CLOSING THE THEORY-PRACTICE GAP: PROSOPOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF SECRETARIES-GENERAL OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

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For the ROUNDTABLE at the International Studies Association Annual Convention, New Orleans, Thursday, 18 February 2010, 3:45-5:30 PM, TD47, Room: Terrebonne

Roundtable Abstract
One way to bridge the divide between scholars and practitioners and to deepen the understanding between theoretical analysis of international relations and real-life practice is to study the careers of international civil servants, in particular the Secretaries-General (SGs) of International Organizations (IOs). SGs – or other executive heads with different titles – are the chief executives and representatives of international bureaucracies that vary in size and shape. Although this position has standing within IR theory and many IO personalities are known for their roles in international politics, there is still a gap in our understanding of the people in these posts, both individually and collectively, in terms of who they are and how they affect the performance of IOs. The biographical literature on SGs is limited, giving an incomplete picture of the variety of people in these positions and the interactions among them. To overcome this shortcoming a biographical dictionary of SGs of IOs (IO BIO) is needed that would include short biographies of individual SGs and prosopographies of groups of SGs (descriptions of the social and professional connections of these individuals). This roundtable will discuss whether it makes sense to set up and edit such a dictionary, and, if so, what kind of dictionary it should be.

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A Biographical Dictionary of Secretaries-General of International Organizations

When I had finished writing my history of international organizations since 1815, I suddenly became aware that no biographical dictionary of secretaries-general of international organizations (IOs) was available. A biographical dictionary is a book, or a series of volumes, that attempts to cover the major personalities who share certain characteristics, for instance, the fact that they represent an IO, by collecting short biographies of these individuals. Articles are ordered alphabetically by entry name, beginning with the personal name under which the individual is entered, generally consisting of a surname, followed by one or more forenames: Waldheim, Kurt, or: Avenol, Joseph Louis Anne. Today’s simultaneous publication in print and electronically does not change the character of a biographical dictionary as a collection of short biographies. On the contrary, electronic publication adds to the success of such a project.

During the last decade more and more attention has been paid to IOs and also to the category of international civil servants that came into being during the 19th century, when the first IOs began to hire their own personnel. Although it is debated whether IOs ‘matter’, and hence those who represent them, there are also many IO personalities who have played their roles in international politics and are known to a wider public, such as the secretaries-general (SGs) of the United Nations, some directors-general of a few well-known specialized agencies as well as some commissioners of regional organizations. Short biographies of some of these SGs are available, for instance at websites of IOs, in the Historical Dictionary of International Organizations Series and in the Yearbook of International Organizations, which has a volume with ‘biographical information on eminent individuals associated with international organizations.’ Volume 6 of the 2009/2010 Yearbook is called Who’s Who in International Organizations and lists ‘over 19,514 presidents, general secretaries, executive directors, chairmen and other officers active in every field of human endeavor.’ However, this kind of Who is Who?, with a much larger group of officers than SGs, is not what I have in mind.

Having been one of the scientific editors of a biographical dictionary of persons from Dutch social movements (9 volumes and an open internet version; see www.iisg.nl/bwsa) I have enjoyed the selection of nearly 600 individuals who have played prominent roles in social politics and the description of their lives in relatively short texts. The three major differences between this type of Biographical Dictionary and the Who’s Who mentioned above are: 1) that our biographical dictionary included a selection of principal actors, rather than ‘all eminent persons,’ 2) that it included deceased people only, rather than living persons only, and 3) that all entries about the individuals were written according to scientific standards, rather than providing a catalogue of biographical details. My awareness that in the field of IOs a similar biographical dictionary was missing resulted in the idea of setting up and editing a Biographical Dictionary of Secretaries-General of International Organizations (IO BIO).

Among the contributors to our biographical dictionary of persons from social movements between 1860 and 1940 were both scholars (mostly trained historians and political scientists) and ‘practitioners.’ The last group was brought in during the 1950s, when the editing of the biographical dictionary started, because these practitioners, who had participated in various pre-war social movements, were willing to act as contributors and were considered as valuable primary sources on individuals they had known personally. The editors continued to embrace this idea of contributions by persons who in one way or another knew certain tendencies among the social movements ‘from inside,’ for instance, catholic authors dealing with catholic personalities or communist ones dealing with communists. This overlap definitely was not general policy; but the availability of qualified potential contributors played a role as well. During a later phase of the dictionary this group of contributors consisted of
younger people, who however had similar relations, either through their background or family relations. The main advantage of their contributions was an understanding of the specific social context and of cultural or other peculiarities that were much harder to get by ‘outsiders.’ Sometimes specific but crucial information about persons was available only through these ‘relatives.’ The main disadvantage, however, was the danger of prejudices stemming from political, religious or whatever conviction that would typify the short biographies in the dictionary, whereas the editors wanted a dictionary with balanced descriptions, paying attention to all tendencies, visions and persons without prejudice or bias.

The problem with some of the ‘relatives’ (both in the wider sense of the word and in the case of family) was that they were unable, and sometimes unwilling, to take more distance. Some of them even attempted to still win certain battles from the past, but now in the written biography. Apart from this undesired undertone, some contributors refused to include certain failures or disputed periods in the subject’s life or work, or refused to include certain persons who had played a role in the subject’s life, simply because they did not like to mention them. Other disputes between editors and such contributors were about the inclusion of women, private facts or affairs that had played a role in the subject’s public life (‘rather not mention that’) and obvious missteps or relations with questionable persons. Many contributors with strong institutional relations (such as with political parties, interest groups, unions, historical institutions, circles, etc.) were inclined to defend their institution’s policies and traditional believes to a large extent, rather than question them, given the distance in time and available sources or evidence. Much to the disappointment of the editors this was reflected once and again in the submitted descriptions of persons. Although it sometimes was possible to agree on a more balanced biography, for instance, by having the text co-authored, it also came to refusals of contributors and of texts.

This relationship between scholars and practitioners who still are related to their ‘old’, or even present, IO is something to be discussed in this IO BIO project, where practitioners will be important sources of information, but may also be hindered by institutional ties. Despite my critical reflections I am in favor of including practitioners in the IO BIO project, given their real-life practice and detailed knowledge of both personal and institutional peculiarities. However, the quality of contributions does depend on an open mind.

One of the interesting aspects of the combination of lives in a biographical dictionary is that many of these people lived in roughly the same time periods, met each other, coalesced together and often quarreled or clashed on policies and/or in actions. Learning about these interactions and ‘group’ aspects, covered by the term prosopography, deepens the understanding of historical developments, because the reader of the dictionary learns the range of positions represented by those portrayed in the book. The roundtable at the ISA Annual Convention in New Orleans has been set up to discuss whether it makes sense to set up and edit such a Biographical Dictionary of Secretaries-General of International Organizations, and, if so, what kind of dictionary this IO BIO should be. Participants in the roundtable will comment on four main questions:

1) Are Secretaries-General of IOs an interesting group to discuss international relations and the divide between scholars and practitioners?
2) Who shall be regarded as SG of an IO and should individuals who do not hold the formal position but have made an important or significant contribution to the work of an IO be included?
3) How should the prosopographies be organized and made relevant for international relations theory?
4) Is there any value to including the SGs or chief executives of International NGOs?
Given these questions I will provide some information about the art of writing short biographies and setting up a biographical dictionary, such as:

- the biographical genre: great wo/men and complex personalities; the individual and his or her environment
- the prosopographic dimension
- an entry in a biographical dictionary: three sections
- two methodological aspects: myth-making and coherence in a life
- three categories of entries
- who to include: secretaries-general only, or also others?
- which IOs to include: which IGOs?, and also INGOs?
- what to include for the prosopographic dimension?
- a team of editors and contributors.

At the end of the paper I will also provide a model biography of Joseph Avenol, the second SG of the League of Nations (1933-1940), which will show some of the problems related to the writing of these entries.

The Biographical Genre: Great Wo/Men and Complex Personalities

Let me start with some explanation of the ‘short biography’ and the modern biographical tradition. The best known examples of biographies are the larger ones published as books. Instead, I will deal with the shorter biographies of one to eight pages in length, ranging from, let’s say, 400 to 3,000 words, also referred to as ‘biographies in miniature’ or ‘mini-sized portraits,’ because that is what I have in mind for the SGs of IOs.1

Since these short biographies aim to present an accurate and coherent description of the lives of those who contributed to their trade, country or era, they are expected to go beyond the mere catalogue of data as presented by a Who is Who?. The genre of the biographical dictionary with short biographies dates from the 19th century, but these early dictionaries are not the first examples of biographies in series. In his Bioi paralleloi Plutarch (±46-±120) described and compared the lives of Greeks and Romans (for instance, Alexander and Caesar) and related then to fate, gods and the world. For Plutarch the philosopher moral and psychological functions were more important than historical description. Beginning in the 16th century Plutarch’s biographies gained new attention, both in literature and politics, as they emphasized the lives of ‘great men’ and as such played a role during the French Revolution of 1789. In 1861 Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869) criticized his own History of the Girondins (1847) for not having maintained enough distance from what had really happened: revolution turned into tyranny. However, he did not entirely reject his portraits of the revolutionaries as he still considered them to be of value. This was confirmed by his later Dutch editor J.A.G. Tans, who argued that his descriptions of Mirabeau, Robespierre and many others in the forefront of political change represent the ideas and passions, faults and virtues of that era (De Lamartine 1989).

Although the appeal of ‘great persons,’ so essential for Plutarch and De Lamartine, has remained a crucial component of biography as an art, scholarly explanation has become more important. The new genre of short biographies in series which arose in the late-19th and 20th century, such as the English Men of Letters series (1878-1913) and many national or specialized biographical dictionaries, contain shorter or longer biographies of men and women important in the fields of culture, politics or economics. Built on the paradigm of the ‘modern biography’ this new genre basically produces more or less coherent lives representing complex personalities as part of, and contributing to, their time.

Modern biography evolved on the basis of three related key elements: 1) the individual at the center, 2) the complex personality, and 3) the individual in his or her time. According to James Clifford it was S.T. Coleridge who in 1810 identified a new cultural configuration
which he termed ‘the age of personality.’ The modern biographical genre took shape in this context of ‘individualism,’ and as part of ‘Western, humanist, industrialized culture,’ as Clifford (1978:42) shows. From the French perspective of Daniel Madelènát modern biography arose from the crisis of values in Greek-Latin humanism, Christian religion and rationalism. ‘Darwinism and scientific psychology consider man as an object amidst other objects, subjected to laws governing his functioning and the evolution of living beings.’ Old doctrines like those of passion and reason, body and soul, or temperament and character, and the concept of the ‘exemplary person, master of himself and his actions’ have been replaced by complex schemes of explanatory hypotheses and scientific theories: ‘words, attitudes and behavior have become the functions of a hidden and unconscious structure.’ Even personal letters and diaries are distrusted because they tend to self-justification or the rationalization of behavior (Madelènát 1984:63-64 - all translations from non-English sources are mine). For the Dutch historian Jan Romein distinctive features of modern scholarly biography are: 1) the open-mindedness of the biographer, 2) the ability to fathom the subject psychologically, and 3) the complexity of the mental picture (Romein 1946:92).

The Individual and His or Her Environment
For the Dutch biographer Jan Fontijn biographical explanation entails the revelation of general causes which may determine the individual life. Such explanations can be undertaken from psycho-analytical, medical, sociological and socio-historical perspectives and theories (Fontijn 1992:67ff). However, the relation between the individual and his or her environment is more problematic than it seems, since some theories leave room for individual actors – realism, for instance, draws attention to heads of state in the context of international relations (cf. Girard 1994) – while other theories, such as economic determinism and structuralism, refer to larger processes and power relations and leave hardly any room for individual dramatis personae. By now there is a widespread consensus that a biographer has to portray a ‘hero’ in the context of his or her time. Fontijn points out that to create the socio-historical context most biographers adopt a dialectical model based on a ‘permanent interplay between a hero and his or her environment.’ As active agents the heroes or heroines are supposedly able to exert at least some influence over their environment. (Fontijn 1992:82). For the Dutch biographer Ger Harmsen the biographer’s ability to find and reveal ‘the hinge between life and work, and between the individual and the collective historic event,’ is decisive for the quality of a biography. After all, it is this hinge that should be demonstrated ‘on the basis of public behavior and deeds’ engaged in by those persons who are supposedly important enough in political, cultural or scientific matters to be eligible for a biography’ (Harmsen 1990:567).

Romein (1946:170) considers it a fundamental mistake of biographies not to include social information which is indispensible for the understanding of a person. Such information may include ‘generational memories’ (Schuman and Scott 1989) or important contemporary political, economic or cultural trends. For Ton Gabriels, editor of a biographical dictionary, a successful mini-biography illuminates the personality, preferably by mentioning some peculiarities from the personal life. He feels that life and work should be treated as interrelated and that an effort at psychological explanation should be encouraged (Gabriels 1992:55-56). Some authors argue that a characteristic detail or a well chosen anecdote may be helpful here. Sam Dresden (1956:99) points out that a part cannot stand for the whole, but agrees that an anecdote may help to catch the sense or essence of a life story. Igor Cornelissen (1993:13), who favors the use of anecdotes, emphasizes that authors tend to omit them, in particular if they are a bit vulgar or negative.

This brings us to the larger and elder problem of using ‘private’ information. While Jan Romein (1946:42) agreed that a new kind of biography emerged in the 19th century, he
drew attention to the fact that the note of freedom that marked the 18-century Georgian biography was lost in the Victorian biography, with its greater degree of dignity and prudery. Lytton Strachey, author of *Portraits in Miniature* (1931), should be mentioned here because of his irony, the display of glamour and the lifelike characterization in his portraits. Later on democratization and the increase of ‘openness’ in society made for a greater degree of frankness and directness in biographies, as witness the biographical style of ‘debunking.’ But even if we have become accustomed to the idea that personal documents and interviews may reveal much about the private life (Clio ‘peeping through the keyhole,’ as the historian Jacques Presser (1969:283) would have it, and the personal being political, as the women’s movement claimed in the 1970s), short biographers in general still tend to be reserved in presenting details from the private life, even if they matter, as is borne out by my personal editorial experience. This attitude may well stem from the conviction that the public sphere should be stressed, as public facts are supposedly more ‘reliable.’

**The Prosopographic Dimension**

The aforementioned idea of an individual whose performance contributes to the public sphere and who is to be understood as a personality subject to internal and external ‘laws’ also underlies the short biography, notwithstanding its circumscribed length. As reference works (preferably made more easily accessible through indexes) biographical dictionaries aim to present accurate and understandable descriptions, both of prominent persons and of those not important enough to merit a lengthy biography. The description of individual lives as part of a series gives the genre a prosopographic dimension, because it deals with representatives of a smaller or larger group, such as national or regional celebrities, women, artists, socialist leaders, or SGs, who in many respects are interrelated. Even if individual authors are not fully aware of this dimension, the mere inclusion of certain vitae contributes to their formation or ‘construction’ as a group (think, for example, of the discussion of national identity or heritage) and to the understanding of individual lives as part of that group. As an editor of a biographical dictionary on social and political movements and as a scholar I enjoy reading about disputes between individuals in these movements. The different points of view adopted in a dispute add to my understanding both of that dispute and of the characters engaged in it. Another step is to examine to what extent individual lives reveal broader common dimensions (such as the political and cultural climate of an era or group), larger social processes taking place, or related phenomena like the evolution of gender relations.

In order to get hold of these interactions it is one of the tasks of the editors of a biographical dictionary to make sure that the right persons are included in the dictionary and that in the various individual descriptions the interactions are made explicit. Both editors and contributors need to be aware of these and to be willing to deal with the interactions with an open mind. In order to promote the prosopographic dimension the instructions for contributors need to make this clear.

The real prosopographic ‘picture’ cannot be taken until the work for the dictionary will have been finished, which may be a disappointment, but it may also be possible, and even desirable, to have some kind of ‘pilot’ in an earlier phase and, if necessary, to revise and sharpen the instructions (and even revise earlier texts).

**An Entry in a Biographical Dictionary: Three Sections**

Each entry in a biographical dictionary is composed of three sections: 1) biographical data, 2) the account of life and work, and 3) the reference section. Certain personal facts (parents, marriages, children, death and the like) are mentioned in a special section at the beginning of the entry. The main section of an entry is a description of the individual life and career plus a short assessment. The reference section at the end contains details about publications,
literature and archives. In this section I will go into the question of what an entry in a biographical dictionary looks like. To clarify the difference with a *Who is Who?* I will first quote what is listed in the entries in the biographical volume of the *Yearbook of International Organizations* and then describe an entry as it is published by the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and, if appropriate, supplement this with my own experience.

The profiles of the *Who’s Who in International Organizations* of the *Yearbook* are made up of four elements: career information, personal information, educational information and addresses. The first three are the most relevant ones here. *Career information* reveals ‘previous and current positions in organizations, commercial enterprises, educational institutions; titles of published works; participation at recent significant conferences; field of work.’ *Personal information* reveals ‘complete name, including titles and aliases; honours conferred; nationality; date and place of birth; family; leisure interests.’ *Educational background* deals with ‘academic degrees, dates and names of educational institutions.’ All details covered by these elements are presented as facts in a catalogue, as condensed as possible, often using abbreviations in order to have sufficient space.

The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford DNB) is a collection of by now nearly 57,000 biographies, which describe the lives of people ‘from all walks of life who shaped British history worldwide.’ It includes people ‘who have left a mark for any reason, good, bad, or unusual.’ Entries offer ‘detailed and extensive biographical information drawn from primary and secondary sources.’ They range from ‘a few dozen to 35,000 words in length.’

I will first discuss the first and the third sections as they are mainly factual, with the information presented according to a fixed format. Both sections are relevant for the prosopographic dimension and, given the format, easily researchable with regard to general aspects, such as nationality, generation, religion, marriage, occupation, etc.

**The First Section**

Often the first section of an entry is printed in bold. Oxford DNB provides in its first section a person’s:

- full name at birth and name changes throughout life
- dates and places of birth, baptism, marriage, death and burial
- parent’s names, life dates and occupations
- records of siblings and other noteworthy family members (in the Dutch dictionary we restricted ourselves to the numbers of daughters and sons)
- education history (in the Dutch dictionary this information is part of the second section).

Oxford DNB gives life dates immediately after the entry name and title (if any) and it also gives an indication of the occupation or field of interest of the person. This is a statement of the principal occupation, activities, or field of interest for which the person is included in the dictionary. This ‘occupational descriptor’ is intended to help the reader to identify the person quickly and in a general context. While Oxford DNB prefers a generic rather than a specific description and a factual rather than an evaluative statement, other dictionaries tend to the opposite.

Many biographical dictionaries are without portraits of the entry’s subject, but some include a portrait, or if this is missing an appropriate illustration. If Oxford DNB includes an illustration, it is placed near the head of the article, with a short descriptive caption. In our Dutch biographical dictionary we have included photographs or other images, much to the satisfaction of our readers and contributors (although it sometimes was hard to find one).
The Third Section
The third section of an entry in a biographical dictionary appears at the end of the article. It also has a fixed format. The Oxford DNB reference section lists:

- Primary and secondary works consulted by the author of the biography
- Paper, film and sound archives for further research
- Portrait likenesses
- Where known, details of wealth at death.

Now that library catalogues are so full and abundant, Oxford DNB does no longer include a complete list of a person’s published works within the account of the life, but encourages contributors to bring out in the text of the second section the significance of the person’s principal publications.

In my Dutch biographical dictionary we called the third section APL, because of the information about her or his Archives, the Publications of the subject and the Literature available about him or her. We attempted to avoid double mentioning of publications by the rule that when a publication was mentioned in the second section, it should not be mentioned in the third section under Publications. We preferred a separate list of publications, because it gave an overview of what a person has written, but also enabled people not acquainted with the subject’s background to find relevant publications. Obviously, in many cases a selection has to be made: only the most relevant publications can be included in short biographies and only the principal ones can be included in the second section.

The Second Section
The second section of an entry in a biographical dictionary is most often chronological, from birth to death. Periods and phases, divided by watersheds, either follow the stages of the life or trace the public or artistic career. Rather than daily routines the entry highlights the subject’s contributions to his or her trade, profession or era. Entries conclude with an evaluation of the person and his or her work, often by reference to literature. In the text other persons are mentioned only if they were crucial to the subject’s achievement. These references are most relevant for the prosopographic dimension. The same goes for social events and other contextual information. The second section does not have a fixed format. However, the instructions for contributors should see to it that the relevant aspects of the prosopographic dimension should be discussed. I will come back to these below.

Oxford DNB editor Colin Matthew argues that an entry should be ‘accurate, informative, clear, and interesting to read.’ Its purpose is to give a ‘complete and balanced account of the life and work of its subject by supplying both detailed personal information and a general assessment of the subject’s significance.’ The entry should deliver ‘essential factual information predictably,’ but nonetheless remain a ‘literary text.’ Authors of the Oxford DNB are encouraged to write accessibly for the general reader and to ‘treat lives in the round rather than focus on one aspect to the exclusion of others.’ The entry should take the form of a biographical narrative, ‘primarily a piece of prose and not a database with prose added.’ Unlike in earlier versions of the dictionary, this narrative should include an ‘ample treatment of context, a more integrated treatment of personal relationships, and (in longer articles) fuller attention to the person’s long-term reputation.’ If in the longer articles personal relationships are included in the second section, they are placed in their chronological location, while the account of death and burial occurs at or near the end, as goes for the account of the subject’s posthumous reputation.

Two Methodological Aspects: Myth-Making and Coherence in a Life
Writing a short biography is an art which also requires critical perspectives. Two methodological aspects should be mentioned here, the avoidance of myth-making and the
issue of coherence in a life. With regard to the avoidance of myth-making one needs to emphasize the importance of a scholarly methodology, such as the collecting and dating of documents, and the search for critical perspectives provided by witnesses (Madelénat 1984:64). The necessity of using original sources cannot be stressed enough, also for the short biography, because the secondary literature extant about a person may not be very informative, overly detailed or contradictory, or it may present a mythical account that has outlived its usefulness or relevance for the present. Clifford’s book *From Puzzles to Portraits* (1970) underlines this necessity.

The issue of coherence in life, the second methodological aspect to be mentioned, leads to questions like: To what extent was a person a coherent being? Or, is it the biographer who, through his or her interpretation of connections and cohesion, constructs a coherent personality that may never have existed as such? Is there a ‘unity’ of person, as Jan Romein (1946:164-66) supposes, and is there a core or essence that can be captured in language (‘that must be the way he was’)? Or is Sem Dresden right to contend that a life is far more uncertain, indefinite, vague and mysterious than any description or evocation? James Clifford rejects the belief of many biographers in the existence of ‘a self.’ He speaks of an ‘underlying mythic pattern in our culture’ which finds expression in biographies (and probably to an even larger extent in biographical dictionaries). He calls this pattern the ‘myth of personal coherence’ and argues that the demand to deliver a self ‘ensures that its rendering of the person will emphasize closure and progress towards individuality, rather than openness and discontinuity.’ Thus, many short biographers suppose that a career follows an ascending line. A personal eye opener was the publication of short biographies written by a Dutch trade union’s bookkeeper. Perhaps as the result of his trade, in which he would habitually record the up- and downward movement of his union’s finances, this man had no inhibition to record downward career moves or less than handsome affairs in his portraits (Brug, Van den Hurk et al. 1995). I agree with Clifford that even in the short biography it should be possible to ‘portray a more open, less complete, person and thus to create a less centered biography’ (Clifford 1978:44-46).

**Three Categories of Entries**

Entries in a biographical dictionary can be longer and shorter. The variety in importance among the persons included in the dictionary may lead to a classification, such as people from the 1st, 2nd or 3rd category. Those from the 1st category, the most important ones, are allowed more words for the description of their lives, for instance five to eight pages (or better an equivalent number of words), while those from the 2nd category are allowed two to three pages and those from the 3rd category only one or two pages. My Dutch dictionary did not opt for entries of roughly the same length, but for three categories, with 2,000 to 3,000 words, all included, for the 1st category, 800 to 1,200 words for the 2nd category and 400 to 700 words for the 3rd category.

While the 1st category was relatively easy to define as the main leaders, original figures and initiators, the 2nd category included those who were mainly institutionally active (for instance, a broad group of trade union leaders) or were engaged in spreading the ideas (propagandists, authors, journalists, priests) or engaged in important incidents (strikes, campaigns, political and other events). Many of these were not important enough to merit a lengthy biography (with some exceptions, of course), but important enough to be eligible for a short biography in this dictionary, which tried to get an overview of the entire social movements it tried to cover. The 3rd category was made up of the ‘lesser, but still interesting gods,’ such as people engaged in specific, worthwhile events, local activists, artists, publishers and the like.
The dictionary tried to avoid of including ‘too many of the same kind.’ Hence, if we wanted to have three or four typical representatives of catholic or socialist trade unionists, we selected the most obvious ones and rejected the inclusion of similar figures, unless they were important for another reason: also a member of parliament, the organizer of an important campaign, a philosopher or theoretician, the publisher of a relevant journal, etc. Since our draft lists were published a few times, we received feedback and were able to include persons who we had not selected ourselves in the first place. And in a few cases we also decided to not include certain persons or we lowered their category.

My Dutch dictionary has used these categories to its satisfaction, although it could be argued that the border lines between the categories have remained disputable. In practice, some of the entries of the 3rd category were two pages rather than one. During the completion of our dictionary we found out that the original size of entries in numbers of words was too restricted. Hence, we enlarged the number of words for the three categories. The first two published volumes are evidently thinner than the later ones, while each volume has about the same number of entries in it. Other biographical dictionaries, including the Oxford one, went through similar processes of enlarging the entries, mainly because more words would allow the author to give a more complete and balanced account of the life and work of those included. For the prosopographic dimension more extensive texts are preferred to condensed ones.

I suggest that for SGs of IOs a categorization will be helpful as well, be it that such a categorization has to be elaborated. Not all SGs of all IOs have been of equal weight. Some can be easily part of the 1st category of initial and principal actors in international relations, while others can be part of a 2nd category of important institutionally active leaders, whereas some SGs are not eligible for a short biography at all; others may be included in the 3rd category of the lesser gods.

A potential 4th category could be created for those who will not receive a text, but will only be mentioned by name, function, IO name and years in office (in case we want to mention all SGs of the IOs included). An overview of all SGs of IOs has to be constructed anyway, in order to decide who will be eligible for a short biography in the IO BIO. A first inventory of SGs of IOs can be found in the Rulers Project, which contains lists of heads of state and government. It also has a selection of IOs, with lists of SGs, providing for their years in office and their years of birth and death. Other helpful sources are the lists of interviews set up by, among others, the United Nations Intellectual History Project, the International Labor Organization and the UNESCO Oral Archives Initiative.

Who to Include: Secretaries-General Only, or Also Others?

Who is eligible for a short biography in the, as it is called now, Biographical Dictionary of Secretaries-General of International Organizations? For me SGs are the first group to be discussed, as is found in the project’s title. The term SG stands for other executive heads with different titles, such as director, director-general, president, managing director, etc. They are the chief executives and representatives of international bureaucracies.

If we take all intergovernmental organizations together (let’s say, some 250) during the entire period of their existence (quite some years by now), we will have a large number of candidates eligible for inclusion in a biographical dictionary with three categories as explained above. We may discern two qualities of SGs, which is the leadership of a bureaucracy and the role of politician in international relations. Not every SG takes, or wants to take, the latter role; however, those who play both roles will have better chances of being included in the 1st category, while most of those who are only bureaucratic leaders, or only politicians, may end up in the 2nd or 3rd category, or may not be included at all. It seems to me
that we should not include all SGs, but only those who have left a mark on IOs and international relations. What exactly this mark is, needs to be elaborated.

Given the fact that many IOs are large bureaucracies, we may raise the question of adding persons who do not hold the formal position of SG, but have contributed remarkably to the work and functioning of an IO. One way to define this second group would be to enlarge the group of SGs to also include under SGs (for instance, Lakhdr Brahimi) or deputy SGs (for instance, Louise Fréchette). Many of these have played important roles, either within the bureaucracy or in international relations, and are well-known for this. This second group raises two questions: 1) How deep do we go into the organization? and 2) Who to include because they contributed remarkably to the work of the IO, but did not have a formal position as SG? With regard to the first question, do we include, for instance in the case of the UN, the regional economic commissions, or in the case of the European Union, do we include the Presidents of the European Parliament, or do we restrict ourselves to the Presidents of the European Commission? The more parts of bureaucracies are included, the larger the number of entries in the biographical dictionary. If we restrict ourselves to the SGs, however, we may ‘loose’ persons who are well-known but not included. With regard to the second question we may think of Raúl Prebisch before he was executive secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America, Brian Urquhart as a personal assistant to Trygve Lie, or Ralph Bunch as a mediator. Later all of them received positions as executive secretary or under SG, however these examples may help us to define the answer to the two questions of the level of the organization we want to be represented and the group of people whose lives are connected to the history of IOs. Examples can be taken also from IOs other than the UN.

Finally there is a third group of persons who may be included, those of the outsiders who nonetheless left their mark on IOs, without being part of their bureaucracy. I just mention people like Woodrow Wilson and Jan Smuts. Eleanor Roosevelt may be mentioned in this respect, as she served as the chair of the UN Commission on Human Rights and also as US ambassador to the UN, but did not belong to the UN staff. Not belonging to the staff of an IO would be a serious argument not to include this third group.

Restricting ourselves to the SGs is the easiest answer, because that provides us with a clear category of functionaries, but this leaves out others who have played their prominent roles, either as staff members deeper in the organization or as outsiders. For a prosopographic analysis the inclusion of staff members other than SGs has the advantage of covering a larger group of eminent persons, and it does not exclude an analysis of SGs as such.

Which are the tricky questions left?

1. How many entries do we want to have in the IO BIO? Do we want to use a system of three categories? And do we want to include more people than SGs, as discussed above? These questions are related to each other. One of the things to be discussed is the number of entries in the IO BIO (500, 1,000, more?) in relationship to the editorial team’s capacities.

2. Do we include all persons, or only deceased ones (for instance, before 1 January 2010)? Unlike a Who’s Who? biographical dictionaries actually assess the life and work of those elected for a biography. Both family members and related institutions happen to be strongly interested in these biographies from the perspective of their own interests (whether true or not). This makes it difficult to include living persons and is the reason that most biographical dictionaries restrict themselves to deceased people. Short biographies as published by biographical dictionaries often differ from the official ones used by institutions. These differences, as is borne out by personal experience, are the ones that may cause serious differences of opinion, when living persons are included.

3. Should we have an open eye for women and other underrepresented groups? Given the fact that most institutions have had trouble in recognizing such groups, it may be expected that when composing the list of entries, special attention needs to be paid to such groups. It
should be discussed which these groups are in the international context of IOs. We may think also of racial groups, regional groups and politically controversial groups.

**Which IOs to Include? Which IGOs? And also INGOs?**

It is necessary to go through lists of IOs in order to decide which ones will be included. We may start with the usual suspects: global institutions such as the League of Nations, the UN, its specialized agencies (which immediately raises the problem with regard to the many funds and programs or other entities created under the aegis of the UN), and international courts. Taken together these make quite a number. We may also include intercontinental organizations, such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development OECD and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation APEC, and regional IOs (both the culturally and the economically defined ones, for instance, the Organization of American States and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations ASEAN respectively). By now, there are quite a few regional organizations. The *Yearbook of International Organizations* mentions 35 universal IOs, 33 intercontinental ones and 178 regionally defined ones in 2005. My point of departure would be to start with all of them, but to make selections with regard to UN bodies and regional organizations. Whatever selection, it should be attempted to cover all fields of policy and all regions. With regard to the time period I am inclined to cover the entire period from the second half of the 19th century until 2010. This does not mean that every organization or SG should be included. But it would be strange to not include the forerunners. A practical aspect is that it will be difficult to find contributors who are willing and able to write biographies of these forerunners, but this will also be true for many SGs who were in office during more recent time periods. Generally speaking, it may be assumed that little information is available about the heads of less prominent IOs. Here practitioners may be important sources.

The trickiest question here is whether to also include international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). The easiest answer is to not include them, because they are outsiders, or at most have a consultative status. Hence they are not staff members of IGOs, let alone prominent ones. However, it could be argued that some IOs started as INGOs, or that some INGOs have had a major impact on the functioning of IOs, such as Amnesty International, which created a break with the existing UN protocol of governments not criticizing each other in the field of human rights. INGOs are also regarded as bringing new issues to the agendas of IGOs and contributing to new ideas and international standards. This could be a reason to include a selected group of SGs of INGOs, because of their impact on the functioning of IGOs.

**What to Include for the Prosopographic Dimension?**

Although one of the characteristics of individuals is that they are unique, there are a few elements that groups of individuals, such as SGs, have in common. With regard to the prosopographic dimension I can imagine three main categories: 1) origins, 2) career, and 3) contacts with other actors. These categories need to be elaborated, but here are the essentials.

**Origin** Each entry will inform us with details about the origins of SGs, such as nationality, the social position of parents, including aspects such as gender and race relations, religion, political and other views, marriage, education and previous positions in national bureaucracies. These aspects taken together will tell us from which backgrounds the group of SGs is recruited and how it has been educated. It may be assumed that in the case of IOs it will be possible to discern subgroups, for instance, according to regions or continents, but also along other lines.

**Career** This aspect allows mapping the career development of individuals within the bureaucratic context of IOs. The main elements may be impact (success and failures) and
leadership (bureaucratic, political, intellectual). Which career patterns will emerge? It seems crucial to investigate not only successes, which may be obvious because otherwise the individual would not have reached the top, but also examples of (near) failure, because these will show what kind of troubles an individual meets when going up in an international bureaucracy. It may be assumed that impediments in career development may be similar in various organizations. Hence, the impact dimension will reveal both individual capacities and institutional aspects. The study of SGs resulting in information about the various forms of leadership exercised by the selected SGs may help us to understand leadership as a possible explanatory variable in international relations.

Contacts with other actors The social and professional connections of SGs with other SGs, as well as with heads of state and government and other actors, such as the representatives of INGOs, will help us to sharpen our understanding of the political and other roles of SGs in international relations and the networks they have established. These dimensions have hardly been researched. A biographical dictionary may help to map them.

It may be obvious that these elements have to be thought through in order to be able to instruct the contributors to the biographical dictionary correctly and precisely. If the relevant aspects are not included in the various entries, it will be difficult to make the envisaged prosopographic analyses. This eventually brings us to some organizational aspects of setting up an IO BIO, such as a team of editors, contributors, resources and a publisher.

A Team of Editors and Contributors
In order to set up and complete a biographical dictionary a team of editors and contributors is required, with editors also being contributors. Both editors and contributors should be independent persons, who are free to write what they believe is correct. They may be former practitioners, but they should write in an independent capacity. Given the assumption that it is not easy to complete a biographical dictionary, and that it will not be easy to find sufficient and qualified contributors another requirement for editors is that they are willing to serve for a longer time period, let’s say at least five years. There is far more to say about these organizational aspects. Here I restrict myself to the major aspects of the preparation phase.

What should an initial group of editors do?
- They should decide about the size of the IO BIO, which includes decisions about:
  - the types and numbers of IOs to be included
  - the types and numbers of SGs to be included, with an open eye for certain underrepresented groups
  - the categorization of SGs.
- They should write draft instructions for the contributors, covering the three sections and focused on the prosopographic dimension of the project.
- They should design a time schedule for the entire project.
- They should see to it that lists of IOs and SGs, decisions taken and instructions are being discussed widely among both scholars and practitioners before being finalized.
- They should prepare an editorial team that is willing to serve a five-year duty.
- They should set up a website and decide what should be on it, such as lists of IOs and SGs; available biographical information about SGs; a list of entries to choose from; a list of draft entries; and maybe also a list of finalized entries. Experience shows that website visitors read (draft) texts, comment on them and suggest valuable revisions and supplements. Another possible avenue for the project is a wiki construction. I have not enough experience with such an approach, but it can be part of the debate; as far as I can see it would not change the fundamental questions raised above. Web 2.0 offers various attractive opportunities, but also requires more ICT expertise and organizational resources than the maintenance of a ‘simple’ website.
They should find resources and other kinds of support for the project. Resources for the initial phase will be restricted (website and e-mail are available; meetings could be scheduled during international conferences).

They should talk to a publisher. I have talked to Routledge, which has published many books on IOs, and Craig Fowlie has assured me to be interested. To reach an agreement time schedules, website and book plans must be more specific and concrete.

They should find the first contributors among both scholars and practitioners.

If you are interested in participation in this IO BIO project, either as contributor or as editor, please let me know: b.reinalda@fm.ru.nl.

This paper is also available at my website www.ru.nl/fm/reinalda.
MODEL BIOGRAPHY

This model biography is not tailored to one of the three categories, but is meant to illustrate the general structure of an entry as well as the problems related to writing such entries. For instance, are all genealogical data available? I always start writing the first and third sections, because I want to have a complete overview of the genealogical and literature data. Where data are missing I will try to retrieve them by checking and addressing institutions, such as genealogical bureaus, archives and libraries (Dag Hammarskjöld Library, Library of Congress, Bibliothèque nationale de France, British Library, etc.). In the beginning I prefer longer lists of publications and literature, rather than shorter ones, because selection may take place later (not every foreword needs to be mentioned). Missing data are highlighted in the entry below. But I can imagine that there will be debate about personal elements to be included in a biography (his personal life), missing or superfluous elements, or judgements that may be reflected as a result of the sources used (for instance, Barros’ biography, or Wikipedia), although I have tried to be as factual as possible in the second section, mentioning authors where appropriate. The prosopographic dimension may also be discussed (only Monnet, Aghnides and Lester), as well as generational memories (the Dreyfus affair; the 1930s). Not all sources have been used so far; nor has my English been corrected. The text has 1,440 words, which would place it after some editorial work in the 2nd category.

AVENOL, Joseph Louis Anne, second Secretary-General of the League of Nations 1933-1940, was born 9 June 1879 in Melle (or La-Mothé-Saint-Ébraye), France, and passed away 2 September 1952 in Duillier, Switzerland. He was the son of Avenol, ‘zouave pontifical’ and , and . He married , and divorced from her . After his divorce he did not marry his companion .

Source: http://rulers.org/indexa5.html

Avenol’s family was of old bourgeois origin. During the early 1800s it turned from a liberal toward a more religious, conservative and legitimist mental attitude. With his father having served as a ‘zouave pontifical’ in Rome until 1870, Avenol wanted to become a monk. At the age of eleven he entered a boarding school run by Marianite brothers. At seventeen he began his studies in law at the University of Poitiers. At twenty he continued his studies in political science and law at the University of Paris. The then moral and political crisis of the Third
French Republic as a result of the Dreyfus affair affected him, but it remained unclear whether he was a Dreyfusard or not. His religious and traditionalist background made him a devoted Roman Catholic in the political, rather than the religious, sense. Later he divorced from his wife civilly, but not in church. Though a second marriage posed no problems for the civil authorities, Avenol decided not to marry his long-time confidante and hostess Vera Lever, as this would have meant excommunication. In his later diplomatic career this private situation produced protocol problems.

Nearsightedness made it impossible for Avenol to follow a naval career. In 1905 he was appointed to the coveted post of inspector of finances. Much to his satisfaction he served nine years in this strictly disciplined branch of the French elite bureaucracy. As civil servant he then moved up in the Ministry of Finance. From 1916 to 1923 he was a financial delegate to the French Embassy in London and in 1921 he was made an honorary Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire. In 1919 he became a member of the French Economic Higher Council and as a financial expert he was sent to various places abroad as well as the League of Nations’ international financial and economic conferences in Brussels (1920) and Genoa (1922).

In 1922 his French Ministry sent Avenol to the League of Nations in Geneva to handle its finances. He replaced Jean Monnet, who retired from the Financial Organization of the League, and in 1923 was named Deputy Secretary-General (until 1933). Avenol became responsible for the coordination of postwar financial reconstruction and devised financial solutions for Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece and Hungary and also China, where he was sent on a League mission in 1929. His financial expertise was appreciated. When Secretary-General Eric Drummond decided to resign, a Frenchman was to be his successor, according to an agreement made by London and Paris at Versailles in 1919. Avenol was unanimously appointed to replace Drummond. The Assembly ratified this decision on 9 December 1932 and Avenol became Secretary-General on 1 July 1933. He took office four months after Japan left the League, five months later followed by Germany and four years later by Italy. Barros in his Betrayal From Within (1969) stresses Avenol’s continual hope of their return, rather than promoting discussion on their aggression. In the case of Japan’s invasion of Manchuria (1933) Avenol argued Japan’s side and when in 1935 Italy invaded Ethiopia Avenol tried to keep Italy as a member by favoring a compromise between Mussolini’s claims on Ethiopia and Ethiopia’s independence. Behind the scenes Avenol worked against the sanctions the League had imposed on Italy (the first time an international organization used these means), but proved unable to prevent Italy renouncing its membership. Avenol’s reaction to Germany’s imposition of annexation on Austria in 1938 was bureaucratic (by dropping Austria from the dues list) and Germany’s invasion of Poland and the Gestapo’s invasion of the home of the League’s High Commissioner in Danzig in 1939 were not raised in Geneva. Compared to earlier times the dearth of leadership and inspiration at the League’s Secretariat was ‘unbelievable,’ according to Deputy Secretary-General Seán Lester in May 1940. Also as a result of the disguised political activity of the secretary-general at the time most of these developments remained unknown to the public at large.

Avenol’s consistent backing for French and British appeasement, his sympathy for dictators of the Right, his weak commitment to democracy and his growing appreciation of a ‘new order’ in Europe left little room for the League, according to Rovine. When Germany occupied Paris in June 1940 Avenol told Under Secretary-General Thanassis Aghnides: ‘We must work hand in hand with Hitler in order to achieve the unity of Europe and expel England’ from Europe. He began to fire most of the League’s staff, including all British employees after the Armistice of 22 June. He wrote to Marshall Philippe Pétain to affirm his loyalty to the Vichy government of France, but ignored the Vichy view that the League should not have a Frenchman as secretary-general and that Avenol had to resign. Suspected of
being in sympathy with the Axis Powers he was obliged to resign as Secretary-General on 31 August 1940. Signing his resignation, Avenol called the League outdated, as the ‘realities’ of the times had made his office unnecessary. Lester, who in fact had taken over leadership of the reduced Secretariat by the end of July, replaced him as Secretary-General. Avenol left Geneva and once again found out that the Vichy government did not accept his services. He settled in a small village in the Haute-Savoie. In May 1942 Avenol returned to Geneva with a memorandum, in which he argued that the future of France lay in close cooperation with Germany, but he did not find support for his oversimplified and for the Vichy government unacceptable view. Warned about deportation by the Germans he returned to Switzerland on 31 December 1943. He was granted asylum, but after the war could not return to France being regarded as a collaborator. Avenol stayed in Switzerland, where he died of a heart attack in 1952 at the age of 73.

Through the publications by Barros and Rovine Avenol became known as the secretary-general who drained the League of its political and moral authority. His appointment, according to Schwebel, had little to do with his capacities but everything with politics: ‘Avenol came to power as the League began to lose it.’ Whereas Drummond was a ‘political’ secretary-general, Avenol struggled to make the League ‘non-political,’ according to Thorne, who mentions Avenol’s financial expertise and capacities in a foreshadowing of the Economic and Social Council and similar UN bodies. Avenol’s ability to maintain relations with representatives of other international organizations or visiting parliamentarians was restricted and during the summer of 1940 he refused to see or talk to Lester, given their differences of opinion. Unlike Drummond’s papers those of Avenol were not destroyed during the war, but given to the French Foreign Office by the executors of his will (with regard to the League now available at the United Nations Office at Geneva).


Bob Reinalda
References


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