to «the acclaim of the delegates of the Latin American countries». Published first in Spanish and Portuguese, «Prebisch's 'heresies', boldly laid out 'a la Bernard Shaw' (as he put it), proved as appealing to the underdeveloped countries of Latin America as they were anathema to UN headquarters in New York».[21] In the UN's 'intellectual history' project, this stunning instance of the early United Nations serving as a platform mediating insurgent political-intellectual sensibilities across three continents and expressing them into radical programmatic possibilities is subordinated to the purposive will of a nostalgic yet determinedly self-promoting bureaucracy lamenting its loss of status as masters of the universe.

Historical perspectives on the League of Nations also reveal a tendency to trade the complex politics including of ideas unfolding outside, for a back-tracing of dominant present-day ideas, epistemes, and practices in the archives of multilateral and international entities – practices that intellectual historians would associate with 'anachronism'.[22] There is naturally growing historical interest in the League as we approach its centenary. Centenaries are a time for tribute. No one likes to spoil a party, and historians can outdo one another in hallowing the centenary object. The quasi-imperial League has been celebrated as a 'harbinger of global governance' for its purported initiatives among others in colonial administration, disarmament, economic cooperation, health, intellectual exchange, international law, labour, and refugees, and so on.[23] Clavin and

21 Toye, Toye, The Origins, pp. 457f., 462.

22 For a critique of anachronism grounded in debates about the past in international law, see Anne Orford, The Past as Law or History? The Relevance of Imperialism for Modern International Law, IILJ Working Paper, History and Theory of International Law Series, Melbourne 2012, pp. 2f., 6–8.

23 Susan Pedersen, Back to the League of Nations, in: American Historical Review 112/4 (2007), p. 1092.

Wessels describe how Britain, a waning power, mobilized the League as a vehicle for its own colonial-type projects. Yet in the end even they wager the League as a key player in the international transmission of 'economic knowledge' and in the «creation and sustenance of a network of economic experts who helped … shift … the economic and political culture».[24]

Other accounts of the League emphasize its continuities with Western colonialism, and indeed the formative relationship between colonialism and the international system. As is now well known, these continuities were most marked in the mandates system that placed former German and Ottoman colonies under renewed colonial tutelage, principally of Britain and France. Creating a qualified form of non-Western sovereignty, mandates became sites where the social could be reordered as an object of science to generate new technologies for managing non-western sovereigns and a new, more intrusive international law to permanently split putative subjects between these jurisdictions. In short mandates helped incubate a new normative-juridical and administrative order to legitimize Western surveillance of non-Western states, institutions, and subjects under multilateral auspices.[25] Its legal and political techniques can help uncover the 'legacies of an imperial political economy' in the UN's territorial administration, colonial as well as contemporary.[26]

Generative/transformative relationships between political mobilizations and norms and ideas figure prominently in some historical accounts of the post-World War II international system and its institutions. Significantly these histories draw on a wider range of sources and sensibilities than more conventional, institution-focused 'intellectual' histories. In the 1950s, besides development, newly independent nations mobilized themselves and UN platforms to create a normative consensus against racism and colonialism. This was not straightforward even for

24 Clavin, Wessels, Another Golden Idol?, p. 767.

25 This is forcefully argued in Anthony Anghie, Colonialism and the Birth of International Institutions. Sovereignty, Economy, and the Mandate System of the League of Nations, in: NYU Jounal of International Law and Politics 34 (2002), pp. 513–633. The key arguments are summarized in Section VIII and the Conclusion; also see Radhika V. Mongia, Historicizing State Sovereignty. Inequality and the Form of Equivalence, in: Comparative Studies in Society and History 49/2 (2007), pp. 395–397. Interestingly William Rappard, who sought to promote the study of international relations as a ‹science›, was also the first director of the mandates section of the League of Nations.

26 Anne Orford, International Territorial Administration and the Management of Decolonisation, Book Review Article, in: International and Comparative Law Quarterly 59 (2010), pp. 232f.

race in the early 1950s.[27] The US, Britain, and other European colonial powers claim and are conventionally thought to be progenitors and champions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which is celebrated as a triumph of liberal Western values.[28] It is well known, however, that these powers were reluctant converts to the declaration and sought to exclude their racial and colonial policies from the UDHR's purview. And that in the 1940s and 1950s the UN's democratic potential and a human rights agenda were advanced by a loose alliance of newly independent states and metropolitan anti-racial, anti-colonial movements.[29] Not coincidentally, this history was being redrafted even as it was unfolding, the near contemporary UNESCO committee on race, for instance, acknowledging the mutual implication of Nazism and 'race science' but not the influence on its deliberations of contemporary anti-racist mobilizations taking place around the idea of human rights.[30]

The view that international bureaucracies represent 'epistemic communities', – in Peter Haas's words, networks of professional experts sharing «normative … principled … and causal beliefs», and united in a «common policy enterprise» committed to a disinterested common good – has had some influence on historians.[31] Such arguments appear to demand suspending efforts to probe or problematize the norms, principles, belief systems, theories of causality, notions of 'common' and 'good', and so on of bureaucratic experts and their expertise. In short, reinventing bureaucracies as knowledge communities may require relaxing even narrowly conventional protocols of scholarly scrutiny.

The UNESCO committee on race, as Brattain shows, strongly argues the limitations of this approach. This committee mobilized 'science' to distance itself from the politics around race. But the 'scientific peer-

27 Michelle Brattain, Race, Racism, and Antiracism. UNESCO and the Politics of Presenting Science to the Postwar Public, in: American Historical Review 112/5 (2007), pp. 1386–1413.

28 As Lynn Hunt would have it, the UDHR «crystallized 150 years of struggle for rights»: Lynn Hunt, Inventing Human Rights. A History, New York 2007, p. 205. See also pp. 202f.

29 On anti-racism, anti-colonialism and human rights, see Carol Anderson, Eyes off the Prize. The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944–1955, New York 2003, chs. 2 and 5; Penny M. von Eschen, Race against Empire. Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957, Ithaca 1997, especially ch. 2; for other contextual interpretations see Mark Mazower, No Enchanted Palace. The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations, Princeton 2009, especially ch. 4; Manu Bhagvan, A New Hope. India, the United Nations and the Making of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in: Modern Asian Studies 44/2 (2008), pp. 311–347; and Marika Sherwood, India at the Founding of the United Nations, in: International Studies 33/4 (1996), pp. 407–428.

30 Brattain, Race, Racism, and Antiracism, p. 1387, pp. 1396f.

31 Peter M. Haas, Introduction. Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination, in: International Organization 46/1 (1992), pp. 1–35.

review' of the report which resulted and the virtual re-writing it necessitated illustrate how, far from producing or providing evidence of a normative or 'epistemic community', political constraints and choices can crudely determine or shape knowledge improvisations in institutional and bureaucratic contexts.[32]

Such examples can be multiplied. Besides, if discursive or knowledge shifts involved political negotiation as naturally they would for bureaucracies, apparent continuities can cloak profound discontinuities of context, protagonists, and power. For instance in one telling IMF special drawing rights (SDRs) can be retraced to British proposals for post-World War II monetary reform calling among other things for the creation of multilateral fiat money (in the form of 'bancor'), and by degrees to the League of Nation gold delegation's proposals to expand the role for fiat money through the gold-exchange standard. But in a more realistic telling, the bancor was dictated by postwar Britain's dependence on external liquidity that would not be tied to its ability to earn dollar surpluses. Conversely USA's rejection of the bancor and embrace of the gold exchange standard at Bretton-Woods (1943) reflected the advantages to it of a dollar-based postwar international monetary system. In the early-1960s Britain sought unsuccessfully to revive a version of the bancor as a means to relieve pressure on sterling. This proposal was reenergized in the late-1960s by Germany notably, seeking something akin to SDRs as an alternative reserve asset into which to diversify its burgeoning US dollar reserves, and countries such as France that resented the dollar's international role. These proposals finally culminated in the form of SDRs in 1969 only after the US succeeded in refashioning and co-opting them into a means to relieve pressure on the dollar whilst prolong its key-currency role, rather than emerge or function as its substitute![33] It is easy to see how a history focused narrowly on multilateral institutions let alone one of its 'ideas', in this instance multilateral liquidity, can narrow and impoverish this story of political contestation and negotiation in favour of a rather wild teleological account of 'ideas' (in this instance 'bancor'/ SDRs) in multilateral governance.

32 Brattain, Race, Racism, and Antiracism, p. 1387, pp. 1396f.

33 For an accessible account of the Bretton-Woods negotiations, see Armand van Dormael, Bretton-Woods. Birth of a Monetary System, New York 1978; and on attempts to reform the international monetary system in the 1960s, Robert Solomon, The International Monetary System, 1945–1976. An Insider's View, New York 1977.

Conclusion

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the objectification of sensibilities, imaginaries, and so on, into 'ideas'. Still international institutions no more originate ideas than agribusinesses originate seeds, terms such as 'communities' to describe them serving only to occlude the structural and relational hierarchies of power within and through which international institutions produce and deploy this type of 'knowledge'. Consequently attempts at writing their intellectual histories not only risk turning into bureaucratic or teleological accounts. They also risk displacing, writing out, or otherwise rendering marginal wide spaces and agencies, including intellectual spaces and agencies nourished by the great political, social, ideological, and other conflicts of the twentieth century, particularly in the non-Western world. These conflicts, spaces, and agencies are erased as generative spaces for new sensibilities, imaginaries, and ideas in the same moment as their ideas, in particular, are abstracted / translated / appropriated / mutated by global 'epistemic communities' into tools of governance. Epistemic communities can inflict organized epistemic violence.

What is true of their intellectual histories holds more broadly true of international organizations-centred histories. Notably these can narrow our optics for attempting histories beyond nations in ways that silence marginal and discrepant actors and their adaptive, creative, and resistant agency. It is several decades since the mainstream of the historical profession moved with good reason beyond a preoccupation with national elites, institutions, and governments and administrations. International organization-centric histories would seem to be at particular risk of being out of step, and whether as intellectual histories or under whatever pretext, turning into administrative and bureaucratic histories.

And perhaps at their best into a tedious kind of imperial history. The empire was always necessarily a historical project. When not themselves writing histories, empires sought and obtained historical justification by framing the terms for writing them. History was and remains a shared modality of power between empires and the international system, and for entrenching multilateral/global systems of governance. Shared modalities could also mean continuities in motivation, approaches, methods, and sources between imperial histories and international organizations-centred histories.

As a small and somewhat stretched site heavily invested in multilateral governance, it is to be expected that the latter's institutions will attract and stretch Geneva's intellectual and institutional resources. The

discipline of history will probably experience this pull with particular sharpness, not least because of all the different ways in which archives relate to power and patronage. These dangers are not new and historians, notably among them contributors to the small but emerging critical scholarship on international organizations, are for the most part well aware of them. Still it is not entirely implausible that Geneva despite evidently lacking an imperial past may yet become a site for historical scholarship in an imperial mode. Relativizing multilateral institutions and international organizations, and a more profound appreciation of the mutually constitutive imbrications between the international system, international law, and the social sciences, will remain important safeguards against such risk. So too, generally, a more self-reflective approach to historical scholarship, the social sciences, and their social and political locations and intertwined histories.