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## INTRODUCTION BY RYAN IRWIN, UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY-SUNY

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I have not left my home in months.

Okay, I shop for food. My point is that this roundtable is coming together at a strange time, and there is considerable irony to introducing an article about international society when the COVID-19 quarantine has rendered life so incredibly . . . *local*. “Look at that,” my 9-year-old daughter commented just this morning as we watered our garden. She was pointing at a plane in the sky. When I began to reflect on the potential significance of her observation—on the way air travel symbolized a certain kind of internationalism—she turned and walked away. (We’ve been spending *a lot* of time together recently.) So, I began humming the lyrics from Joni Mitchell’s “Big Yellow Taxi” and turned back to my vegetables.

In my corner of the international society, that song is as familiar as Erez Manela’s intervention. I think he is a very good pick to inaugurate a series of articles about core concepts in the field of U.S. foreign relations history. Manela’s award-winning *The Wilsonian Moment* reinterpreted the 1919 Versailles Conference by highlighting how several communities outside Europe engaged Woodrow Wilson’s call for self-determination.<sup>1</sup> Since that book, he has authored thought-

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<sup>1</sup> Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

provoking articles about smallpox and explained new directions in the field of ‘U.S. and the World’ history.<sup>2</sup> From afar, these arguments have often appeared to elaborate earlier interpretations by Akira Iriye, a fellow Harvard historian who worked assiduously to disentangle the conceptual relationship between the modern nation-state and the international community. The differences between Manela and Iriye are apparent in “International Society as a Historical Subject.” Like Iriye’s international community, Manela’s international society is presented as a historical subject in its own right, but one that encompasses both state and nonstate actors and—most importantly—offers a blueprint for anyone trying to *do* post-national international history.<sup>3</sup>

If you have not yet read the article, it is worth your time. Manela nestles most of his claims in the historiography about U.S. foreign relations, which makes sense because *Diplomatic History* is the flagship journal for the field of U.S. foreign relations history. “In a certain sense,” he begins, “the turn to histories that go beyond a single nation or region is a *return*” (187). He elaborates this claim by talking about the paradox of U.S. foreign relations history, or the way historians in that subfield always seem to be struggling with their own parochialism. In this retelling, salvation arrived with the recent ascendancy of ‘new’ international history, and people are finally starting to ask new questions, learn new languages, and abandon the comforts of College Park. However, salvation has set off anxiety in the halls of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR), partly, Manela explains, because the object at the center of U.S. foreign relations history is no longer U.S. foreign relations. The object is international society, hence the need to comprehend “International Society as a Historical Subject.” Manela makes this point by synthesizing recent work about development and humanitarianism, and he guides his readers toward a provocative denouement:

“[A]ll historians of a particular nation-state (the United States, or France, Russia, China etc) who study that state’s policies toward, and interactions with, other parts of the world, are contributing to the historiography of international society, even if their own interests are focused on the foreign policies of a single nation. The foreign policy of any nation, after all, is imbricated with the history of international society since the creation and implementation of such policies is always shaped relationally and by historically-constructed conceptions of a larger international space” (209).

In introducing the article, *Diplomatic History* editors Anne Foster and Petra Goedde explain that they want Manela’s piece to spark discussion. Mission accomplished. Kai Hebel, Timothy Nunan, Davide Rodogno, and Agnieszka Sobocinska have authored reviews that are as compelling and thoughtful as Manela’s article. For the most part, the reviewers avoid the sorts of questions you might expect to encounter at a SHAFR gathering: Does SHAFR need a new name? Is *Diplomatic History* the right moniker for the field? Who have we become and why should others care? Sidestepping these questions makes a lot of sense. *Passport*’s “SHAFR in the World” roundtable, which makes numerous appearances in Manela’s footnotes, is approaching its tenth birthday and the context has changed.<sup>4</sup> Recent events have dramatized both the fragility and ubiquity of transnational exchange and international cooperation, and, as I rediscovered this morning, you do not always appreciate what you have got until it reappears unexpectedly over your head. Manela’s argument is that we are only starting to comprehend our imbrication in international society, and Rodogno speaks for all the reviewers when he characterizes this

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<sup>2</sup> Erez Manela, “A Pox on Your Narrative: Writing Disease Control into Cold War History,” *Diplomatic History* 34:2 (2010): 299-323; Manela, “The Wilsonian Moment,” Manela, “The United States in the World,” in Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr, eds., *American History Now* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Akira Iriye, “The Internationalization of History,” *American Historical Review* 94:1 (February 1989), 1-10; *ibid.*, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); *ibid.*, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in Making the Contemporary World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); *ibid.*, ed., *Global Interdependence: The World after 1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Connelly, Robert J. McMahon, Katherine A.S. Sibley, Thomas Borstelmann, Nathan Citino, and Kristin Hoganson, “SHAFR in the World,” *Passport: The Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Review* 42:2 (2011), 4-16.

insight as “an intelligent and sophisticated, open, and mature *plaidoyer* for international society as a historical subject.” So, how should we engage Manela’s *plaidoyer*?

When I finished reading these reviews, I found myself thinking about several questions, which I will pull together for the sake of discussion:

*How should international historians engage their critics?*

In Manela’s retelling, ‘new’ international history enveloped ‘old’ U.S. foreign policy history, but that characterization should be read alongside Frederick Logevall and Daniel Bessner’s call to re-center the field of U.S. foreign relations around the domestic history of policymaking. Logevall and Bessner do not agree that there is a new object at the center of the field. Because United States had surfeit of power in the recent past, they reason, historians must continue to grapple with U.S. history, especially if they want to explain things like causation and change.<sup>5</sup> Nunan asks the obvious question: “What new work does ‘international society’ do,” he asks, “in terms of achieving methodological clarity without antagonizing international historians into camps?” He answers the question indirectly by offering observations about the academic job market. The plain truth, he explains, is that it is unrealistic to expect a tenure-track job in international history if you go on the market with a dissertation about Sino-Soviet-Mongolian relations. You will find that you are too Chinese for the Russianists, too Russian for Sinologists, and not Anglophone enough for the international historians. Since most universities are neoliberal dream factories, markets matter, and even if they did not, the field of international history would still be more divided, more exclusive, and more American than Manela admits. The “onus on those like Manela” is “to reflect on the structural and material conditions in national subfields that make them more or less ‘internationalist.’” Logevall and Bessner are not going anywhere.

*How should international historians engage their allies?*

Rodogno roots one answer in his observations about chairing an international history department. By design, everyone in his world is invested in the things Manela writes about. Rodogno is quick to emphasize that international society is a commodious paradigm for doing international history; it brings state and nonstate actors into a common analytical frame, while allowing for a capacious enough understanding of politics to blur the lines that too often separate transnational and international historians. Yet Rodogno does not share Manela’s interest in coherence. “[I]f international society deserves to be a historical subject,” he writes, “we do not need a turn, there is nothing frighteningly new, and we should not be working towards it forever.” Rodogno employs the metaphor of a Triumph motorcycle with subtle purpose, and he obviously believes that the best way to spoil a good road trip with friends is to think too obsessively about the roadmap. He points to an interesting contradiction in Manela’s argument, suggesting that there is a tension in lamenting the Whiggishness of yesteryear’s historians while equating one’s own “new big thing” with progress for all. “I wonder if Manela would consider speaking about international societies?” Rodogno asks. “Isn’t the plural fitting better Manela’s purpose?” Rodogno obviously has his department chair hat on when he asks the question, implying that most of his colleagues—again, in a department dedicated to the study of international history—don’t enjoy manifestos. Their idiosyncrasies are better celebrated than solved.

*Who are international historians?*

Sobocinska takes issue with the way Manela answers this question. Writing with her feet planted firmly in the Anglophone world, she suggests that international and transnational history emerged not from U.S. and the world history but from colonial and imperial history. Her subfield, not Manela’s subfield, changed the way historians explained the circulation of

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Bessner and Fredrik Logevall, “Recentering the United States in the Historiography of American Foreign Relations,” *Texas National Security Review* 3:2 (2020), <https://tnsr.org/2020/04/recentering-the-united-states-in-the-historiography-of-american-foreign-relations/>. See the H-Diplo roundtable on the article at <https://hdiplo.org/to/RT21-42>.

power, and new international history is conceptually inseparable from the insight that imperialism moved in multiple directions and took different forms. “To my mind,” Sobocinska writes, “the indissoluble connection between the categories of imperial, international, and national are at least as important a reason why historians should venture beyond the enclosures of the nation-state as the atmosphere of crisis that pervaded the field of diplomatic history in the United States.” The word empire appears three times in the text of Manela’s essay, so he is not ignorant of the historiography Sobocinska cites. However, he has chosen to put the emphasis in a different place and there are plenty of people in the field of U.S. foreign relations who would agree with Sobocinska. They know the object at the center of their work: It is the American empire. Just last year, historians Paul Kramer and Daniel Immerwahr brought this point to life in a sharp-elbowed exchange about how to study that empire. Putting aside the controversy surrounding Kramer’s essay—and the specifics of his intervention—that discussion dramatized the thin line separating international and imperial history.<sup>6</sup> The field looks more geographically and thematically specific when conceptualized on Sobocinska’s terms.

*So, what is an international society?*

Manela suggests the answer will reveal itself when people commit to the question’s importance. In his words, “[T]he utility of international society as a *historiographical* subject, that is to say as a useful conceptual category, does not much depend on the degree of its cohesion as a *historical* one, that is to say the degree to which it can be shown to have ‘actually’ existed in the world.” Hebel is not impressed. He is neither a U.S. foreign relations historian nor an American imperial historian, but he is convinced that Manela has missed an opportunity to exploit the central insight of the English School of international relations theory, which popularized the phrase “international society” back in the 1970s. Institutions, Hebel writes, hold societies together by constituting state and nonstate actors, which structures international cooperation and conflict in ways that can be historicized. Contrary to Manela’s claims, therefore, international society has actually existed in the world—and international historians can recapture its past with empirical studies about institutions. “[A]n institutional approach,” Hebel writes, “fleshes out what, at a deep level, international society is about; it helps us identify what cases to pick, who the key actors are, and how they relate; and, importantly, it furnishes us with a dynamic picture of world politics.” Hebel also bemoans Manela’s (potential) ethnocentrism and (potential) statism—lamenting the way international society might be misused by those who would over-exaggerate the United States’ importance in world affairs—but his main point is that historians should read political scientists carefully. Escaping the prison of our methodological nationalism will require their help.

What now? I am not sure, but we need these sorts of conversations, particularly now, when so many of us are still sequestered in our hobbit holes waiting for permission to be together again. Manela’s work invites us to think about things that feel lost and he reminds us that we are still inextricably connected to one another. His reviewers largely agree. They also caution against all-encompassing conceptual paradigms that promise to pave away the status quo. Ultimately, the conversation here exemplifies why the field of international history is so imperfect, confusing, open-ended, and interesting. The whole thing has me humming Joni Mitchell again. I think I now know why—it has something to do with trees in tree museums and parking lots on top of paradises. Most of the parking lots in my neighborhood have been empty for a long time, and I am not yet convinced that that is a bad thing.

### Participants:

**Erez Manela** is Professor of History at Harvard University, where he teaches international history and the history of the United States in the world. His latest book, co-edited with Stephen Macekura, is *The Development Century: A Global History* (2018). He also co-edited two other books and is the author of the prize-winning *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (2007), which recently came out in Chinese and

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Kramer, “How Not to Write the History of U.S. Empire,” *Diplomatic History* 42:5 (2018), 911-931; Daniel Immerwahr, “Writing the History of the Greater United States: A Reply to Paul Kramer,” *Diplomatic History* 43:2 (2019), 397-403.

Turkish editions. In addition, Manela co-edits a book series on *Global and International History* for Cambridge University Press.

**Ryan Irwin** is an associate professor at the University at Albany-SUNY. His research interests include liberalism, decolonization, and global governance and he is the author of *Gordian Knot: Apartheid and the Unmaking of the Liberal World Order* (Oxford, 2012).

**Kai Hebel** is Assistant Professor of International Relations at Leiden University. He is a graduate of the Sorbonne, the University of Marburg and the University of Oxford where he earned an MPhil and DPhil in IR. His research interests include diplomacy, the international history of the Cold War, IR theory and cultural studies. His book, *Fathers of the Final Act: Britain, Détente and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), 1954-1975*, is forthcoming with Routledge.

**Timothy Nunan** is a Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter (Assistant Professor) at the Free University of Berlin. He received his D.Phil. from the University of Oxford in 2013 and is the author of *Humanitarian Invasion: Global Development in Cold War Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). His current project examines the history of Islamist internationalism during the Cold War.

**Davide Rodogno** is Professor of International History at the Geneva Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies. He published *Fascism's European Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2006). He researches the history of humanitarianism, international organizations, philanthropic foundations, and international public health since the nineteenth century. In 2011 Rodogno published *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire (1815-1914), the Birth of a Concept and International Practice* (Princeton University Press). He co-edited and authored *Humanitarian Photography; Transnational Networks of Experts in the Long Nineteenth century*, and a volume on the League of Nations' social work. His forthcoming monograph is entitled: *Night on Earth—Humanitarian Organizations' Relief and Rehabilitation Programmes on Behalf of Civilian Populations (1918-1939)*. Since 2017 Rodogno has been working on two research projects: one is on The Myth of Homogeneity and Minority Protection in Belgium, Italy and Spain; and the other is on Rockefeller Foundation fellows as heralds of globalization (1910s-1970s).

**Dr. Agnieszka Sobocinska** is a Senior Lecturer in History within the School of Philosophical, Historical and International Studies at Monash University. Her first book, *Visiting the Neighbours: Australians in Asia* (UNSW Press, 2014) situated travel as a politically significant factor in regional and international relations. Her second monograph, *Saving the World? Western Volunteers and the rise of the Humanitarian-Development Complex*, will be published by Cambridge University Press in 2021.

## REVIEW BY KAI HEBEL, LEIDEN UNIVERSITY

An increasing number of scholars agree that we need to escape from the Alcatraz of methodological nationalism, but there is insufficient agreement on how exactly to conduct the prison break. And there is even less consensus on where the fugitives might be headed and under what alternative framework they might congregate. Erez Manela's intervention, then, is both timely and important. His excellent article contributes to both the 'how' and the 'whither' questions by clarifying the contours of international, transnational, and global history and by suggesting the notion of international society as a paradigm within which state and non-state actors can be studied together.

My main point is that the success of both moves is contingent on filling in the blanks in Manela's discussion of the nature of international society. The notion of international society, the flagship concept of the 'English School' in International Relations, is a powerful analytical tool that can facilitate intra- and cross-disciplinary integration. But what holds its myriad of actors—states, diasporas, multinational corporations, transnational advocacy networks, churches, mafias etc.—together? Beyond a general sense that these agents are "intimately interconnected" across various "realms" and that all these linkages deserve our attention, the article provides little conceptual or heuristic guidance (3). The countless actors, it states, "operate alongside" each other, with their importance "varying from case to case" (17). To help us study the international in a rigorous and cumulative way, a framework that contains a plurality of actors should provide more orientation. It should help us understand how the agents relate to each other, provide coherent guidance regarding which cases to pick, and convey how their interactions combine to form a larger whole that is more than the sum of its parts. My main criticism is that the article does not capture, and hence fails to exploit, what I hold to be the key contribution of the 'English School': the understanding of international society as a *society*, a social whole held together by fundamental institutions.

None of the above is meant to suggest that the concept of international society is unproblematic. Before sketching how the main blank in Manela's article might be filled, let us discuss two significant risks associated with importing the concept in the first place: ethnocentrism and statism. Starting with the former, there is a risk of replacing the traditional Eurocentric bias of writings on international society with a U.S.-centric one. Greater attention to the complicated ways in which the United States was pulled into that society will make scholarship less parochial, but it can easily reinforce the tendency to write the history of international society from a Western perspective. Although some of the attacks against the English School on this front are overdrawn,<sup>1</sup> it has rightly received much flak for telling a problematic monocentric expansion story of international society and for equating Western institutions and predominance with stability while framing de-Westernization as a threat to order.<sup>2</sup> There can be no doubt that the English School has seriously underplayed non-Western agency and, along with it, the role of political communities other than the 'Westphalian' nation state as well as the myriad of interactions between and across different international societies. In recent years, scholars working at the intersection of International Relations and International History have shown how today's globe-spanning international society emerged out of a polycentric process of globalization, with multiple international societies expanding simultaneously and interacting in intricate ways.<sup>3</sup> It is not a coincidence that much of this cutting-edge work has focused on the era *before* European dominance, paying particular attention to the early modern period when Europeans played subordinate roles of 'suplicants'

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Little, "Conclusion: Eurocentrism, World History, Meta-Narratives and the Meeting of International Societies," in Shogo Suzuki, Yongjin Zhang and Joel Quirk, eds., *International Orders in the Early Modern World: Before the Rise of the West* (London: Routledge, 2014): 159-180.

<sup>2</sup> Shogo Suzuki, Yongjin Zhang, and Joel Quirk (eds.), *International Orders in the Early Modern World: Before the Rise of the West* (London: Routledge, 2014); Timothy Dunne and Christian Reus-Smit, eds., *The Globalization of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Phillips, "International Systems," in Dunne and Reus-Smit, eds., *The Globalization of International Society*, 43-62; John Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

in political orders dominated by non-Western powers, most notably the Chinese Empire.<sup>4</sup> This literature is reconstructing the polycentric origins of modern world politics that preceded the ‘global transformation’ towards Western dominance.<sup>5</sup> Especially because it is directed primarily at a U.S. audience whose chief research focus is on the last two hundred years when the West dominated, I worry that Manela’s call will reinforce the traditional expansion story. If one focuses on the United States during the global transformation, it might be tempting to retell the old narrative—only this time with the U.S. in the driver’s seat. As it stands, the article underplays the challenge, which is not ‘just’ to disaggregate the U.S. as an actor, to normalize its supposed exceptionalism, and to de-centre the history of U.S. foreign relations by embedding it in the broader history of international society. The real challenge is to do all of that without at the same time reinforcing the meta-narrative of a monocentric, Western-led expansion of international society. This requires more research on the periods preceding the global transformation and a greater sensibility towards non-Western agency on the part of students of that transformation.

The second weakness that historians risk importing along with the notion of international society is the English School’s statism. There is an awkward tension in the attempt to boost the study of non-state actors by introducing a heavily state-centric approach to understanding the international. Manela is well aware of the English School’s traditional bias towards ‘Westphalian’ political communities as well as of recent mitigation attempts (2). But the article risks exacerbating the problem by simply squeezing the large universe of non-state actors into international society. This creates a bloated umbrella term which provides little guidance for researchers regarding what to study, why, and how. The problem is that the article destroys the English School’s traditional triptych—international system, international society, world society—which scholars have used to capture the complexity of the international. While international society is indeed of central importance, the English School has never pretended that any single concept can adequately capture the complexity of the international. So Manela’s suggestion radically narrows the traditional framework, bloating the concept of international society which is repurposed to house all of the actors of world politics. This move is understandable given that the goal is to integrate research agendas. But successful integration requires prioritization. A key question is how to accomplish this without stacking the cards in favour of states. To sensitise the international society framework to non-state actors, we can draw on Barry Buzan’s work, which is mentioned but not used in the article (fn. 6). Specifically, Buzan offers two incisive ways of thinking about world society, both of which clarify English School thinking and go some way towards moderating its statism.<sup>6</sup> Without more analytical spadework along these lines, an inflated version of the international society concept might produce more confusion than clarity. Lacking conceptual and heuristic guidance, scholars (at least those not already sold on the ‘new international history’ agenda) might simply continue to anchor their projects in the familiar enclosure of the nation-state, thus reinforcing the orthodox view of non-state actors as second-class citizens in international society. Other scholars might opt for the opposite extreme while yet others might relate the two categories of actors in ad-hoc, idiosyncratic ways that will impede rather than further the integration of research agendas. My suggestion is to either follow one of Buzan’s options (in which case international society loses its conceptual primacy and must be thought together with world society as a complementary or as an overarching concept, respectively) or to clarify the relationship between state and

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<sup>4</sup> Yongjin Zhang, “Curious and Exotic Encounters: Europeans as Supplicants in the Chinese Imperium, 1513-1793,” in *International Orders in the Early Modern World: Before the Rise of the West*, ed. Shogo Suzuki et al, 55-75; Yongjin Zhang, “Worlding China, 1500-1800,” in *The Globalization of International Society*, ed. Timothy Dunne and Christian Reus-Smit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017): 204-225.

<sup>5</sup> Barry Buzan and George Lawson, *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and Making of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Scholars, who are interested in rigorous theorizing about the international that does not automatically privilege states, will find much food for thought here. Particularly promising is Buzan’s use of Niklas Luhmann’s take on the sociological insight that complex societies are functionally integrated, a mechanism that relates different actor types (or, in Luhmann’s work, ‘social systems’) non-hierarchically. Barry Buzan, *From International to World Society? English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 126, 189-190; Barry Buzan and Laust Schouenborg, *Global International Society: A New Framework for Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 5; Niklas Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme: Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp).

non-state actors by fleshing out the nature of international society. It is to the latter, more parsimonious, option that the concluding section now turns.

Arthur Schlesinger once quipped that “the past is an enormous grab bag with a prize for everybody.”<sup>7</sup> In Manela’s usage, international society abounds with a plurality of actors and realms, material and social structures, networks and hierarchies etc., but apart from a general sense of interconnectedness, it is unclear how they hang together. To turn this grab bag into a manageable framework that encourages cumulative research, I contend that historians can profit enormously from importing the English School approach to international institutions. The article repeatedly conflates institutions with international organizations, but this is an overly narrow view that does not do justice to the much more fundamental, constitutive role they play in English School thinking (13-14, 21).<sup>8</sup> International institutions—nationalism, trade, diplomacy, colonialism (until about 1945), war, international law, great power management etc.—are sets of fundamental understandings and practices that, having evolved over long periods of time, define the fundamental character of a given society. In the “game” of world politics, “institutions define what the pieces are and how the game is played.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, they constitute state and non-state actors (the ‘pieces’) and relate them to each other, thus structuring conflict and cooperation (the ‘game’) within and between these actor types.

Many of the exciting and important topics of the new international history are exciting and important not least because they tell us something about deep changes in international society, i.e. about transformations in its institutions, many of which involve state and non-state actors. For example, the contested debate about human rights and the related discussions about ‘humanitarian’ intervention, corporate social responsibility, human security etc., can be conceptualized as revolving around this question: Should human rights be turned from a selectively applied set of norms into an institution of international society? If their champions, who are often organized in transnational advocacy networks,<sup>10</sup> succeeded in institutionalizing them, adherence to human rights would define what it means for states and a good number of non-state actors, including corporations, to be legitimate members of international society as opposed to stigmatised rogue states like North Korea or ostracized greedy companies like Shell Nigeria.<sup>11</sup> As a full-fledged institution, it would define the ‘pieces’ and the ‘game’ in the normative realm of world politics. A similar process has arguably been underway since the 1970s (at the latest) regarding the evolving institution of environmental stewardship, with potentially wide-ranging implications for the political and economic realms. Even these sketchy notes suggest that an institutional approach has several advantages; it fleshes out what, at a deep level, international society is about; it helps us identify what cases to pick, who the key actors are, and how they relate; and, importantly, it furnishes us with a dynamic picture of world politics. Nobody is better equipped than international historians to help us understand empirically how institutions evolve, adapt, and decay over time.

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<sup>7</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., “Review of Ernest May: “Lessons” of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy,” *Journal of American History* 61:2 (September 1974): 443-444, at 444.

<sup>8</sup> Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1977), 74; Barry Buzan, *From International to World Society? English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 161; Tonny Brems Knudsen and Cornelia Navari, eds., *International Organization in the Anarchical Society: The Institutional Structure of World Order* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Buzan, *From International to World Society?*, 162.

<sup>10</sup> Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> Kai Hebel, “Kanada und die Responsibility to Protect,” in *Die Außenpolitik Kanadas*, ed. Wilfried von Bredow (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2003): 278-295, here, 293.

Since the English School and their many sympathizers have only recently begun studying institutions with the conceptual rigour that fundamental pillars of world politics deserve,<sup>12</sup> Erez Manela's thought-provoking intervention comes at an auspicious time. Not only can it help coordinate historians' escape from the Alcatraz of methodological nationalism; it also connects them to a sizable group of willing accomplices from a wide range of other disciplines.

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<sup>12</sup> Buzan and Schouenborg, *Global International Society*.

## REVIEW BY TIMOTHY NUNAN, FREE UNIVERSITY OF BERLIN

Erez Manela's call to use 'international society' as a historiographical subject arrives at a time when the actual existence of any such category in the world stands in question. While COVID-19 itself is a global phenomenon, traveling across borders with ease, the pandemic has exposed the fragility of many forms of international cooperation. For instance, a March 2020 G-7 Foreign Ministers conference failed to deliver a joint statement when the U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo insisted on calling the coronavirus the "Wuhan virus."<sup>1</sup> On April 14, 2020, the Trump Administration announced a freeze on funding for the World Health Organization (WHO), accusing it of being "China-centric."<sup>2</sup> To be sure, the swap lines between the U.S. Federal Reserve and the central banks of major economies, established during the 2008 financial crises, have been reactivated, preventing major liquidity crises for now.<sup>3</sup> Like mortgage-backed securities before it, however, COVID-19 has demonstrated the impact that transnational objects and actors can have on the world, as well as the challenges they pose to present-day forms of international cooperation.

Particularly in such times of crisis, historians have a valuable role to play in providing students and readers with the context to understand events that go beyond the nation state. To take the example of disease control alone, we can look to Manela's own work on the history of smallpox eradication during the twentieth century — or to Amanda McVety's scholarship on rinderpest, the only other disease to be eradicated in human history.<sup>4</sup> Yet the way in which historians approach 'the international,' notes Manela, has not always been clearly demarcated. The 'transnational turn' in the field of U.S. diplomatic history has enriched the field, but arguably at the cost of decreasing a focus on policymaking and institutions like the National Security Council (NSC). New works on the United Nations and its predecessor, the League of Nations, have illuminated our understanding of these formalized institutions of liberal internationalism, but remain written largely from the point of view of European actors. Scholarship on socialist internationalism, and visions of internationalism from the 'Third World' and groups like the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) have offered corrective perspectives to views of the world from Washington or London. Yet as Manela notes, this pluralism arguably adds up to a "big tent" under which historians dealing with a diverse array of regions, topics, and methodologies [...] shelter in mutual tolerance" but lack a widely agreed upon common subject (198).

Manela's essay pleads for the use of "international society" as a distinct historical subject around which historians of subjects as diverse as the WHO, the NSC, and the PLO might find common cause. By 'international society,' Manela means not just the actually existing 'society of states' theorized by scholars in the English School of International Relations, but also "the international" itself as a contested arena where states and non-state actors have acted and made claims (185). Crucially, Manela notes that "international society [...] is at once an evolving discursive artifact and a historical space in which events unfold" and that "the utility of international society as a historiographical subject [...] does not much depend on the degree of its cohesion as a historical one, that is to say the degree to which it can be shown to have 'actually' existed in the world" (205). A final key point that Manela stresses is the openness conveyed by the term "society," as opposed to "community" or other alternatives (200). The domain of the international in Manela's reading is "diverse, contested, [and] often

<sup>1</sup> "Pompeo, G-7 Foreign Ministers Spar over 'Wuhan Virus,'" *Politico*, 25 March 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/03/25/mike-pompeo-g7-coronavirus-149425>.

<sup>2</sup> "Urged On by Conservatives and His Own Advisers, Trump Targeted the W.H.O.," *New York Times* (April 15, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/15/us/politics/trump-coronavirus-who.html>

<sup>3</sup> Adam Tooze, *Crashed: How a Decade of Financial Crises Changed the World* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Erez Manela, "A Pox on Your Narrative: Writing Disease Control into Cold War History," *Diplomatic History* 34:2 (2010): 299-323; Amanda McVety, *The Rinderpest Campaigns: A Virus, Its Vaccines, and Global Development in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

hierarchical.” Manela’s article concludes by highlighting works on two themes—development and humanitarianism—that he sees as exemplary of this sensibility (200-204), before concluding on the issue of training and methodology (205-209).

As a historian whose work sits between the fields of international history, Soviet and Russian history, and the history of Middle East, I found myself agreeing with much of Manela’s call. (Full disclosure: my work on development and humanitarianism in Cold War-era Afghanistan found a home in the Cambridge University Press series that Manela co-edits, as well as a recent volume he edited with Stephen Macekura).<sup>5</sup> Yet questions also emerged as I read Manela’s piece, which I will pose here in the spirit of critical conversation.

First, I found myself wondering how Manela’s call for ‘international society’ as a historiographical subject might be applied to themes like military affairs, espionage, international business, and finance. Manela highlights scholarship on international development and humanitarianism as examples of his sensibility toward international history. Yet the article is a bit less clear on how scholars of more ‘traditional’ topics might be brought into the fold. Where ‘traditional’ topics like interstate diplomacy and military conflict do appear in the essay, it is in the context of stressing that an ‘international society’ approach ‘enriches rather than replaces’ them; or that historians need “to study the workings of power in international society not only in the realms of diplomacy,” (186) but also in those of the environment, global population, and development. Recent and forthcoming work on the Department of Interior’s global mission, the entangled history of U.S. policing and counterinsurgency, and the global footprint of Texas oil companies all provide excellent examples of this sensibility.<sup>6</sup>

Yet if a core task of the essay is to define a common historiographical subject, I worry whether this is still too much of a ‘big tent’ vis-à-vis historians of U.S. foreign relations. In a recent essay, for instance, historians Daniel Bessner and Fredrik Logevall call for a “recentering” of the study of American foreign relations toward “the domestic history of policymaking” and stress the American-centric nature of the post-1945 international system.<sup>7</sup> Because they see the United States as the center of gravity of the international system, however, they underscore Washington bureaucratic politics, White House-congressional relations, and perceptions of the world in the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson Administrations as areas for expanded future research. As diplomatic historians like Bessner and Logevall are more interested in the “sources and nature” than the “effects and limits” of U.S. foreign policy, their engagement of ‘international society’ remains by their own admission ‘America-centric,’ aloof from how non-Americans imagined the world.<sup>8</sup> One question for Manela, then, is how he sees “international society” engaging with historians of policymaking. Many of the fault lines between historians like Manela, on the one hand, and Bessner and Logevall, on the other, are similar to those present almost a decade ago in the

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<sup>5</sup> Timothy Nunan, *Humanitarian Invasion: Development, Humanitarianism, and Global Projects in Cold War Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Nunan, “Graveyard of Development? Afghanistan’s Cold War Encounters with International Development and Humanitarianism,” in *The Development Century: A Global History*, ed. Erez Manela and Stephen Macekura (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Megan Black, *The Global Interior: Mineral Frontiers and American Power* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), Stuart Schrader, *Badges Without Borders: How Global Counterinsurgency Transformed American Policing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019); B. Alex Beasley, *Expert Capital: Houston and the Making of a Service Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, forthcoming)

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Bessner and Fredrik Logevall, “Recentering the United States in the Historiography of American Foreign Relations,” *Texas National Security Review* 3:2, Spring 2020, <https://tnsr.org/2020/04/recentering-the-united-states-in-the-historiography-of-american-foreign-relations/>.

<sup>8</sup> Bessner and Fredrik Logevall.

SHAFR *Passport* piece Manela cites.<sup>9</sup> What new work does ‘international society’ do, then, in terms of achieving methodological clarity without antagonizing international historians into camps?

The two other issues that Manela’s essay raises connect with my own position as a teacher and scholar of international history (whose work does not focus on the U.S.) based at an institution outside of the United States. First, what role is granted to historians of ‘international society’ who work on the history of nations other than the United States? And second, what are the implications of Manela’s call for institutions and scholars outside of the Anglophone world?

As for the first of these two issues, my perspectives are informed by my position as someone working at the intersections of Russian history, the history of the Middle East, and international history. Beyond the fact that ‘... in the world’ job advertisements are far and few between for non-U.S. fields, the ‘transnational’ or ‘international turn’ has disparate meanings for different national fields. ‘Internationalism’ in the context of Russian history has the ring of Socialist internationalism, or even ‘domestic internationalism’ within the USSR or Socialist bloc itself. Meanwhile, scholars who want to study, say, Soviet relations with Cuba may still be asked the question of whether their project is ‘Russian enough’ or ‘Cuban enough’ by hiring committees and fall between the cracks. Excellent work on, for instance, the Sino-Soviet-Mongolian triangle might be read as ‘not Russian enough’ for the market and may have difficulty seeming legible to an international history field that remains anchored in an Anglophone source base Western internationalist institutions. The extent to which Eastern Europe and even Ukraine have become distinct historiographical fields separate from Russian history in the last thirty years also adds to the professional risks of an international history approach. To the extent that hiring committees focus on scholars of *Russian*, *Ukrainian*, or *Central European* history, it becomes riskier to focus on institutions like Comecon, the Warsaw Pact, or the International Investment Bank that bridged regions but are not reducible to national histories.

International-history approaches are less common to Iranian history, but as Roham Alvandi writes, “we have ten books on U/S.-Iran relations (my own included), for every one that looks at Iran’s international or transnational relations with the rest of the world.”<sup>10</sup> Some might contend that this merely reflects the hierarchy of international relations (*pace* Bessner and Logevall), but the onus on those like Manela who demand a more diverse conversation is to reflect on the structural and material conditions in national subfields that make them more or less ‘internationalist.’ Scholars of Russian or Iranian history in the United States face the pressure of connecting their work to American history in order to make it appear more relevant. Notwithstanding a forty-year cold war with the Islamic Republic of Iran, American investment into Persian-language pedagogy still pales in comparison with institutions built for Russian-language pedagogy decades earlier. And in both contexts, one might ponder the advantages and disadvantages that heritage speakers and members of diasporas hold in defining the field. While the orientation of fields like Russian or Iranian history will be decided by those in it, one open question for Manela remains how an ‘international society’ approach can navigate the asymmetrical ‘internationalization’ of national history fields.

Third, and finally, while Manela’s essay focuses on history departments in North America, his essay also raises questions about the relationship of scholars writing and teaching international history outside of the U.S. and in non-Anglophone contexts. At the Free University of Berlin, for instance, I teach a group of Global History Master’s students — a cohort that includes students not only from the Anglophone world and Germany itself, but also from the rest of Europe, the Arab world, and South and Southeast Asia. Teaching international history to these students has done much to shift my own research interests to the Global South, while teaching as an American in the age of Trump has also underscored the role that hierarchy and racism play in international relations. Yet, identifying as a scholar of international society can carry risks in the German context. In spite of professorships or centers devoted explicitly to global or international history in Berlin, Munich, Heidelberg, and, outside Germany, in Vienna, most chairs for ‘modern history’ remain tailored for German or European

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Connelly, Robert J. McMahon, Katherine A.S. Sibley, Thomas Borstelmann, Nathan Citino, and Kristin Hoganson, “SHAFR in the World,” *Passport: The Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Review* 42:2 (2011), 4-16.

<sup>10</sup> Roham Alvandi (@RohamAlvandiLSE), Twitter Post, 17 April 2020, <https://twitter.com/RohamAlvandiLSE/status/1251123450250514434>.

history. 'Eastern European history' often exists as a separate chair entirely, but the lack of a departmental structure means that scholars have every incentive to cover a diverse range of topics, approaches, and time periods (imperial and Soviet) in their Ph.D.s and *Habilitationen* (second dissertation). Given the constraints of the reality of English as an international scholarly language, scholars have limited incentives to add languages like Chinese, Turkish, or Persian, etc. to their academic profiles.

But perhaps the bigger impact of language issues is on students and professionalization. While international and global history approaches make much of decentering narratives and highlighting subaltern connections, these fields remain a heavily Anglicized domain. As my former colleague Michael Goebel has observed, this has the effect of making student performance and the distribution of academic power increasingly dependent on one skill—spoken and written fluency in English—that in the past was tangential to a wider range of skills.<sup>11</sup> Further, access to this skill is unequally distributed and dependent on national origin. If we are to ward off criticisms that international and global history are not only elitist (e.g. they carry expectations of multilingualism and multi-archival research) but also hypocritical (since the field reproduces global inequalities), we need to think more about the responsibilities that scholars and institutions in the Anglophone world have to institutions and scholars elsewhere. On an individual level, scholars with access to 'cordoned off' discussions in languages like Arabic or Persian can try to make these 'regional' conversations legible to scholars of international society who are not focused on these regions. In light of Manela's more systemic call, and his own experiences as a non-native English speaker who has navigated these Anglicized spaces, I would welcome his thoughts on more institutional and discipline-wide steps we can take to avoid reifying inequalities in our own scholarship.

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Goebel (@mgoebel29), Twitter Post, 16 October 2019, <https://twitter.com/mgoebel29/status/1184467219293577217>.

REVIEW BY DAVIDE RODOGNO, THE GRADUATE INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES, GENEVA

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*What riding an old Triumph Motorcycle Taught Me about International Societies, Academic ‘Turns,’ and Dead-Ends.*

Rez Manela has written an intelligent and sophisticated, open, and mature *plaidoyer* for international society as a historical subject. I agree with him almost entirely. In my conclusion, I invite my colleague to consider using the plural, i.e. international societies rather than the singular.

Manela’s article starts by acknowledging that the term international history has (and continues to have) a complicated history in the U.S. historical profession. This is the case elsewhere too. The vantage point from which I write my response has to be disclosed from the outset: I am one of the thirteen colleagues of the International History department of the Geneva Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies; for decades the name of this department was *International History and Politics*.

I agree with Manela when he claims that International History should not be limited to the history of international relations. And, the way I interpret what I do is close to Marc Trachtenberg’s idea of international history being the history of international politics.<sup>1</sup> This is the first reason why I do not see a problem at all with international society – as Manela defines it in his article – being a historical subject. Ever since I joined the department I realized something I shared with my colleagues: we resolutely refuse to stick to very precise, restrictive definitions of what international is or, worse, what it should be. Many of us, our masters and Ph.D. students included, interpret international history as loosely as possible.

In 2010-2011, one year before I joined it, the department was amputated of ‘and Politics’; some colleagues who were already at the Institute before me were given the possibility of identifying themselves as professors of ‘International History and Politics’; some of them still do. Since 2017, when I was serving as Head of my department, we began making efforts to revert to the older name ‘International History and Politics.’ This remains an ongoing conversation within the Institute, the case being that ‘International History’ referred to our disciplinary identity and ‘politics’ qualified the theme and nature, as well as the object of our analyses in the broadest and, in our view, did so in the most efficient way. Anyway, in 2020 we still are International History.

There are two issues related to Manela’s article worth mentioning here. Back in 2017, when my colleagues and I reflected on the department’s name, we discarded several alternatives and retained politics: a polysemic term that made perfect sense in English and in French (*le politique*, since the Institute is bilingual). Politics is a broader term than policies; all history faculty dealt (and still deal in 2020) with politics but not all of my colleagues taught or researched the history of policies or policy itself. We referred to politics as a term designating today’s world; politics as encompassing without being limited to *polis* (in the Greek meaning of the word) and policies. We also connected politics to the Graduate Institute’s remit to enhance international cooperation, peace, and just, sustainable development and to Geneva, the international city *par excellence*. Moreover, in 2017 and I guess in 2020, we are satisfied with the decision of keeping International History rather than becoming the Transnational, Global, World or Interstellar History department. All we wanted was to recover the longer, older name. At the time of the dropping of ‘and politics’ my colleagues were fully aware that our department was not like a classic Contemporary History department and ‘International History’ failed (and still fails) to designate a clearly-identifiable sub-field of history. Moreover, being a small department and the only representatives of humanities in an Institute where colleagues teach International Economics, Anthropology, Sociology, International Law, and International Relations we abandoned any illusion of exhaustivity. We preferred, and we still do, building bridges and enhancing a

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<sup>1</sup> Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History: A Guide to Method* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

constructive dialogue with our colleagues who study topics not so different from ours using different analytical and disciplinary tools.

The second reason why I agree with Manela is that I do not believe it is useful or appropriate to marginalize the states in the writing of international history. COVID-19 politics and policies in 2020 demonstrate the centrality, vitality and persistence of the state and of state sovereignty despite pervasive Whig narratives of globalization which I resist as strongly as I can. International history is not exclusively about the state or relations between states. In fact, the case of my department illustrates that an increasing number of historians focus on one or a number of inter-related themes that they explore across time(s) and space(s), not neglecting the state but encompassing it as one of the actors populating a given environment. For some of them, in some of their research, the state is central, in other cases it is not.

Probably because I teach and research in an Institute with a specific remit, despite my preference for specific nations or regions, I have been encouraged to go beyond them. Contrary to the colleagues Manela refers to in his article, I might have focused on some regions of the world more than others, but my research moved across times and spaces through themes and designated actors. I am persuaded that versatility came as a result of the academic environment I lived in. In other words, the fact that I did not belong to a History department anchored in a national context was a (my) liberation. For the same reasons, I guess, over the years, I noticed that I did not become overwhelmingly preoccupied by, discomfited, or over-excited with globalization, and global interconnectedness. I did not erase the nation-state from my syllabi or my research agenda in the name of a new utopia or the last utopia. Transcending the nation was important in 2011, when I joined the International History department and it is still important today. However, I never felt that transcending the nation was an imperative or a *condition sine qua non* explaining globalization. It was a choice, my intellectual choice. Some of my colleagues research histories beneath the nation. And, as far as I am concerned, the history of a single border can perfectly be international history. Other colleagues ask how history serves the needs of the present not just politically but epistemologically and for them globalization is one among several subjects.

The third reason why I agree with Manela has to do with my contentment to be an international historian, even when I do take a transnational approach. If, and again I completely agree with my colleague, transnational and global are approaches rather than parochial and provincial sects, keeping the name international history might be a coherent and consistent choice. International history changes, and always will; it might soon encompass historical analyses of international societies. I might worry about the name of the department when nation-states will be extinct; something tells me that by then I too will be long extinct. When I joined the Graduate Institute in Geneva, from St Andrews – a School of History with almost ninety faculty – I was glad my colleagues had not swapped international with global history. I do not think the latter should only be about the history of globalization. In fact, many global historians do not write about it; and, I argue, international historians are not supposed to focus on the history of internationalization. This is where, contrary to Manela, I would refrain from offering descriptive definitions. The idea of the responses of a diverse set of historical actors, both state and non-state to the processes of globalization has a flavour of immanence, with which I do not feel comfortable. And international history as the history of internationalization is equally unpersuasive to me and I do not find it a necessary prerequisite for Manela's argument on the legitimacy of international society as a historical subject.

Since Manela refers to it, allow me a short digression here: I have always been suspicious of and unpersuaded by 'turns' in academia, in history too. Since I like riding an old Triumph motorcycle I know that a turn is followed by another, by straight-lines where I can accelerate, crossroads and roundabouts where I must slow-down. When I reach my final destination, the turns have been part of my journey or as Manela would have it, they have been 'absorbed' along the way. Whenever a 'turn' really means becoming an adept of a sect, abandoning your previous identity, and accepting a dogmatic article of faith, I run away from it as fast as possible. I think that the transnational or the global approach might be useful depending on the nature of one's historical investigation. International history has taken many turns and that is good news. More broadly speaking I see historiographical 'turns' as sign-posts giving the rider directions on how history as a field of inquiry is (and was) as much about the intellectual needs of one's own moment as anything. 'Turns' are nothing more than an opportunity to reflect on how each new trend should be historicized rather than merely adopted without understanding why the moment called for the bend in the road or a 'new' kind of history. Moreover, the usefulness of the adjective 'new' as in 'new International History' escapes me, especially because academic books rarely sell millions of copies and the marketing

argument seems superfluous or, worst, ridiculous. If we historians have done our work well, there must be something new in it. Similarly, I have a hard time understanding the term ‘towards’: e.g. Towards a New International History. ‘Towards’ sounds as a promise that someday, in a not too distant future, there will be a new international history, which is currently – perhaps, forever – in the making. The work-in-progress metaphor, which looks horribly similar to Sisyphus’s metaphor, frightens. So, if international society deserves to be a historical subject, we do not need a turn, there is nothing frighteningly new, and we should not be working towards it forever.

Erez Manela views history from Harvard, in Cambridge (Ma.) and it is understandable that he pays attention to ‘United States in the world’ and ‘United States and the world.’ From the vantage point of a small provincial town like Geneva, I do not really have to worry about this problem. I can invite the United States (or not) in my research on Western international humanitarianism in the interwar years without having to worry too much about the epi-centre of my research. That is one of the advantages of teaching and researching international history in a small country like Switzerland. For exactly the same reason, precisely because the Graduate Institute is located in the heart of the *quartier international*, I resist as strongly as I can to hagiographical narratives from and of international Geneva. Of course, I am aware of the advantages of multi-archival historical research written from Geneva when writing about certain actors like non-governmental organizations (NGOs), inter-governmental organizations such as the League of Nations or the United Nations, philanthropic foundations, or when writing about the history of humanitarianism, human rights, or international public health (re-christened not too long-ago Global Health, indicating that it is not only history and historians who suffer of a labelling problem). But it does not make sense to speak about ‘Geneva and the world’ and I have strong doubts about ‘Geneva in the world.’ Still, I find it stimulating to critically reflect on writing economic and social history, cultural history, the history of conflicts, of racism, environmental or gender history, and even on more classic diplomatic history from Geneva.<sup>2</sup>

A point on which I do not entirely agree with Manela concerns the alleged new anxieties and confusions concerning the broad thematic expansion of international history as a field and the concurrent blurring of the boundaries between the domestic and the foreign, states and non-states, hard and soft powers, which, he claims has left some wondering whether the field of diplomatic history, in its push for renewal, lost its coherence. If that is the case, rather than anxiety and confusion I would rather speak of serenity and clarity, since such blurring of the boundaries is necessary and welcome. Manela’s challenge is to reframe the field of international history in a manner that would encompass the various approaches mentioned above, including those of older vintage, and that would also make clear the common historical subject which these approaches all help to illuminate. His idea is to put forward the history of international society as a historical subject that encompasses and allows the various connections, intersections, and imbrications that have been examined in the last twenty years to be tangible and visible. International society, Manela argues, has a political history an economic and social history, an intellectual, legal, cultural history. I cannot agree more and will be delighted to read his forthcoming work.

In the last five pages Manela explains that the last thing he wants is to write a Whig history of internationalism, though he keeps referring to *the* international society. He recommends considering the precise spatial and temporal scope of the subject; and how this field should relate to historical fields anchored in national and regional enclosure. I am confident that our colleagues will undertake these analyses in different ways and this, in my view, is an asset rather than a weakness signalling the beauty of our discipline. I wonder if Manela would consider speaking about international societies? Isn’t the plural fitting better Manela’s purpose? If Manela discarded the plural it would have been interesting to know more about the rationale that brought him to choose the singular. Wouldn’t the plural allow for further blurring and redefinition of spaces, time-periods, and actors? Wouldn’t the plural stimulate more comparative, creative, and open research respecting both the initial point of each colleague’s intellectual and academic journey and her or his final destination, whether she or he rides a Triumph motorcycle or not?

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<sup>2</sup> I do not really understand why in footnote 53 Manela clarifies that in his view few who are interested in world affairs would argue that we no longer need to understand the history of war, diplomacy, military power, or that a historical perspective on the thinking of decision-makers in major capitals and the environments in which they operate is no longer important. This sentence ought to be included in the main text, since its contents reinforce Manela’s argument.

## REVIEW BY AGNIESZKA SOBOCINSKA, MONASH UNIVERSITY

For decades now, historians have eagerly battled over the spatial and conceptual boundaries of transnational, global and international history. Debates over New Diplomatic History, New Imperial History, and New International History have been fought in the pages of historical journals, and *Diplomatic History* in particular. It is fitting, then, that Erez Manela's article, "International Society as a Historical Subject" features in this journal's pages, the latest—but probably not the last—salvo in an ongoing battle to define the nature of historical inquiry that transcends the nation state.

The bulk of this article is concerned with mapping discussions and debates in the historical discipline, and the field of diplomatic history in particular, over the past three decades. As Manela notes, the 'international turn' has been widely accepted, and has produced a burgeoning literature. But, he continues, "if agreement on the importance of going beyond national and regional enclosures is now widely shared within the historical profession, the question of *how* historians should go about doing it has not been easy to answer" (187).

Manela is upfront that his focus is on the discipline in the United States. Manela focuses on the U.S. not only because it is the context with which he is most familiar, but because in his depiction, the American debates have been acutely self-aware. For decades, American scholars have been pointing to the imminent demise of U.S. diplomatic history, and making stirring calls for historians to internationalise the subject in order to revive it. This is what Michael H. Hunt called "the academic equivalent of a ritual rain dance summoning the spirit of a more international approach" (193).

Like many scholars working outside the United States, I would suggest that the rain dance might be more effective if it took greater account of debates and research taking place elsewhere. In Australia and Britain, the turn to the 'international' has produced different questions and has suggested a different trajectory for future work. In these places, transnational and international history has intersected with colonial and imperial history to reveal a great deal about the global circulation of power, including the power of ideas and moral norms. British and Australian scholarship has shown that justifications for imperialism, and modes of colonial governance, circulated within the Anglosphere and were in dialogue with European models. It has also shown that transnational discourses of colonial governance had brutal impacts at the scale of the regional, the local and the intimate, particularly for Indigenous peoples and societies.

I work in Australia, where the 'transnational turn' hit particularly hard and effectively transformed the (much-smaller) field of Australian history. Leading historians now wonder if the pendulum has swung too far, and probe the reasons why "Australian academic history has become over-determined by the transnational turn."<sup>1</sup> The fear is that, in a field as small as Australian history, the turn to internationalisation could leave scholars without the situated knowledge—the deep understanding of Australian society—that previous historians found so useful. In this context, as one senior historian asked almost twenty years ago, "Does Australian history have a future?"<sup>2</sup> Yet, the field has gained immeasurably by the recognition that Australia, which is often assumed to be an outpost far from anywhere, was deeply and profoundly embedded within networks of people, ideas, and commodities circulating around the globe. The transnational turn has now irreversibly situated Australia within the broader category of settler colonial history, showing how colonisation gained strength and justification—both legal and moral—from the fact that it was taking place in multiple contexts at the same time. Tracing the circulation of material goods and ideas within and between empires and regions has also proven revelatory. Historians have now shown that the early Australian colonial project was partly funded by compensation received by British slave-owners after the abolition of slavery in the United States, and that the repressive system of governance imposed upon the Australian Indigenous population was at least partly inspired by British and German humanitarians demanding the

<sup>1</sup> Christina Twomey, "Is Australian History Over-determined by the Transnational Turn," in Anna Clark, Anne Rees, and Alecia Simmonds, eds., *Transnationalism, Nationalism and Australian History* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017): 89-101.

<sup>2</sup> Ann Curthoys, "Does Australian History Have a Future?" *Australian Historical Studies*, 33: 118 (2002): 140-152.

'Protection' of Aborigines on the far side of the globe. In Australia, the transnational and international have intersected with colonial history in a way that that enriches, rather than endangers, the field.

British history has also been consumed with questions about 'Britain and the World,' and about the dénouement of Empire and its legacies and afterlives. The debates surrounding New Imperial History mirror U.S. concerns about the New Diplomatic History, in that historians of imperialism navigated the cultural turn, and came to grips with the competing claims and methodologies of postcolonial scholarship. But in Britain this process led in a different direction again. Most importantly, perhaps, was the discovery that imperialism was a two-way process: that the 'Empire Strikes Back' and that the responses of subalterns could, and did, shape the nature of the British Empire, and Britain back home. In James Vernon's words, over the past few decades, British historians have found that "Britain was made by, and in, the modern world that it once claimed to have made all by itself."<sup>3</sup> In both the British and Australian contexts, probing the broader contexts in which national and imperial histories took place has provided major, and sometimes surprising, insights.

The overlapping of international, imperial, and national history is, I think, important. International history is imprinted with political and discursive power, and over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, power dynamics were profoundly affected by imperial contexts. Some of the histories of global governance, humanitarianism, and international development that Manela points to as examples of cutting-edge work in international history are well aware of this dynamic.<sup>4</sup> To my mind, the indissoluble connection between the categories of imperial, international, and national are at least as important a reason why historians should venture beyond the enclosures of the nation-state as the atmosphere of crisis that pervaded the field of diplomatic history in the United States.

The most exciting aspect of Manela's article is not so much his sketch of why we should turn to international history, but his original answer to "the question of *how* historians should go about doing it" (187). Essentially, Manela proposes that we redefine the field of international history as the history of "international society." This term is more precise than just 'international history,' but leaves a wide scope for research into both state and non-state actors, and accommodates both traditional and post-cultural turn historical approaches. To my mind, it is an elegant solution to the problem of defining the relationship between state and non-state, and between the national and international. As Manela notes, it is broad enough for both political history and social history; just like any national history, it leaves enough space for intellectual, legal, economic, and cultural histories to emerge.

Like all good ideas, Manela's formulation provides a spur to action. Reading this article, I immediately began to think of where the boundaries of 'international society' might lie. Like all societies, 'international society' is presumably one of multiple classes and communities, with power distributed dynamically (but unequally) between them. Recent monographs and articles have begun to trace the dynamic relations between state- and non-state actors, and between groups representing varied interest groups around the globe. But can the history of international society accommodate the public? Can we expand 'international society' to move beyond the elites who formed the majority of the League of Nations and United Nations secretariats, and their self-consciously 'internationalist' and bourgeois civil servants? Can we look beyond the middle-classes and elites who established international societies and organizations, and who provided development expertise to aid agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)? Can 'international society' also accommodate citizens who were not organized, but who nonetheless experienced globalization, who held opinions about it, and engaged in various ways—from participating in Model United Nations or donating to humanitarian NGOs, to participating in protests against the World Trade Organization (or latterly, the World Health Organization)? And what about the competing visions of international society emerging from the Second and Third Worlds of mid-century, and the people who supported or opposed them beneath the elite level? 'Ordinary' people thought and acted and felt internationally—and not just in response to the modernization and development projects Western experts and elites thrust upon them. I have been thinking

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<sup>3</sup> James Vernon, "The History of Britain is Dead; Long Live a Global History of Britain," *History Australia*, 13:1 (2016): 19-34.

<sup>4</sup> For a particularly good example see Timothy Nunan, *Humanitarian Invasion: Global Development in Cold War Afghanistan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

through these ideas for several years; to me, Manela's proposal of 'international society' provides a useful frame that captures and situates these questions, and demands that I ask more. I suspect that many other scholars will find Manela's framing to be just as useful, and histories of 'international society' will become more frequent in years to come.

## RESPONSE BY EREZ MANELA, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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I am grateful to Kai Hebel, Timothy Nunan, Davide Rodogno, and Agnieszka Sobocinska for their generous and thoughtful engagement with my essay. I was especially pleased to discover, when I received the reviews, that all four were by scholars based outside the United States. Since my essay was written from a U.S.-based perspective and concerns debates that have largely taken place among U.S.-based scholars, I found the perspectives presented in this forum especially illuminating. I also want to thank Tom Maddux, who organized the forum, and Diane Labrosse, who edited it. Their tireless work on H-Diplo over many years has helped make it an invaluable resource for our scholarly community.

Since some readers of this forum may not have yet read the original essay<sup>1</sup> that is its subject, let me first summarize it briefly. The essay begins by noting that, for several decades now, historians have increasingly pursued work that transcends national or regional enclosures. It outlines the distinction, as I see it, between international history—the subject of the essay—and the related but separate projects of global and transnational history. It then recaps the debates over international history since the 1970s, tracing how the field has evolved, in part in response to broader changes in the historical profession. During these decades, the field incorporated methodological innovations from the cultural turn in history and expanded its purview in various ways that I often like to summarize as the ‘three news’: new themes; new places (in particular, a greater interest in the global south); and new actors (notably, non-state actors).

The essay then outlines longstanding, contentious debates as to whether the field can incorporate all these new themes and approaches while retaining its coherence. Most especially, these debates have played out along lines perceived to be dividing historians who are working on more ‘traditional’ topics and actors (high diplomacy, top decisionmakers) and those who are interested in venturing beyond that sphere; and between scholars who have wanted the field to retain its focus, at least in the United States, on the history of U.S. foreign policy, and others who have preferred for it to have a more expansive remit.<sup>2</sup>

The core of the essay is devoted to proposing the adoption of ‘international society’ as the historical subject of the field of international history. This is a subject, I argue, that is capacious enough to encompass all of the above approaches and has the additional benefit of encouraging international historians, regardless of their thematic or methodological preferences, to see themselves as engaged in a common project: uncovering, elucidating, and interpreting the history of international society. I borrow the term ‘international society’ from the English School of International Relations but define it more broadly than the ‘society of states’ that it has typically connoted to encompass the full diversity of non-state as well as state actors. This broader definition, I believe, makes it far more useful for international historians even if (or, perhaps, precisely because) it sheds, as Kai Hebel notes in his review, some theoretical precision. I then survey two recent clusters of literature—on the histories of development and of humanitarianism—that for me exemplify the usefulness of the international society framework, and conclude with a discussion of some methodological and institutional considerations that pertain to the goal of further developing and institutionalizing the field of international history.

Let me now move on to respond to some of the issues raised in the reviews.

Agnieszka Sobocinska, based in Melbourne, observes that the debates I trace have taken place primarily among U.S. historians and would benefit from greater engagement with similar debates over the past decades among historians of Britain and Australia. I could not agree more, and of course there is already work out there putting U.S. international

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<sup>1</sup> Erez Manela, “International Society as a Historical Subject,” *Diplomatic History* 44:2 (April 2020): 184-209, <https://academic.oup.com/dh/article/44/2/184/5739337?guestAccessKey=c1b9c9c4-c81e-43b1-b763-cd1c408095b0>.

<sup>2</sup> These debates are still very much alive, as evidenced in the recent H-Diplo Roundtable XXI-42 on Daniel Bessner and Fredrik Logevall, “Recentering the United States in the Historiography of American Foreign Relations,” <https://hdiplo.org/to/RT21-42>.

history in that context, not least on the themes of immigration and race.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, I could well have used this body of literature, as I did in the essay with the histories of development and humanitarianism, to illustrate what I have in mind when I think of international society as a historical subject. Sobocinska then perceptively probes the character of international society, noting that, like all societies, it “is presumably one of multiple classes and communities, with power distributed dynamically (but unequally) between them.” She asks how we can move our study of it beyond the elites that, for example, establish and populate international organizations. I agree that this is a crucial move and, indeed, some historians have already been doing precisely this, writing, for example, international histories of labor, race, or anticolonialism.<sup>4</sup>

Davide Rodogno, in Geneva, notes that if in the United States the term ‘international history’ is seldom used to describe faculty positions, let alone whole departments, this is not always the case in Europe, where he, in fact, serves on the faculty of the International History Department at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies.<sup>5</sup> However, his department’s name notwithstanding, he also finds that international history has failed to find wide acceptance as “a clearly identifiable sub-field of history.” I agree, and this is precisely the problem that my essay attempts to tackle. Finally, Rodogno asks why I did not use the plural form, “international societies,” instead of the singular, to capture the diversity that characterizes the international arena. But since the goal of the essay was to make a case for the conceptual unity of international history, the complementary nature of the various approaches to it, and the need for it to claim a clearly defined institutional space within the academy, I found the singular form, international society, more apt. At the same time, as I stress in the essay, I take this term to connote a space that is, like all societies, intrinsically plural: contested, hierarchical, multi-layered.

Timothy Nunan, working in Berlin, asks how the idea of international society might apply to topics such as “military affairs, espionage, international business, and finance” or relate to the history of U.S. foreign policymaking. For me, international society plainly has a military history, a business history, and a financial history, just like it has a political history or a history of immigration, race, culture, or ideas. How could it not? And the history of foreign policymaking—whether in the U.S. or elsewhere—is inextricable from it, too. After all, there is no foreign policymaking, no matter how powerful the actor, except in response to, and in the context of, international events and actors. So, framing the history of foreign policy within the context of international history cannot but enrich it, even—indeed especially—for histories focused on Washington-based elites.

Nunan also wonders how the field of international history can be better institutionalized in a profession where—in the United States, and even more so in many other places—most faculty positions are still defined by national or regional markers. I am not sure I know how to answer this question in full, especially as it pertains to academic institutions outside the United States. But I am certain that it would require having international history thought of not, as Nunan implies that it often is, as a skill that is ancillary to a historian’s main specialization in some nationally or regionally defined field, a nice-to-have bonus at best or, at worst, a distraction from their ‘real’ work. Rather, it must be recognized as constituting a primary

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<sup>3</sup> Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and David Atkinson, *The Burden of White Supremacy: Containing Asian Migration in the British Empire and the United States* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017) are two excellent examples of this literature that focus on the Anglophone world, while Adam M. McKeown, *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), has a broader geographic scope.

<sup>4</sup> For examples see, respectively, Aviva Chomsky, *Linked Labor Histories: New England, Colombia, and the Making of a Global Working Class* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Rebecca Herman, “The Global Politics of Anti-Racism: A View from the Canal Zone,” *American Historical Review* 125:2 (April 2020), 460-486; and Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> One other notable international history department in Europe (if indeed it still is in Europe) is located, of course, at the London School of Economics. In the United States, international history is at best occasionally mentioned as a field *within* history departments, for example at Yale, Harvard, Columbia, and the University of Maryland, though each place defines it somewhat differently.

field of historical expertise, one that is complementary to but no less important than, to take Nunan's examples, Russian or Iranian history. It is to this end that I hope my essay can contribute.

Finally, Kai Hebel, a scholar of international relations at Leiden University, is concerned that I define international society too loosely. If we encompass in the term both state and non-state actors, he worries, we might jeopardize our ability to “study the international in a rigorous and cumulative way” and risk encouraging “idiosyncratic” approaches that would “impede rather than further the integration of research agendas.” For me, however, idiosyncratic scholarship that avoids the roads most travelled and shakes loose encrusted paradigms is oftentimes the most illuminating. What I argue for is not cumulative or integrated research agendas. Rather, it is the recognition that, no matter what corner of international history you work in or how idiosyncratic an approach you adopt, your work fits within the purview of a historical and historiographical space—international society, broadly construed—that is the subject of a distinct field of historical expertise. It is a field as coherent, as diverse, and as multifaceted as any other.