

International Organizations are Here to Stay

Interview with Jan Klabbers, Professor at the University of Helsinki

ABSTRACT

Jan Klabbers is a Dutch Professor at the University of Helsinki. He is a Member of the Finnish Academy of Sciences and Letters, a member of the editorial board of the European Journal of International Law. Klabbers is the author of *The Concept of Treaty in International Law* (1996), *An Introduction to International Institutional Law* (2002, 3rd edition 2015), co-editor of *Towards Responsible Global Governance* (2018). Professor Klabbers has also published around 200 book chapters and articles (in the European Journal of International Law, International Organizations Law Review etc.) He is famous for delivering lectures during visiting positions at NYU Law School (2009-10), the Graduate Institute for International and Development Studies (2008, 2013, 2015), and the University of Paris-II and Paris-I (2011, 2017).

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Journal of International Analytics: Dear Professor Klabbers, thank you for giving us the opportunity to conduct this interview. Could you start by telling us how you came to study international organizations?

Jan Klabbers: I did my studies in Amsterdam where part of the curriculum was a minor in International Organizations Law. I was not very interested in it. But I must have picked up some things. In 1996, after finishing my Ph.D. on the concept of treaty in international law,¹ I was asked to write about the legal personality of the European Union. The problem was that in the Treaty establishing the European Union there was no provision for legal personality – neither in domestic law nor in international law. Of course, that raised a number of questions. So, I started to read about the personality and powers of the EU and got very intrigued because what I was reading made very little sense. I thought, “It does not seem to be very systematic.” Eventually, I concluded that in preparing the draft of the Treaty of the European Union they had simply forgotten to give legal personality to the European Union. This made some sense in the light of the fact that three individual European communities had their own personalities. That piece got published.²

1 Klabbers, Jan. *The Concept of Treaty in International Law*. The Hague; London; Boston: Kluwer Law International, 1996.

2 Klabbers, Jan. “Presumptive Personality: The European Union in International Law.” In *International Law Aspect of the European Union*, edited by Martti Koskenniemi, 231–254. The Hague; London; Boston: Kluwer Law International, 1998.

By that time, I had moved to Helsinki and realized that no one was teaching international organizations law. So, I said, "Well, I've read quite a bit. Why don't I start teaching a course?" However, there was no good textbook available. So, I spent a couple of years cobbling together a textbook,¹ and here we are. It is no coincidence: I wrote my dissertation, my doctoral work on the concept of a treaty. Treaties and international organizations have one thing in common. They are both forms in which states can manifest the ways they cooperate. My interest is in how states can organize the way they interact. This approach may be a little too state-centric, but as a starting point it's probably justified. So, I am interested more in the modalities of cooperation than in the outcomes of cooperation. That sets me apart from quite a few international lawyers whose keen interests are in human rights, criminal law, financial regulation, trade, or whatever. My inclination is to look at the forms of cooperation, law-making, treaties, and international organizations.

JIA: We were wondering whether you can say that studies of international organizations are somehow changing focus: from being rather state-centric to focusing on the concept of an international organization that is starting to incorporate other actors besides states.

J.K.: Yes, in the world around us – and it is part of my job to describe and to try to understand that world – there is an increasing tendency for different types of actors to collaborate in joint ventures, e.g., with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the World Bank, the World Health Organization, *Microsoft*, and governments. Those conglomerates, those joint ventures are becoming increasingly numerous. As a result, there are more papers exploring that phenomenon now than there were twenty years ago. However, I am not aware of any work that would approach it in a systematic way. Or, perhaps, there is a good study on entrepreneurs² taking into account all those joint ventures in climate change and in health. But even that scope is limited.

Then, there are more specific studies – sometimes very good – about private associations and how they regulate local governments. The book by Büthe and Mattli³ is very good.

There are bits and pieces here and there, but no one has made a unified attempt, as far as I know, to come up with a concept of an international organization where states are only part of the picture. Many scholars still think that organizations are solely the province of states – even though we can see that things around us are changing. However, the law of international organizations still assumes that there is only one relevant type of relations, and it is the one between an organization and its member states. And sometimes a private foundation can join in because it has money. Sometimes, a company might be involved. Still, most of the time it is an organization and its member states, member states and an organization. They are, sort of, in a vacuum. I think this is theoretically detrimental, it does not help us to understand much or only helps to understand just a little. Because some things are indeed related to that dynamic. But other things are not.

1 Klabbers, Jan. *An Introduction to International Institutional Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

2 McKague, Kevin, Leslie J. Wardley, and Chad Saunders, "Nova Scotia's Entrepreneurial Ecosystem: A Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM)," *Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Report*, January 2021, accessed November 20, 2021, <https://www.gemconsortium.org/file/open?fileid=50677>.

3 Büthe et al. *The New Global Rulers: The Privatization of Regulation in the World Economy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.

The whole discussion of the constitutionalization of international organizations as such, for instance, has nothing to do with the relations with member states but rather with the question whether the Security Council is controlled by the General Assembly or vice versa. For that sort of questions, you cannot look only at the member states *per se*. You also have to look at the political theory, at checks and balances, because any other approach will not take you very far. The same pertains to external relations in international organizations. If we continue to focus only on the role of member states there, we will miss at least a considerable part of the picture.

JIA: In your opinion, where are the leading centers in the study of international organizations now?

J.K.: I would say there are no centers in the field of law at the moment, with one and a half exceptions. Also, there are individuals like myself in Helsinki. You can say Helsinki is a leading center in the study of international organizations. This is probably correct for as long as I am here. But if tomorrow I leave for Amsterdam, then Amsterdam will become a leading center, and Helsinki will no longer be one.

The “half of an exception” I’ve mentioned is Leiden, which has a very strong tradition in studying international organizations, starting with Henry G. Schermers¹ and followed by Niels Blokker² and other people who have been working there. The “one exception” would be the Graduate Institute in Geneva, which has about eight or ten professors of international law.³ They are all in close contact with international organizations. The Institute has professors of history, political science, IR, many of them closely working with organizations. Located in Geneva, the Institute has a number of international organizations around the corner. So, it is located perfectly and could be considered a center in the study of international organizations and international organizations law. But other than that, it is all about individual academics in certain universities, e.g., José Alvarez,⁴ who is doing great work at the New York University, or Kristina Daugirdas,⁵ who works in Michigan, but you cannot really call Michigan or NYU centers in the study of international organizations law.

It is just the way it is. There is nothing particularly wrong with it. I think it is a mistake to start thinking in terms of leading centers until you have at least some “critical mass” and a well-conceived strategy to build on your own strengths. Many universities do not look further than today’s research assessment. So, they are not developing any strategies for that sort of thing.

JIA: Is there any kind of community of those who study international organizations in terms of law, or do you all work separately?

J.K.: We are all doing our own thing, but we do communicate with each other. We publish chapters in each other’s books. So yes, there is a community. There are a couple of people in the Graduate Institute in Geneva with whom I work regularly.

1 Schermers, Henry G. *International Institutional Law*. Sijthoff, 1972.

2 Blokker, Niels. “Withdrawing from International Organizations.” In *Furthering the Frontiers of International Law: Sovereignty, Human Rights, Sustainable Development. Liber Amicorum Nico Schrijver*, edited by Niels Blokker, Daniëlla Dam-de Jong, Vid Prislán, 1–20. Leiden: Brill Nijhoff, 2021.

3 Krisch, Nico. *Entangled Legalities beyond the State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

4 Alvarez, Jose E. *The Impact of International Organizations on International Law*. Boston: Brill, 2016.

5 Daugirdas, Kristina. “Member States’ Due Diligence Obligations to Supervise International Organizations.” In *Due Diligence and Structural Change in the International Legal Order*, edited by Heike Krieger, Anne Peters, Leonhard Kreuzer, 59–74. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

There is a journal on international organizations that I helped to found in 2004 with colleagues from the Netherlands.¹ This is a form of community building: the editorial board of that journal is a kind of an academic community. We communicate regularly, we read each other's papers either before or after their publication. We build on each other's work. And I can safely say that some parts of my work would have been a lot more difficult or impossible to do if I did not have colleagues to talk to. Some of them work in Geneva, others work in New York, London, or Cambridge.

JIA: Would you say that there is a European perspective or, more particularly, that there is a Dutch or a Swiss perspective on international organizations law?

J.K.: I think International Organizations Law is a very European field of study. There are a few people in the North-America, e.g., Ian Johnstone² who is Canadian, by the way, but he works at the Fletcher School of Diplomacy. But mostly it is the Europeans or people working in Europe, sometimes for international organizations. I think, historically, during the formative years, the first people to write about international organizations came from the periphery. They came from Switzerland, Belgium, or the Netherlands, but not from England or France: these two countries were far too busy keeping control over their empires at the time. The Americans were far too busy building an empire. They said, "Oh, wait a second, a form of international organization would actually be useful as a way to control Latin America, for instance." They came to realize it in the early 20th century already. So, at that time there were probably more Americans writing about international organizations than there are now. But contributions from French and English scholars from those early years – there was only a handful of them. You can find some relevant papers by John Hobson³ or Leonard Woolf, Virginia Woolf's husband.⁴

However, lawyers did not pay much attention to international organizations until the 1930–1940s. All the attention came from the periphery. For example, Piotr Kazansky⁵ came from Odessa, which was not quite at the heart of global governance in the early 20th century. Then, there were some Dutch and Belgian people, and that was pretty much it. In the Netherlands, the tradition continued with a few interruptions. In the 1950s, there was Arnold J. P. Tammes⁶ who worked in Amsterdam, one of the few people who started taking international organizations seriously. One of his colleagues was Henry G. Schermers who then took it a lot further. He moved to Leiden and founded the Leiden school of international organizations law. He had a bunch of people who wrote their Ph.D. theses with him on topics related to international organizations. So, Leiden has a strong tradition and, maybe as a result, the Netherlands in general has a fairly strong tradition. This can partly be explained by geopolitical reasons. A former Dutch government minister, also a former IR professor, once wrote a book on

1 International Organizations Law Review; published in Leiden since 2004.

2 Ian Johnstone, "COVID-19, International Law, and the Sustainable Development Goals," Center for International and Area Studies, Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences, January 2021, accessed November 20, 2021, <https://wccias.northwestern.edu/covid-19-research/covid-19-international-law-and-the-sustainable-development-goals.html>; Johnstone, Ian, "The Rule of Law Under Siege: A Foreword," *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 44, no. 1 (2020): 5–14; Ian Johnstone, "Conditioning the Use of Force: The UN Security Council as Interpreter of Jus Ad Bellum," *American Journal of International Law Unbound*, June 2018, accessed November 20, 2021, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-journal-of-international-law/article/conditioning-the-use-of-force-the-un-security-council-as-interpreter-of-the-jus-ad-bellum/9D4CE8BAE3F029FB0220DBF979F24CED>.

3 Hobson, John A. *Towards International Government*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1915.

4 Woolf, Leonard S. *International Government: Two Reports*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1916.

5 Казанский, П.Е. Всеобщие административные союзы государств. В 3-х тт: Одесса, 1897.

6 Tammes, Arnold J. P. *Hoofdstukken van internationale organisatie*. The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1951.

Dutch foreign policy called *Peace, Profits and Principles*.¹ The idea of the book is that a small trading nation such as the Netherlands can only benefit from some kind of international cooperation and, thus, international organizations are important for it.

JIA: Professor Klabbers, five years ago you said that one of the main topics for research in IOs was inter-organizational relations. Does this topic remain relevant now? Or has the pandemic led to discussing other issues?

J.K.: I think the topic remains relevant. Regardless of, but also because of the pandemic. One thing that has become very clear is that you cannot tackle a global health pandemic by focusing only on health measures. So many other things have been affected. Like, I think within a month after the first serious measures had been taken, an airline went bankrupt. It went bankrupt because the whole air transportation market had collapsed temporarily. In March 2020, I happened to stumble upon the website of the World Tourism Organization. It was full of Covid-related messages: "Please, Covid authorities, do not take any measures that would affect tourism, take tourism into account." So, all economies have been affected. This suggests that the only way out of the pandemic is not to focus only on health issues or who gets vaccinated, but also to make sure that its economic consequences are kept in check, to make sure that travel, tourism, transportation, supply chains – all this can function. You will need international organizations to cooperate because all of that is out of the jurisdiction of the World Health Organization. When we organize ourselves, when we set up organizations, we tend to think of problems in isolation. And it has its uses. But, of course, in the real world, problems always have effects, they always radiate to other problem areas, for better or worse.

JIA: Let us play the devil's advocate here. One could argue exactly the other way around. In particular, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the immediate reaction of the European countries was to close the borders. Even though they did it for a short period of time, it was a very nation-state-centric reaction violating the freedom of movement within the European Union. This is something that happened in Europe. If we look at the U.S., now that the Trump administration has left, there is still a certain resistance to multilateralism. While we observed a lot of multilateralism in the 1990s and in the early 2000s, the situation has changed dramatically over the last four years. Nowadays, international organizations are losing influence and they are losing the status they had before.

J.K.: I don't for a moment believe that there is a structural change, that states have come to think that we do not want international organizations anymore. "We can handle it ourselves," they might tell themselves or their populations. Certain "strong leaders" might act that way. But then these strong leaders establish their own international organizations. Five or six years ago, China set up the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. China is an emerging superpower. Maybe *the* emerging superpower. It could find other ways to tell us what to do. But it chooses to do it through international organizations. They have realized what the Americans realized in the early 20th century: that it was a lot easier to control Latin America through the Pan-American Union than by sending troops there. The problem here is that it sketches a very instrumentalist picture of international organizations. I am not sure I completely buy into that myself.

1 Voorhoeve, Joris J. C. *Peace, Profits and Principles: A Study of Dutch Foreign Policy*. The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1979.

But to some extent, international organizations can be instrumentalized by hegemonic powers. I am by no means the first or the last person to say that.

Thus, international organizations have their use as forms of goodwill cooperation between states, but they can also be used for hegemonic purposes. In both cases, they are not going to disappear. They are too useful. And, historically, there are very few international organizations that have completely disappeared. They usually change their form, they might change their identity, and they might change their structures a little. We went from the League of Nations to the UN. It is not like we went from the League of Nations to a void, and that there had been nothing for 50 years until some new organization was set up. No, it happened pretty quickly. You see the same thing elsewhere, with OAS following the Pan-American Union. It is not that there was a gap. Because the need for organizations is there. No state can make it alone, not even North Korea, although they try. But ... So, this means that there is a – call it a market for organizations, if you will – there is a demand, for whatever reason. So, there is a demand for international organizations, no matter what they are intended to be used for.

We tend to assume that international organizations can only serve good purposes. I don't think we can hold onto that assumption anymore, if that was ever plausible at all. International organizations can also be set up for evil purposes, and, depending on your political outlook, sometimes you can say they have been. One of the best examples of that would be an organization that was never founded, thanks to France. In the 1930s, Mussolini was very close to setting up a European Union type of organization with Germany, Britain, and France for the greater glory of fascism. In the end, France backed out. But Germany was interested in the idea and was keen to cooperate, which is not surprising. It was surprising, however, that the British wanted to go for it too. Still, France blocked the initiative. That's an example, a very early example of organizations being set up for purposes that you and I might find questionable. Like, when we think of organizations, we think of the World Health Organization (WHO). You can hardly argue with the fact that global public health is a good thing. When we think of the World Meteorological Organization – it predicts the weather – it's useful for a number of reasons. The Universal Postal Union facilitates communication. So, they all are considered to be good guys. But nowhere is it written that we can set up organizations for good purposes only. And this is something that the discipline of international organizations law – and I reckon, neighboring disciplines as well – have a hard time to accept.

JIA: Could you summarize how international organizations can contribute to the world order during this pandemic and the post-pandemic period.

J.K.: A lot depends on how you picture the current situation; a lot depends on your political preferences as to what should happen next. As I mentioned earlier, my impression would be that international organizations are here to stay. I am increasingly convinced that they are very useful for the people who are running them, whether it be particular states, particular industries, or particular individuals. But, by and large, they tend to be useful tools for those who run them. I have absolutely no idea what it means for the future. If I had a crystal ball, I'd share the results of fortune telling with you. But I don't.

If you want to picture a world without any international organizations, in a kind of a thought experiment, then imagine that you are back in the days of Thomas Hobbes.

"Life is nasty, brutish, and short," and all that. So, to my mind, international organizations have had many functions but usually it is fostering some kind of cooperation. That sounds like a truism, but maybe not entirely, because existing organizations are also places where politics is played out, they are also theatres of politics.

Generally, international organizations are useful not only because of their material contribution but because they provide "grammar rules" and a "vocabulary" for communication between people in positions of power. Those people can be heads of states; they can be captains of industry in certain cases, etc. International organizations play a useful role, and sometimes this role is more pronounced, sometimes less. You may be right in suggesting that their contributions are a bit less tangible at the moment. However, even the Trump administration – and this is a point I cannot emphasize enough, while I am by no means a fan of Trump – was not anti-multilateralist per se. Trump threatened to withdraw from the Universal Postal Union because it was disadvantageous to U.S. businesses. He did withdraw from UNESCO because of the implied recognition of Palestine. And he announced withdrawal from the WHO. If you take those three examples, you can conclude that he was clearly not a fan of international organizations – but only if you consider these examples in isolation.

If you look at the broader picture, you will see that the U.S. under Trump has also joined the Bureau of International Expositions – the international exhibition bureau, which is a useful organization that selects a city every couple of years to host a global Expo. And the U.S. came very closely to joining the World Tourism Organization. So, with all its anti-multilateralism, even the Trump administration was keen to be multilateralist when it was beneficial to them. Because they have simply realized that tourism can be useful. Then, Covid stepped in, and so they cannot pursue that goal now. They clearly joined the Bureau of International Expositions because they wanted the global Expo 2023 to be organized in Minneapolis. For that, they had to be a member of the organization, so they joined it. However, the organization called its bluff and decided to hold the global Expo in Buenos Aires.

I think that it is a lesson we should take far more seriously than we did before. It is not a political position to be pro-multilateralist or anti-multilateralist, to advocate for or against international organizations, to be pro-international or anti-international. It all depends on the nature of the regimes, whether they are to someone's benefit, whether that someone is President Trump, or pharmaceutical industry, or Hollywood. In the early 1990s, the TRIPS agreement negotiations were launched in the World Trade Organization under the pressure of big pharma and Hollywood who were very worried about their intellectual property rights and could not see those rights being effectively protected elsewhere. You can interpret that as pro-multilateralism or pro-whatever. It is also a matter of simply pursuing your interests and finding venues for protection of those interests. I think we should realize that international organizations are political actors, and just like other political actors they can be manipulated, or instrumentalized, and they can also have their own agendas. Then we might begin to understand them a bit better, without overly simplifying things and saying something like: "Trump was the gravedigger of international organizations." Such conclusions are not of much use, I think.

JIA: Legal scholars are leaders in the study of international organizations. What can you say about the contribution of other academic disciplines to the field?

J.K.: First of all, I disagree with your contention. I've read a lot of IR papers on international organizations, 90 percent of them – I'm not exaggerating – roughly 90 percent of them completely ignore the legal perspective. This means that IR specialists who write about international organizations often lack profound understanding of how international organizations function. That should be said right away. Now, is legal science a leading research field amongst lawyers – sure, as for the other scholars, however, it is, perhaps, less often the case. Maybe it should play a bigger role for them. I can give you one example. A recent study by Liesbet Hooghe, Gary Marks, and Tobias Lenz¹ on the theory of international organizations zooms in on the tensions between what they call a “community” and a “function” – oblivious of the fact that the tensions have existed since the very day international organizations were first created. Lawyers have devised mechanisms to manage the tensions in the form of implied powers doctrines and all that. If you don't understand this, then you cannot write a convincing study on international organizations. You can be a leading IR scholar, but your study would just not be very convincing if you do not have an understanding of the legal framework. What I do see is that there are traditions in IR, in particular the constructivist tradition, which pays more attention to international organizations. But then again, I find constructivism quite appealing, so probably this is why I'm saying that.

One can also observe that historians are slowly starting to take international organizations a bit more seriously, not all of them though. I'm still amazed by the fact that a leading historian, Niall Ferguson,² could write a book about the 20th century and never once mention the United Nations. How is that possible? What are you doing then, as a historian? It's like writing the history of Sweden without mentioning Stockholm. It just does not make much sense. But there are more and more historians who explore international organizations and how they have contributed to certain developments. There is a wonderful book by Susan Pedersen about the mandates of the League of Nations.³ There is a paper by Patricia Clavin on the League of Nations⁴. There is Mark Mazower's *Governing the World*.⁵ They are all very good. Anthropologists are increasingly focusing on the significance of bureaucratic cultures within international organizations. And some of these approaches are adopted by IR-constructivists – Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore, e.g.⁶ I really appreciate this sort of research. The funny thing is, of course, that international organizations have existed since at least the late 19th century, but they have been, by and large, ignored because law has been the leading discipline in the study of international organizations. The approach that IR scholars have been using is way too state-centric to attach great significance to international organizations. Much of the same applies to historians.

In general, we all still seem to be very much caught up in the state-centric paradigm. We grew up with the idea that the state is the beginning and the end of all politics. And that everything that happens is because states want it or because states

1 Hooghe, Liesbet, Tobias Lenz, and Gary Marks. *A Theory of International Organization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

2 Ferguson, Niall. *The War of the World*. London: Penguin Books, 2006.

3 Pedersen, Susan. *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

4 Patricia, Clavin. *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920-1946*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

5 Mazower, Mark. *Governing the World: The History of an Idea*. London: Penguin Books, 2013.

6 Barnett, Michael, and Martha Finnemore. *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2004.

do not want it, because states agree or because states disagree. To a large extent, this is, no doubt, accurate. But this is only part of the story. We begin to realize that the Secretariat of the UN might have some role to play, that special representatives of the Secretary-General – their character, their beliefs, their working habits and talents may have an impact on whether or not the crisis in Kosovo can be solved. It is not just about Serbia and Russia, on the one hand, and Western Europe, on the other hand. It is also about Bernard Kouchner¹ and what he is doing there, or might decide to do, for that matter. However, this is difficult to cover when developing models. As soon as we start developing models of things, we resort to looking at states because there are only two hundred of them, and you can easily bundle them together or look at them separately. But then we overlook the subtleties and usually also what truly matters.

JIA: Do you think that more attention should be paid to the inner life of international organizations? And if so, do you think that sociology has a role to play there?

J.K.: Yes, there's still a gap. However, seems like something is changing. There have been legal anthropologists or legal sociologists – but they are mostly anthropologists, people with ethnographic training who have done some interesting work. One that comes to mind is, I think, a 2012 study *Values in Translation*,² where a person worked at the World Bank as a trained legal anthropologist for a number of years and could explore the organizational culture of the World Bank staff. These are predominantly economists, of course, which means they are people with a predominantly utilitarian or consequential reasoning. Because economic reasoning is typically cost-benefit reasoning, right? And that could help explain why the World Bank is having such a hard time incorporating human rights. Because you cannot discuss human rights in terms of costs and benefits. This is also why it was a lot easier for the World Bank to incorporate environmental protection because you can put a cost on that, you can translate that into figures.

So, organizational culture at the World Bank is largely consequentialist. That creates a structural obstacle for deontological agenda, which supports human rights, where you think in terms of duties irrespective of what their costs are, irrespective of what their benefits are. So, you have two classical cultures. I thought it was a fascinating case that would typically require a well-trained legal anthropologist, or a legal sociologist, or ethnographer to solve it. There are more examples of people who do fieldwork in different international organizations or different treaty bodies within international organizations. And there is, of course, the Latourian³ tradition, and France is somewhat oriented towards that. Latour sort of explored how laws are made rather than what textbooks say. I think this is a promising area for your research. It's not going to solve all our problems but it will be instrumental, it will be helpful to gain a better understanding. So, I am all for it. Another example: there is a lovely book by Iver Neumann⁴, the Norwegian IR scholar/anthropologist who worked for the Norwegian foreign ministry for a while and came up with fabulous insights. It's

1 Bernard Kouchner was for a while in charge of the UN Mission in Kosovo.

2 Sarfaty, Galit. *Values in Translation: Human Rights and the Culture of the World Bank*. Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 2012.

3 Latour, Bruno, and Steve Woolgar. *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Fact*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.

4 Dunn, Kevin C., and Iver B. Neumann. *Undertaking Discourse Analysis for Social Research*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2016.

called *At Home with the Diplomats*¹, I think. I liked it. So, there is room for that kind of things, and now more is being done than ten or twenty years ago. I can see that there are more anthropologists interested in international work now than there were ten years ago, that more historians are studying international organizations. It makes me very happy because, it also helps me to come, hopefully, to a more sophisticated, or at least more comprehensive, understanding of international organizations.

JIA: We are somewhat curious what your prediction for the future is. Are there any interesting fields in the study of international organizations, for example, for Master or Ph.D. students?

J.K.: Ok, in general, I have an impression that there is an increasing recognition of international organizations as autonomous actors with the mind of their own, will of their own, policies and agendas of their own, which cannot be reduced entirely to those of their member states or leading member states, or whatever powerful member states. So, they are increasingly recognized as autonomous. If you take that, then there is a whole world opening up. Because that means that you can look internally – and that what happens with those autonomous actors – and then sociology, organizational sociology, ethnographies might step in. Also, when it comes to the legal sphere: what are the relations between the organs of international organizations? Is there any system? How do international organizations treat their staff? This latter issue has been explored by lawyers to some extent, but the research is fairly limited, and apart from lawyers – there's not much research either, as far as I can tell. Not really. Because the bureaucracy is an important part of what any organization is. Like, the World Bank has seven thousand or so employees. That is a massive institution, for what it is worth.

Yet, we don't know about that sort of relations, other than what we can see from the caseload of staff tribunals. Tribunals usually come into play when there is a problem. But what happens when there are no problems? What is the regular type of relationship between an organization and its staff? You can take that further. Consultancy, for instance. International organizations increasingly use consultancy. How does it work? Who are the consultants? How are they selected? Where do they come from? Are there any guidelines for that? This is an internal issue. But the most important ramification is that international organizations are increasingly striving for autonomy. So, international organizations are also becoming increasingly engaged with the world around them.

Currently, I'm working on a project on international organizations and the private sector. Because we know very little about why and how organizations get funds from the private sector. But they do. The budget of an organization such as UNHCR is 10% or so dependent on contributions from private parties. They can be foundations, philanthropic associations, or companies. Likewise, transporting vaccines in sub-Saharan Africa requires refrigerated trucks, and they are sometimes borrowed from *Coca-Cola*. Again, this is a connection with the private sector. That kind of thing is fascinating.

However, there is more to it. International organizations are also in contact with each other to fill in the blanks or the gaps in their different functions. For instance, there

1 Neumann, Iver B. *At Home with the Diplomats: Inside a European Foreign Ministry*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2012.

is International Labour Organization dealing with labor and International Maritime Organization dealing with maritime issues – where do sailors fit in? It is not solely a maritime issue, not solely a labor issue, but both. So, you need to have some kind of communication between these two organizations. You will find very little information on these matters in their constitutions. Sometimes there are some provisions allowing them to make arrangements with similar organizations working in similar fields. But the more interesting question is whether they work with organizations engaged in different fields. A classic example is the International Civil Aviation Organization and the International Telecommunication Union working together to find ways to make it possible to use mobile phones on aircraft, which we still cannot officially do. They work together to try and figure that out, to create a set of standards to make that work for every party concerned.

Thus, international organizations work with the private sector, they work with other organizations. They often work with non-member states, which we tend to forget. One example is the OECD's global tax regime for multinationals. They will have to engage not only the thirty-seven or thirty-eight member states, but also the rest of the world, including the tax havens if that's at all possible. So, they will have to work with states that are not members of the OECD. In a similar vein, individual sanctions suggest that there are relations between international organizations and individuals. These can be businessmen transferring money to Afghanistan or whatever. So, there is a whole bunch of organizations acting as autonomous actors – and a lot of new questions are arising, like "Ok, who are they engaging with?", "How is it working?", "How is it legally organized?", "What is the policy?", "Have there been historical precedents?", etc. But there are also more of a classical political science type of questions, like "Who benefits?", "Who benefits if the WHO sets up a joint venture with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to combat malaria?" Arguably, you and I benefit, people suffering from malaria or who might suffer from malaria benefit too. But maybe there are others who benefit as well?

There may be conditions imposed here and there. There may be forms of governance that would otherwise be differently organized. It raises accountability issues, like, what if such a foundation, or an international joint venture for malaria, makes some decisions and then something goes wrong? Who do you get to sue, if anyone? So, there are lots of questions that come up if I just start considering international organizations as autonomous actors, not solely as vehicles for their member states – which has been the tradition, of course. We have been looking at them as if they are merely doing what their member states tell them to do far too often and for far too long. I think that's wrong, that was never completely plausible; it is now less plausible than it was ever before. So, once you see them as autonomous actors, you can also start to think of them as political actors in their own right, with their own agendas, their likes and dislikes, things they promote and things they're inclined to oppose. I think that it can be very insightful.

JIA: Some scholars claim that there is a decline of the West, the end of the liberal world order. This is at least one, more or less common, kind of narrative. First of all, do you buy into this kind of narrative, that there is an end to the liberal world order? Secondly, do you think this affects international organizations?

J.K.: I believe that a kind of liberal world order exists at least partially. It begins from the outside and from the inside. But some countries are not particularly liberal.

Does it affect international organizations? It will affect those that are supposed to sponsor or protect liberalism. The EU might be an example of this. The EU is effectively an interest group, a lobby group for its member states. It's written in the EU Treaty. The EU promotes the interests of the peoples of Europe. So, whether that coincides with the interests of people in Africa or not is a completely different question.

In that kind of framework, I'm not so sure whether international organizations will suffer too much. They are flexible. They tend to bend with the wind. That's how they are set up. They are supposed to follow instructions from their member states. They may not always do it gladly. They sometimes resist, they use their own discretion. But at the end of the day, if all member states are convinced that we should go one way, then an organization has fairly little choice but to go that way.

Thus, international organizations – it's a difficult question in the sense that we tend to think of them purely as reflections of something else. To some extent they are, but to some extent they are not. They will follow wherever people tell them to.

I cannot picture the world without any international organizations whatsoever. Not just because this is what I do for a living, but also generally speaking. I grew up when the UN was already there. When I was born the EU was already there, at least as the European Community. I presume it is possible to mentally withdraw from them, as Britain does with Brexit, for example. But I cannot imagine the world without any kind of international organization. As long as there is international cooperation of all sorts, as long as there are international issues of all sorts, there will be international organizations, for better or worse. So, there we are. Maybe it's good news, maybe it's bad news, but international organizations are here to stay.

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