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INTERNATIONAL LAW, INTERNATIONALLY: MEDITATIONS ON AN ORGANIZATIONAL PILGRIMAGE INTO THE DISCIPLINES OF GLOBAL LAW AND POLICY

International Law, Internationally: meditations on an organizational pilgrimage into the disciplines of global law and policy[1]

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Abstract

What does it entail, methodologically, to study the globe – and its laws? What leads us to think that a topic, building, or organization is clearly "international", whereas a neighboring institution can be seen as purely "local"? These categories are neither neutral nor self-evident, and they ultimately respond to ingrained assumptions about the relations of adjacency through which we classify the world. To become an international lawyer, one needs to master the two dimensions of the work that the "adjective" is doing here: as a qualifier of a *subject*, but also as a characteristic of the *perspective* with which one comes to study it. This is what I call doing international law, internationally. To make sense of these challenges involved in this exercise, I retrospectively make sense of my own experience of becoming an international lawyer through the lenses of the anthropology of pilgrimage. In this way, I provide a reflection on the ways "modern" or "secular" conceptions of space are shaped by models of territorial adjacency still anchored in Christian thought and foreground the sacrifices and opportunities that a career based around worldly movement entails for those aspiring to study the disciplines of global law and policy.

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> *Those who image themselves as inhabiting the role of representative of the "West" or the "international community" in bringing human rights and democracy to a local in need of saving, are as much a product of the history of colonialism as they are a product of legal disciplining. The promises of international lawyers in the post-Cold War era are the same promises as those made by benevolent colonial missionaries (…).*
> (Orford 1999: section II.2)

> *Although multi-sited ethnography is an exercise in mapping terrain, its goal is not holistic representation, an ethnographic portrayal of the world system as a totality. Rather, it claims that any ethnography of a cultural formation in the world system is also an ethnography of the system, and therefore cannot be understood only in terms of the conventional single-site mise-en-scene of ethnographic research, assuming indeed it is the cultural formation, produced in several different locales.*
> (Marcus 1995: 99)

The Local and the International

Deep within midtown Manhattan, in New York City, one can find two neighboring towers. Despite their relative proximity, their origins and function could not – in principle – be any more different. The first, casting its long shadow over First Avenue, is the "Trump World Tower" (Nash 2005: 177–178). While less awe inspiring than the *original* Trump Tower (located some meters further into midtown, on Fifth Avenue [Nash 2005: 143–144]), during a short period it was the world's tallest residential complex. In fact, since its erection in the late nineties, it has proven to be a desirable dwelling place for both local and international elites. This is partially explained by its location as the immediate neighbor of our other tower: the Headquarters of the United Nations (UN). Should a chicken cross the road – First Avenue, to be sure – from the "World Tower," it would immediately find itself in a building created some decades earlier to serve as a sort of "capitol" or "capital" of the world (Nash 2005: 99–102; Dudley 1994; Mires 2013; Touloumi 2024). As a result of this proximity, the flats in the "World Tower" have been consistently rented out to high foreign dignitaries – and even some of its floors have functioned as the diplomatic missions of certain countries. Knowing well its target audience, the Trump Organization also equipped the complex with a "world bar", with the motto "where Manhattan meets the world" as its official slogan.[3] Despite the fact that, as one journalist notes, this luxurious establishment is clearly "too fancy for civil servants", it seems that Trump's gambit ultimately paid off, as within the bar one can regularly hear "United Nations-related jargon" (Leimbach 2013).

   Despite all of this, we – and I use the "royal we" in reference to my own main "field", international lawyers – do not usually think of the "Trump World Tower" as an *international* place. In contrast, the neighboring tower is, perhaps, the most concrete instance of what "the international" is expected to look like in the imaginaries of both specialists and the public. This is clear not only because of the building's use of the UN's emblematic blue insignia, but also by its display of a panoply of flags that correspond to the different nations it aspires to unite. In fact, within the UN site (and, again, in contrast to the Trump Towers), US local and federal law does not apply – at least in principle. The UN's complex has an extraterritorial status *vis-à-vis* the local jurisdiction and its operations are ruled by a complicated web of immunities and privileges, established by an international treaty and the

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[3] The World Bar NYC, Twitter: https://twitter.com/theworldbarnyc (last accessed 21 October 2024).

host state. For this reason, the UN Headquarters in New York City (in tandem with some of its other less famous offices around the world) have been popularly called "international territories" (Bartos and Hitchens 1994) – even if this is not strictly the case in legal terms.[4] But even beyond the applicable law, it is clear that the UN Secretariat has deliberately sought to signal the "internationalism" of its building through the aesthetic and institutional choices of its material culture. While the neighboring "Trump World Tower" might also be populated by foreigners who mingle in its "global" bar, it has no such "public" aspiration to represent "the international". This cursory comparison of the two skyscrapers might seem to suggest that the study of the "Trump World Tower" is a matter for local research (be that legal, historical, or anthropological), while the analysis of the neighboring UN Headquarters is a topic of "international" concern.[5]

In this working paper, I question such an analysis. Instead, I take the towers as a prompt to reflect on the following question: what does it entail, methodologically, to study "the international"? What leads us to decide that one building (or organization) is clearly "international" while considering a neighboring site or institution to be purely "local"? These categories are neither neutral nor self-evident, and they ultimately respond to ingrained assumptions about the proper "order of things" and the relations of adjacency through which we classify the world (Foucault 1994). There is no inherent reason why an international lawyer should feel more "at home" at the UN Headquarters than at the "Trump World Tower" – and yet, I suspect most of us do.[6]

One could, conversely, write a sociolegal history of the "Trump World Tower" from an international or transnational perspective. One could highlight that, since its very inception, its making was entangled with the operations of nebulous cast of foreign investors – from South Korean conglomerates and German banks, all the way to the shady elites that emerged out of the ruins of the Soviet Union. This had important consequences, one could add, once Trump was first elected to the presidency of the US in 2016 – as suddenly this tower found itself at the center of a series of controversies related to undue foreign influence in the Trump Organization's "private" operations, with "public" consequences. In fact, even before the first stone was laid down, the building was extensively debated. Even its legality was questioned before domestic courts by actors that sought to protect the neighborhood's integrity in general – and that of the UN site, in particular. There is a rich – and no doubt, "international" – dimension worth exploring in what might seem, at first glance, an unremarkably parochial tower. On the other hand, one could write a purely "local" history of the UN's skyscraper – as just another element in Manhattan's bursting skyline (Caro 1975: 771–775; Zipp 2010: 31–70). Instead of highlighting the building or the organization's "internationalism", one could focus on the continuities between this project and other local urban renewal projects – the Rockefeller Center of 1939, for example. Neither of these two narratives would be necessarily better than the other. But each alternative road does require the researcher to commit to a series of methodological decisions either way. The relevant sources, the intended audience, and the writing style all depend on which of these routes is taken. The "internationality" of any given research project, in other words, depends on the researcher and her methodological choices – and is not tied to the "object" of research.

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[4] This notion has also been promoted, as Fergie (2024) notes, by the UN's tour guides themselves.

[5] While I do not address the question of spheres of law in this paper, it would be similarly questionable to conclude that the "World Tower" is a subject to be studied by "private" legal scholarship, while the UN site falls under the remit of "public law"-related concerns.

[6] See, for instance, Koh (2019). On this dichotomy, see further Quiroga-Villamarín (2020).

There is, in this sense, no place, organization, or topic that is purely "international" (Riles 1995). As Latour (2017: 135) noted, one "is never as provincial as when one claims to have a 'global view'." The everyday life of the global, as Eslava (2015) has shown, always occurs in "local" spaces – and not in the imaginary scale of the national or the international. For that reason, the study of "the international", including its law – requires us to take seriously that it is often very geographically "small" spaces in which planetary decisions are taken (Quiroga-Villamarín 2023a). This is also true for those spaces we often take as paradigmatically global: the UN Headquarters chief among them. This is my friendly critique of the project Underworlds – Sites and Struggles of Global Dis/Ordering.[7] When this project argues that international legal scholarship ought to go beyond the "international palaces in Geneva, New York City, or The Hague" to interrogate, instead, the "underworlds" of the field, it is assuming – wrongly, in my view – that such "palaces" are not also "local" underworlds. This is problematic because it reproduces (unintentionally, no doubt) the central dichotomy between "field" and "headquarters" which is so dear to the way in which many of these organizations conceptualize themselves (Mülli 2021). But Geneva, New York, or The Hague, in fact, are "fields" too – we only need to look carefully and "lift the veil of harmony" (Müller 2015).[8]

The bridge to the globe, in other words, must always be anchored some*where*. As such, if one wants to write about the international legal order, we always need a "local" entry point. And, unsurprisingly, such an order – with its promises and disappointments – looks different depending on whether we are looking at it from Arusha, Bogotá, or Washington, DC (Gathii 2020). Where we stand depends on where we sit. And, for that reason, the concrete places and processes through which international lawyers become socialized into our discipline play an important role in the way the legal education reproduces (international) hierarchies (Kennedy 1982). To become an *international* lawyer, one needs to master the two dimensions of the work that the "adjective" is doing here: as a qualifier of a *subject*, but also as a characteristic of the *perspective* with which one comes to study it. This is what I call – with apologies to Beckert and Sachsenmaier (2018) – doing international law, internationally.

With this in mind, in this chapter I reflect on my own experience of becoming an international lawyer and pursuing a PhD dissertation on the birth of what I call the "international parliamentary complex" in the twentieth century, as this experience required me to engage in multi-sited archival research to pursue an "international" research agenda (Quiroga-Villamarín 2024a). To make sense of the challenges involved, I retrospectively deploy an autoethnographically-oriented approach to my own training. In particular, I think of my work through the insights generated by the burgeoning anthropology of pilgrimage – reflecting on the ways "modern" or "secular" spaces are shaped by models of territorial adjacency anchored in religious thought (Dubisch 1996).[9] The next section provides an overview of this literature. This is followed by another section that reflects on the specific time in which I undertook this experience of induction into "the disciplines and international law and policy" *as a pilgrimage* (Kennedy 1999b). This allows me to offer some concluding remarks on the dynamics of hierarchy and global (im)mobility that shape the making of international lawyers today.

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[7] Coordinated by my colleagues, Marie Petersmann and Dimitri van den Meerssche, at Queen Mary University of London. See https://www.qmul.ac.uk/ihss/whats-on/underworlds--sites-and-struggles-of-global-disordering/ (last accessed 21 October 2024).

[8] See further Brumann (2012; 2022); Margaria and Vetters (2024: 13); Touloumi (2024: 181–214).

[9] I use "secular" only as a placeholder for critique, see further Quiroga-Villamarín (2021).

Going Places: thinking of "the international" as a chain of places of pilgrimage

As I mentioned above, it would be legally unprecise to think about the UN's buildings as "international territory." In fact, as Sluga quipped about the interim site of the UN's predecessor – the League of Nations – in Geneva, one could argue "that the territorial internationalism that established the inviolability of the League's buildings and grounds more profoundly imitated the conventions of national sovereignty" (2013: 54). They operate, in many ways, *as if* they were *foreign national spaces vis-à-vis* the host state (Bordin 2019: 49–86) – providing another example of how the prefix *inter* ratifies, instead of challenging, the *national* as a category of thought and action. This might be a rather obvious point, but it helps dispel a common view that such institutions are the antithesis of the nation-state. Indeed, our traditional understanding of territory – or the stato-centric notion, to put it in Lythgoe's terms (2022) – conceives of space as a finite resource that since the nineteenth century has been disputed and claimed by nation-states, insofar as they have closed all of the "white spots on the map" (Nesiah 2003). As I have argued elsewhere, this "secular" notion of state, intimately linked to the rise of the Protestant self-contained polity as a template for governance, is of a rather recent and tenuous origin (Quiroga-Villamarín 2021: 641–642). It displaced a more fluid notion of imperial jurisdiction that focused on personal ties of allegiance between subjects and rulers, as opposed to the "modern" idea of territorialized governance (Benton 2002; Elden 2013; Anderson 2016; Sluga 2021; Bartelson 2023). Instead of "re-territorializing" "the international",[10] I suggest we can understand it through a key institution that we have inherited from this "pre-modern" way of thinking about the rule over "mobile flocks rather than geographical borders" (Quiroga-Villamarín 2021: 631): the (Christian) pilgrimage.[11]

Indeed, the ritual of pilgrimage, offers us a geographically detailed – but not territorially bounded – way of thinking about the relationship between subjectivity, truth, and jurisdiction. Elsewhere in an article on the history of the papacy as an international legal institution (Quiroga-Villamarín 2021), I noted how Foucault in his analysis of pastoral power highlighted that a distinctive feature of the rise of Christianity in Western governance was the way it led to the emergence of "a Church, that is to say, (…) an institution that claims to govern men in their daily life on the grounds of leading them to eternal life in the other world, and to do this not only of the scale of a definite group, of a city or a state, but of the whole of humanity" (Foucault 2007: 148).

In this sense, I argue we can think of the geography of "the international community" in the same way we might imagine that of the Catholic Church – which, indeed, might be world's first structured international community, with borders that extend far beyond the walls of the Vatican. And yet, at the same time, for a devout Catholic there is something special about being in Saint Peter's Cathedral. The same is true, I argue, for international lawyers when they place a foot – or, more precisely, partake in "international legal sighting" (Stolk and Vos 2020) – in the edifices created to accommodate international law's "move to institutions" in the twentieth century (Kennedy 1987). Why? How can we make sense of this certain *je ne sais quoi* that infuses a particular place with

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[10] See Lythgoe (2024).

[11] Of course, pilgrimages are not unique to the Christian tradition – and much of the anthropological and interdisciplinary literature on the concept has in fact revolved around the cross-cultural comparability of this notion; see Coleman and Elsner (1995: 196–197). Due to my own work on social Catholicism in the twentieth century – and my own, somewhat surprising and reluctant experience as recurrent *Jakobsweg* walker – I prefer to self-parochialize (some pun intended) and limit myself to Christian traditions of pilgrimage. On self-parochialization, see Keane (2018).

meaning?[12] Drawing from the literature on the anthropology of pilgrimage, I carry out a sort of self-ethnography of my own experience as a pilgrim of "the international" – hoping this might strike a chord with the experiences of other colleagues within, and beyond, our field. In contrast to most of my work (which tends to focus on the "structures" of international ordering), here I embrace a distinctively more *phenomenological* approach.[13] Before we go back to my first encounter with international law in 2014 – and "international Geneva" in 2018, in particular[14] – let me introduce some key notions from the burgeoning literature on pilgrimage, movement, and culture.

It is not my aim here to propose a definitive concept of pilgrimage, but rather to see how it can be useful for thinking about the experience of becoming an international lawyer. As Coleman (2021: 21) notes, "[a]nthropology's disciplinary rigor emerges, paradoxically, from the ability to operate through permanently provisional categories of description, observation, and comparison." As a point of departure, we can take Morinis's definition: "a pilgrimage is journey undertaken by a person in quest of a place or state that he or she believes to embody a valued ideal" (1992: 4). In principle, this ideal does need to be "religious" in nature, but I understand "religion" here in a broad sense. Students of pilgrimage, largely influenced by Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (2008: 11) and the later work of his student Robert Hertz, have placed collective human relations at the heart of their accounts.[15] As Badone and Roseman note, "[f]rom this perspective, it is not surprising that collective experiences like sporting events, *Star Trek* conventions, or mobilizations for war generate 'religious' emotions" (2004: 2). The same, I argue, can be said of international legal conclaves. Participants in these meetings often talk about their *atmospheres*: a notion that is not too far from Durkheim's idea of religion as an "anonymous and impersonal force that is found in each of these beings though identical with none" (2008: 140).[16] Indeed, d'Aspremont (2017) has even suggested we can think of international law as a system of organized belief.

What matters, above all, is the *journey*. "Pilgrimages invariable require spatial movements and, thus, involve the geographic concern with distance and its effect on behavior" (Stoddard and Morinis 1997: x). To *go places*, one needs to *go to places*. As opposed to other forms of rituals and cultural practices, a pilgrim cannot achieve this objective from the comfort of her home. As such, the material act of traveling is connected to "the possibility of creating social and/or psychological transformation, even if only on a temporary basis" (Coleman and Eade 2004: 2). This is the basis for the thesis advanced by Victor and Edith Turner in what has been called "possibly the most influential text in the [Anglophone] anthropology of pilgrimage" (Coleman and Eade 2004: 1): pilgrimage as a rite of passage. Drawing on Victor Turner's work on liminality in the rituals of the Ndembu people of Zambia (Turner 1991 [1969]: 94–130), the Turners went to articulate an influential theory of "pilgrimage as a liminoid phenomenon" in their monograph *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (Turner and Turner 2011 [1978]: 1–39). Their argument was that pilgrimages, insofar as they function as initiation rituals, suspend some of the traditional structures of cultural life – allowing for subversive instances of "anti-structural" conduct and spontaneous reimagination of community norms.

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[12] French for "I don't know what" – an expression used to refer to the ineffable but self-evident characteristic of something.
[13] A similar phenomenological approach is the hallmark of the project on "legal sightseeing" by several of my friends and colleagues. See Stolk and Vos (2020). While some have challenged the structural/phenomenological dichotomy, I consider that it is one of the central divergences in European twentieth-century social theory. See Kultgen (1975).
[14] For a more "structural" approach to the same theme, see instead Quiroga-Villamarín (2023b).
[15] On the genealogy of pilgrimage studies, see MacClancy (1994). On Hertz in particular, see Isnart (2006).
[16] "Beings" here refers to those partaking in religious congregations. For an example of the use of "atmosphere" in international law-making conferences, see Quiroga-Villamarín (2019: 92–94).

This conception of pilgrimage has been challenged as giving inadequate attention to the ways in which traditional cultural structures (such as gender or class) continue to operate in moments of "exceptional pilgrimage" (Juschka 2003). As Coleman helpfully traces, the Turners' proposal was deeply shaped by their own turn "from a British anthropological focus on social structures (…) towards relatively freer, North American interpretations of culture and symbol" (2021: 62). Indeed, much of this work was a product of the upheavals of the student revolts of the sixties, as the Turners observed "that anti-structure could be witnessed not only at the center of Ndembu ritual but also on the streets and campuses of Euro-American life" (Coleman 2021: 63). Biographically, this also overlapped with their conversion to Roman Catholicism as they turned away from their post-war Marxist commitments (Larsen 2016: 182). In her own self-ethnographical account, Edith Turner was quite explicit about the influence of this shift on their work: "joining the Catholic church was fieldwork for us after all, the best we could get at the time" (Turner 2006: 95). The Turnerian approach, then, sees pilgrimages as initiation rituals that temporarily suspend collective norms and allow for individual agency – even if, ultimately, the end of the journey leads to the restoration of the *status quo*. But even so, things never return exactly to where they were: the pilgrim comes back full circle with a surplus of meaning that she did not have upon embarking in the initiation ritual.

While perhaps the Turners gave too much weight to the "agency" side of the "structure" vs "agency" dichotomy, their notion provides a promising entry point into a theory of "the international" as a collection of places of pilgrimage. For international lawyers, just like the Ndembu or Roman Catholics, are not *born* as such – they are socialized into this particular tradition. More often than not, this entails a process of disciplinary training that first forms them as national lawyers, tied to the bar of a specific jurisdiction. And then, through a different process of initiation, one becomes a member of the "invisible college" of international lawyers, as Schachter (1977) famously called our field. And this, as Kennedy has shown, entails a degree of commitment to a shared "valued ideal" – as "we" are "a group of people sharing professional tools and expertise, as well as a sensibility, viewpoint and mission" (Kennedy 2002: 387). In the same vein, Roele (2018) has argued that "transitional objects" can play an important role in the making of this subjective imaginaries. But, what about "transitional pilgrimages"? Drawing from a (perhaps less sanguine) Turnerian understanding of pilgrimage as "a rite of passage", I now try to make sense of my own experience of *becoming* an international lawyer through a journey through the spaces of "the international". Sometimes, Kennedy quipped, it feels as though the only common denominator of international lawyers is that "we all read the Lotus Case" as it is "a different job" to be "an international lawyer in Europe and America (…) [and] all the more in Cairo or Beijing" (2006: 648).[17] By bringing pilgrimage into the picture, I want to suggest we (at least) share one more thing: we all pray while looking towards the same "international" *shrines* – and many of us, moreover, aspire to eventually visit them!

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[17] For readers not socialized as international lawyers: the *S.S. Lotus* case is a landmark decision from the early twentieth century. Welcome to your first rite of initiation should you want to join our cult: this case provides the basic mantra on the limitations of state sovereignty and as such we expect new initiates to remember it.

The Knight's Journey: becoming an international lawyer (2015–2025)

As Kennedy (1985: 1379) aptly noted,

> "Many of the stories we characteristically tell ourselves about human rights missions have a similar plot: a knight bursts forth from his domain, has a number of adventures crossing borders, foiling enemies, or bonding friendships, and eventually reaches the land beyond the pale, returning with tales aplenty."[18]

The story I want to tell began in Bogotá, Colombia, where I did all my basic legal training under the shadow of peace – or, more precisely, the unfulfilled promise thereof. The year before, in 2012, the Colombian government had officially announced the opening of formal negotiations with the FARC-EP guerilla group, and these dialogues had a profound impact on my legal education.[19] For one, the truly international nature of the negotiations and the issues at hand taught me that there were few problems that could be seriously tackled if one saw the world only through the lenses of Colombian domestic law (Rojas-Orozco 2021). For, as we Colombians quickly realized, the presence of "the international" could be felt at every step of the way. Not only was the Colombian negotiation generally lauded as an innovative "laboratory" that could have global implications (Ucrós 2017; Jespersgaard Jakobsen 2024), it was also one in which there was extensive involvement of "international experts" on both sides of the table (Ramírez-Gutiérrez and Quiroga-Villamarín 2022: 154–155). But we also came to realize that there was no single voice that was authorized to speak on behalf of "the international". For the guidelines of "international law" that were applicable to Colombia's peace negotiations were starkly different if we looked to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in San José than if we looked to the International Criminal Court in The Hague (Urueña 2017; Acosta-López and Murcia 2021). These are just two particularly prominent examples – the list could continue as we turn our gaze towards Washington, DC, Geneva, or New York City.

I – like many others, I suspect – first dealt with this "pull towards the international" through the exercise of *simulation.* Indeed, models and moot courts have long been used to first introduce students to the inner sanctum of "the international".[20] In my case, it was a simulation of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 2015, held in Washington, DC. I think it was only then that I started to think of pursuing a professional and academic career in this field in earnest. This was true for many of my peers who did other moot courts: today, one can participate in simulations of proceedings before the International Court of Justice, the World Trade Organization's Appellate Body (or whatever remains of it), international investment law panels, and even international criminal cases. In these spiritual exercises ("spiritual" insofar as they involve a structured pattern of scripted repetitions), one first learns to "rehearse" the contours of what might be a later professional practice (Werner 2019). Some of the older and more prestigious moot courts are even held in the actual "international sites" – for example, the Philip C. Jessup Moot Court Competition, which holds its final rounds in Washington, DC, or the Telders International Law Moot Court, where the last competition occurs within the very Great Hall of Justice of the Peace Palace itself.

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[18] See further Kennedy (2009).

[19] On my own reflections on the peace process, law, and transitional justice, see Ramírez-Gutiérrez and Quiroga-Villamarín (2022); Quiroga-Villamarín (2024). For an overview of the negotiations, see Freeman and Orozco Abad (2020).

[20] For example, see Strauss (1998); Paquette (2015: 84–110).

Moreover, "model assemblies", have long performed a similar function, starting with Model Assemblies of the League of Nations in the 1920s (The New York Times 1932: 68) and coming into their own in the 1940s with the establishment of Model United Nations programs around the world – and in the US, in particular (Mullenbach 2025). To participate in them, students flock from neighboring communities – as well as from quite far away –, simulating the traversing of the road to New York City. Indeed, as I remember these events, *movement* was central to their allure: not only as the thought experiment of placing yourself in the shoes of a foreign delegation, but also of going somewhere else to do so. Moreover, the political economy of such simulations has been structured around a hierarchy of model assemblies, ranging again from the very local to prestigious global events – often held in the US, sometimes on the very grounds of the UN itself. This was my experience both as a participating high school student and later as a university-level staff member at the National High School Model United Nations (NHSMUN). Typically, an ambitious team would try to move through the ranks, garnering prestige (and, sometimes, institutional funding) to then participate in a bigger simulation held farther away – and closer to the centers of "international" power. These simulations, I argue, can productively be read through the lenses of the anthropology of pilgrimage: not only do they provide an initiation ritual for newcomers, but they also attempt to recreate the experience of *movement* required to join the ranks of the community.

Given all my involvement in all of this, it is not that surprising that after finishing my legal studies I would continue my graduate education in a place created precisely "to teach the then emerging discipline of international studies and also to inculcate the 'Geneva spirit'" (Gorman 2012: 193). This term, first popularized by a pamphlet written to commemorate the first decade of the League of Nations in 1929 (Traz 1995), clearly harks back to the city's role as a refuge for European Protestants during the sixteenth century (Murray 2002: 194–195). In fact, some claim that "humanism and outward-looking spirit characteristic of the city of Calvin (…) had undoubtedly been strongly conducive to the exceptional development of international life" (700th Anniversary of the Swiss Confederation: 'The Humanitarian Spirit of Geneva' 1993: 388). Following this narrative, Calvin's legacy was later taken up by the Protestant humanitarian movements of "Second Great Awakening" (*Réveil*) in the century – crucially, for example, by the Christians involved in the creation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (Quiroga-Villamarín and León Marín 2022). Appropriately perhaps, the League of Nations held its first series of Assemblies in the Salle de la Réformation (nicknamed the "Calvinium"!), ratifying the close link between the pre-existing religious spatiality of Geneva as the "Protestant Rome" and the new spatial imaginary of "the international" that emerged after the Great War of 1914 (Herren 2017: 212). In fact, Geneva owes its role as the first site of early international institutions to the decisive intervention of the US President Woodrow Wilson. One of his aides firmly believed that "[n]o place upon our earth has such fitting claims to be the meeting place of the League of Nations as Geneva – unless it be Jerusalem" (Babík 2011: 852). These examples merely scratch the surface of a theme that has been examined in robust literature on the intimate connections between religious and internationalist sentiments (Bentwich 1933).

Thus, my own decision to embark to pursue "secular" studies in Geneva was built upon a previous infrastructure of religious movement and accumulated cultural capital. Sites of pilgrimage do not exist in isolation. They generate what Brumann aptly calls an "infrastructural corona around them"

that provides services to the pilgrim without being directly operated by the shrine in question.[21] In Geneva, I argue, what we see is that a the city's centuries-old tradition of serving as a "Protestant Rome" (and the infrastructural and cultural circuits that this generated) *directly* bolstered its selection as an "international" site of pilgrimage (Quiroga-Villamarín 2024a). This, in turn, reinforced its place as a key node in a wider religious constellation – hosting, for instance, the Ecumenical Centre of the World Council of Churches (Lodberg 1999). Beyond its place in the territory of the Swiss nation-state, the city Geneva continues to exist in a networks of adjacency that were created both before and after the republic of Geneva became the twenty-second canton of the Swiss Confederation in 1815 (Sherman 1918: 247).

The pilgrimage-like nature of the international institutions, however, can be best seen in relation to the Hague Academy of International Law, first held in 1923 ("The Hague Academy: A Centenary of Scholarship" 2024). Ever since, the "international city of peace and justice" has served as a hub for generations of students who flock each summer – and in recent years in winter, too – to join the ranks of the invisible college (Schachter 1977). As Van Leeuwen (2024: 8) has noted, this process of socialization did not just occur on "a theoretical level but also in the form of actual human encounters that took place in the lecture halls and tea rooms of the Hague Academy." As in Geneva, this new institutional set-up was built on The Hague's role as the site of the peace conferences of 1899 and 1907 – a third one was planned but it was interrupted by the outbreak of war in 1914 (see, generally, Caron 2000; Eyffinger 2007). The selection of the city owed much to the dynastic ties between the Dutch and Russian monarchs, as the event was formally convened by the Russian tsar who wished "to avoid entangling political questions that often press upon a great capital" (Tryon 1911: 472–473). As in Geneva, this institution has been enriched by its close relations with the judicial institutions established in the city: from the Permanent Court of Arbitration to the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court. For that reason, the academy functions as a veritable pathway into the profession. Moreover, years after their original studies, many former students return to the pilgrimage route as lecturers – now themselves conducting the rituals of initiation that they once experienced.

During my graduate studies in Geneva, I attended the Hague Academy twice. And despite the distance between these two cities, upon entering their international institutions there was an immediate sense of familiarity. As Mülli noted in her ethnographic work on the precarious but privileged interns who toil in these spaces, one quickly develops a "trained gaze to recognize 'UN people' in their pre-working attitude among the few locals" (2021: 13; see also Billaud 2015). Sometimes they make this easier by wearing their blue UN badges – although I agree with Mülli that this is mostly done by "UN newbies". But the most distinctive feature of these spaces is, of course, their long queues. Due to the securitized nature of these spaces – a development which I argue elsewhere is a product of the early seventies (Quiroga-Villamarín 2024a) – one experiences "long periods of queuing that, on busy days, stretch to thirty minutes and more – so it has become a joke among the interns to ask who had waited for the longest" (Mülli 2021: 15). Summing up this "ritualized everyday practice", Mülli describes how it "will eventually enhance our metamorphosis from civilians, still enrolled or recently graduated university students and early career professionals, into interns at one of the many UN organizations" (Mülli 2021: 15). This experience, which I first encountered as a high school student attending a Model UN at the Manhattan headquarters was

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[21] I thank Christoph Brumann for his pertinent feedback on this matter.

compounded by a later summer job as a research assistant in Geneva and got multiplied with each and every visit to the UN's archives – "the archives of universal history" in the words of Rothschild (2008) – during my doctorate. On every occasion, my (rather weak) Colombian passport was thoroughly inspected; most times, I walked down a gallery of flags before entering the halls of "the international". Like a pilgrim, I learned to recognize the iconography that signaled that, after a long journey, I had now reached my destination: the "palaces of hope" (Niezen and Sapignoli 2017).

And yet, despite the familiarity of all these institutions, elements of "the local" stubbornly stuck to the substance and form of these international shrines. In some cases, this was a deliberate decision taken by its creators – for instance, as I show with more detail elsewhere, Africa Hall in Addis Ababa was designed with the specific aim of embodying the promise of African decolonization as an architectural project (Quiroga-Villamarín 2024a). But even when such cultural considerations were not explicitly incorporated, "local" sensibilities found a way to creep into the mix. In view of this, it is thus not surprising that the UN's main office in the US would take an architectural form long associated with that nation: the skyscraper (Tafuri 1979). It is also not surprising, moreover, that precisely because of this a different formula was preferred for the UN's third headquarters in Vienna (Quiroga-Villamarín 2024a). The legal arrangements governing ownership, maintenance, and everyday operations of these different sites also vary substantially across places. While some buildings are actually owned by the UN (like the Manhattan or Geneva buildings) and are given extraterritorial status, others remain in the hands of the host states – like the headquarters in Vienna or the Palazzo FAO in Rome – and are leased to the institutions concerned. It would be a mistake, therefore, to think that a detailed study of any single place would suffice to make sense of the "everyday diplomacy" as a whole (Marsden, Ibañez-Tirado, and Henig 2016). "The international" should instead be seen as a "field (…) co-produced by different, yet interconnected global phenomena and in different places and across multiple scales" (Mülli 2021: 52; see also Margaria and Vetters 2024: 12).

Professional international lawyers aspire to effortlessly navigate these different spatial and temporal scales – and I suspect that many successful colleagues might actually do so! While I do not know where my journey might take me yet, I can think of many colleagues who spent their lives traversing the globe, jumping from one of these "international" nodes to the next. This is amplified by the seasonal and cyclical nature of many UN activities (Halme-Tuomisaari 2020). Since the first assembly of the League of Nations in 1920 (Gregory 1921), global plenaries of this sort have customarily been held in the Fall (normally, around September). For Alfred Zimmern, holder of the inaugural Woodrow Wilson Chair in the discipline we now call international relations, this yearly assembly constitutes "the first outward and visible manifestation of the authority of the Rule of Law in the World" (1939: 467). At the time of writing, the most recent of these conclaves was the 79th session of the UN General Assembly in New York City. The International Law Commission (an advisory body of lawyer-diplomats and professors), in turn, meets every summer – mostly in Geneva. Most major treaties or international organizations, especially if negotiated in the last three decades or so, also have built-in mechanisms for regular follow-up activities such as the "conference of the parties" (COP) events that have proliferated across the board. Accordingly, I know of many colleagues who seasonally migrate, like birds, following the UN's calendar of events: the price one must pay to become a truly "international" international lawyer. By foregrounding the experience of movement *between* sites, I wish to complement the robust ethnographical literature on legal work within individual international institutions (Meerssche 2022; Clements 2024) or on the movement

and vernacularization of norms across global space (Merry 2006) in the interdisciplinary project to create a lasting anthropology of international law (Halme-Tuomisaari 2016; Riles 2021; Margaria and Vetters 2024: 5–10; Foblets, Donahoe, and Sapignoli 2024).

In sum, movement – especially across borders and towards a series of specific sites – has a key role in our training and self-image as international lawyers. Perhaps this is not a new insight, but I suggest that it is one of the things that we tend to "discuss (…) only over cocktails" (Kennedy 2006: 649). My goal in this working paper has been to take this a step further and actually theorize global movement through the framework of the experience of pilgrimage as central to the disciplines – and hence, the process through which new subjects become *disciplined* into being students – of global law and policy. These processes create blind spots and biases (Kennedy 1999b) – but they also produce a shared sensibility for what it entails to think and work "through the international" (Brett, Donaldson, and Koskenniemi 2021). With this in mind, religion is more than "something we used to have" (Kennedy 1999a: 145). Rather, it appears as the conceptual infrastructure upon which a supposedly secular international legal practice of movement (Quiroga-Villamarín 2021) becomes logistically possible, intellectually recognizable, and professionally rewarding.

Concluding Remarks: the uneven flatness of our shared earth

Even if movement is a key element of our increasingly globalized world, we would do well to remember that its benefits are unevenly distributed (Urry 2012: 54). Indeed, "the international" has been produced as much by patterns of deeply rooted structures of immobility as by global flows of peoples, goods, and ideas (Honarmand Ebrahimi and Milford 2022). In fact, this asymmetry has been a central debate in the field of global history in the last couple of years. After an initial wave of scholarship that focused (almost) "exclusively on mobile people and things" (Drayton and Motadel 2018: 1), new perspectives are also stressing process of disconnection as fundamental to wider processes of global entanglement (Wenzlhuemer 2023). Foregrounding movement, as I have done in this working paper, does not mean that I uncritically adopt narratives about the alleged "flatness" of our seemingly connected world in this century (Friedman 2006). Rather, I want to conclude by noting that the processes of international legal education, which I have read through the lens of pilgrimage, also reproduce their own hierarchies regarding who can traverse these paths.

This question brings me back to the debate in the anthropology of pilgrimage: are these ritualized forms of movement a ratification of or a challenge to the status quo? For the Turners, the allure was in the latter aspect: pilgrimages as liminal moments in which traditional rules are suspended and "anti-structural" possibilities come to the fore (Turner 1991: 166–203). Their critics, conversely, saw pilgrimages as mechanism that reproduced social hierarchy – after all, those conducting the initiation had often been at the other end of the stick just some decades before. This same tension, I argue, also haunts the pilgrimage routes of "the international". In fact, not all pilgrims travel equally – even if they all pray bowing towards the same shrines and aspire to reach the same destination. The possibilities to engage in the sort of experience of transnational movement required to join the ranks of "the international community" are also quite unevenly distributed. The pilgrim's path is affected by differences such as: gender (perceived or otherwise); the color of passport (or skin); the "nativeness" of the pilgrim's language skills; or the availability of material resources (Halme-Tuomisaari 2018; Quiroga-Villamarín 2024a). Thus, it is not surprising that certain nationalities and backgrounds continue to be over-represented in "international" spaces, while others feel they are

bound to participate in a "never-ending race to catch-up with Western International Lawyers" (Emtseva 2022: 756).

For starters, the lion's share of these "international sites" are found in the North Atlantic region. It was only after years of struggle that the UN established its fourth – and last – major office site in Nairobi, Kenya (Volger 2010). As the "only UN Headquarters in the Global South" (as the website of its visitors' service proclaims),[22] the office in Nairobi has been hosted since 2011 in a visionary eco-friendly building that seeks to showcase the site's focus on environmental and housing issues. It serves, after all, as the main hub for the UN Environment Programme and the UN Human Settlements Programme. In Vienna, in turn, the focus lies on nuclear issues, along with questions of drugs and criminal justice (Desai and Schomerus 2018). "International Geneva" continues to be the hub for an enormous variety of issues – from human rights to global health; from the laws of war to the nexus between trade and development; from meteorology to communications. On the whole, the "alphabet soup" of institutions rooted there reveals continuities between the League of Nation's tradition of work on economic and social issues and the activities of its successor institution. And yet, questions of peace and security are jealously guarded by the Security Council in its Danish-designed chamber in New York City. The council has rarely left the Global North – and for that reason, its first African session in Addis Ababa in 1972 was particularly significant (Quiroga-Villamarín 2024a). In Washington, DC, somewhat separate from the other more "political" institutions (Pahuja 2011), are "technical" and "economic" agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. And beyond these main sites, other specialized agencies and bodies have offices scattered around the world, but their headquarters are almost exclusively found in the North Atlantic. This "geopolitical fragmentation" of the UN's family[23] promotes specialization along thematic lines. But it also bears witness to a hierarchy (generally hidden, but sometimes quite overt) of what – and who – matters within the institution. This is particularly clear when it comes to questions about how to (re)distribute the UN's already overextended budget.

Indeed, the "international" pilgrimage has its own political economy. Not only does it entail immaterial costs and sacrifices, but it also requires a very literal material contribution to the survival of the circuit. And, on top of this, partaking in *movement* requires being able to afford to move through the infrastructures of circulation. The liminality of the ritual would also require the pilgrim to stop her "normal" routine – and that, of course, is not a decision many can take lightly. As I explore with more detail elsewhere (Quiroga-Villamarín 2024a), civil society activists discover these challenges very quickly when they want to lobby in/against these institutions. While the struggle dates further back, it became particularly clear in the late seventies, culminating in the great summits of the nineties (Müller 2015: 14), when the "costs" of pilgrimage became a central concern for many non-governmental organizations. Those who wished to participate in the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights of 1993 had to seriously ponder the expenditures connected with it – assuming, of course, that they got visas to begin with (Quiroga-Villamarín 2024a). Finally, while the "international" has no language of its own, it has its own embedded linguistic hierarchies, too. In practice, speaking as an international lawyer requires mastery of both English and French, at the minimum. The centrality of these two languages for international communication has a long history

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[22] United Nations, "Visitors Service Nairobi", https://www.un.org/nl/node/116673 (accessed 5 February 2025).
[23] The idea of the UN as a geographically and functionally fragmented "family" of institutions is inspired by a question from Margaret Young during a presentation I gave at Melbourne Law School last year. I am grateful to her and her team at the Institute for International Law and the Humanities for hosting this event.

– and perhaps a contested present (Quiroga-Villamarín 2024b) – but it seems unlikely to change in the future.

For that reason, when we embark on the pilgrimage towards international lawyerdom, we all do so within material structures that centuries of unequal imperial rule have created in what is, in the abstract, a seemingly horizontal "international community". And yet, for all this notion's flaws (and the gaps between its lofty promise and the actual operations of international institutions), the scope of challenges we face are indeed planetary in scale. In fact, if such notion did not exist, we would probably have to invent it – and the same is true, I argue, for the UN and the institutions that sought to give this nebulous community a nebulous face. And here is where these routes of pilgrimage play an indispensable, if understudied role: in the creation of a common cultural community of international lawyering in the disciples of global affairs. For veterans, the real "international" might actually be the friends made along the way. For in this recurring patterns of interaction, ties of adjacency are created that go beyond "national identities" and create veritable global allegiances. Those who are subjected to these rituals emerge neither as radical liminal beings nor as thoroughly indoctrinated subjects, but as the keepers of shared language on the relation between law and the global – a language that is both absolutely indispensable and thoroughly inadequate for today's world.

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