

‘Professor Baetens has brought a fascinating new perspective to the study of international law, looking at the role of unseen actors in various areas. While unseen, these actors are certainly not unimportant for the effective functioning of their respective institutions, and the discharge of their duties benefits parties, States and the rule of law. This volume demonstrates how the many unseen actors contribute to making international adjudication efficient and effective, and is a fresh approach to the study of international adjudication.’

Meg Kinnear, ICSID Secretary-General

‘Freya Baetens has put together a stellar collection of contributions highlighting the role of multiple actors involved in the work of international courts and tribunals. Some are visible, others are less visible. Some are directly involved in the litigation process, others are involved in a more indirect manner. This lifting of the stage curtains also places a welcome spotlight on issues concerning legitimacy, neutrality or transparency.’

Laurence Boisson de Chazournes, Professor,
University of Geneva, and Director of the LLM in
International Dispute Settlement (MIDS)

‘This book not only has the merit of exploring areas of international adjudication to which little attention has been paid to date, it also brings together an impressive array of experiences, information and insights from leading practitioners and researchers on essential aspects of the functioning of international courts and tribunals. By shining a light on the “unseen actors” in international adjudication, this work is a welcome and ground-breaking contribution to reflection on the role and responsibilities of these *auxiliaires de justice* in the sound administration of international justice.’

Philippe Couvreur, ICJ Registrar

‘My advice to every practitioner of international law, to every advocate before an international tribunal, and to every State or private party to an international dispute is: *read this book!* *Legitimacy of Unseen Actors in International Adjudication* is a fascinating and well-researched study of how courts and tribunals actually function, the importance of court personnel and other behind-the-scenes actors, and the impacts they can have

on outcomes. No international advocate, no matter how experienced, should step into court again without having read it.’

Paul Reichler, Partner, Foley Hoag LLP

‘There are few works of international legal scholarship which shine the spotlight on the important “hinterland” of international legal adjudication – namely, the work of registries, secretariats, appointing authorities and others, which both enables and shapes international adjudication in typically unseen ways. In this volume, an impressive range of experienced and expert authors is marshalled to do just that, and to provide their perspectives on the nature, significance and, indeed, legitimacy of the work of such professionals. This will be of great interest and value to those working on international tribunals across a range of disciplines.’

Andrew Lang, Chair in International Law and
Global Governance, Edinburgh Law School

‘Finally, the missing piece of the puzzle! There have been numerous books on international judges, prosecutors and the so-called international bar, but rarely has scholarship focused on the unexplored world of the people who keep the lights of international adjudication on. This is a must-read for anyone who wants to understand how international adjudication actually works, in reality.’

Cesare Romano, Professor of Law, Loyola
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LEGITIMACY OF UNSEEN ACTORS IN INTERNATIONAL ADJUDICATION

International courts and tribunals differ in their institutional composition and functions, but a shared characteristic is their reliance on the contribution of individuals other than the judicial decision-makers themselves. Such ‘unseen actors’ may take the form of registrars and legal officers, but also non-lawyers such as translators and scientific experts. Unseen actors are vital to the functioning of international adjudication, exerting varying levels of influence on judicial processes and outcomes. The opaqueness of their roles, combined with the significance of judicial decisions for the parties involved as well as a wider range of stakeholders, raises questions about unseen actors’ impact on the legitimacy of international dispute settlement. This book aims to answer such legitimacy questions and identify ‘best practices’ through a multifaceted enquiry into common connections and patterns in the institutional composition and daily practice of international courts and tribunals.

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LEGITIMACY OF UNSEEN
ACTORS IN INTERNATIONAL
ADJUDICATION

Edited by
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University of Oslo



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FOREWORD

My role as author of the Foreword to this book perhaps needs a few words of explanation. Professor Baetens invited me to attend the conference that gave rise to it, knowing that, as a long-serving ‘unseen actor’ at The Hague myself, I might have valuable experience to draw on, and also honoured me with an invitation to give a keynote speech. Unfortunately, when the time came I was recovering from an operation and I had to conclude that it would not be possible to attend. I was happy therefore to be able to accept her further suggestion that I should contribute a Foreword, introducing the main themes on which the various papers elaborate. It is for me a pleasant coincidence that the planned publication date will fall almost exactly fifty years after the date on which I entered the service of the International Court of Justice (ICJ)!

Any international lawyer who has had contact with the process of international judicial or arbitral settlement of disputes, the judicial protection of human rights, or with the administration of international criminal law, even if such contact is only if from the vantage point of the study or library, will be aware that it involves more than a judge, or a bench of judges. There necessarily exists a number of occupations, comparable in some ways with those of the *auxiliaires de justice* of French law, whose purpose is to support, to provide the framework for, the decision-making process. Every court requires, at least, a secretary or registrar to record the proceedings and the decision, and to authenticate it, and this official must be supported by the appropriate clerical staff. Unless the court and the parties before it use only a single language, interpretation and translation must be provided. Access to a library, with a staff, will be necessary; particularly if the tribunal is a standing one, archives will be needed, and must be curated. The need for contributors in these categories and generally the nature and extent of the contribution they make to the final product – the decision or decisions – is determined by their pre-defined functions, and in that sense visible to the parties and to the world. That contribution is valuable, but limited and non-judicial. Even a Registrar

does not, *as Registrar*, suggest how the case should be decided, or himself write any part of the judgment.

But in the actual practice of international dispute settlement the situation is frequently less simple. The role of a Registrar or secretary may in practice include confidential support; the registry may have staff specifically specified as legal staff, as is now the case of the ICJ; and the judges may have legal assistants, or there may be persons described as, for example, interns, who support the judges in unspecified ways. Not only is the contribution of such additional persons not visible to the outside world, but their presence may also not be generally disclosed. It was primarily officials such as these that formed the focus of the Call for Papers in preparation for the conference, designated ‘unseen actors in international adjudication’. The stated goal of the Conference was stated as being ‘to identify and analyse [alleged] common connections and patterns on the institutional makeup and daily practice of international courts and tribunals, through an interdisciplinary investigation of the functioning of “unseen actors”, with the purpose of explaining and answering legitimacy challenges, for example, through the developments of codes of ethics’.

The unspoken question was whether in practice their activities always fall within proper limits – those limits being defined by reference to the unique function reserved to the international judge – reaching the decision: might judges be over-influenced by their invisible supporters? Might they even be tempted to delegate some part of their powers, where delegation conflicts with judicial duty? But once the concept of ‘unseen actors’ was examined, Professor Baetens and her team found that it had relevance in other contexts within the international dispute-settlement process, a number of which were enumerated in the ‘Call for Papers’. As will be evident from the Table of Contents of the present publication, there proved to be even more aspects worthy of examination than then foreseen.

The conference afforded the participants many opportunities to venture on comparisons between the operation of different international tribunals, the functioning of which was presented in the various papers. Part I offers a descriptive overview of institutional perspectives: mention is made of the ICJ (Chapter 2), International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) (Chapter 3), arbitral institutions (Chapter 4), the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Chapter 5), as well as the more specialized bodies such as the International Criminal

Court (ICC) (Chapter 6) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) (Chapter 7), and the Court of Justice of the European Union (ECJ)(Chapter 8). Subsequently, these international tribunals are dealt with in depth in subsequent chapters, such as the ECJ in Chapters 16 and 24, the Court of Arbitration of the International Chamber of Commerce in Chapter 13, the ICC in Chapters 15 and 21, and the International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) in Chapters 19 and 20.

Unseen actors may be at work even before any judge or arbitrator takes up his functions. He has to be appointed by some means: could the appointment process be adjusted to ensure the presence of a favourable inclination (not to say ‘bias’)? How transparent is any system for the appointment of judges or arbitrators? (Chapter 9). For established bodies like the ICJ, the ICC, the ECtHR and the ECJ there are constitutional systems in place, but even for some of these ‘screening bodies’ exist, whose role should not be overlooked (Chapter 10).

Most fascinating on the theoretical level was, first, the group of papers devoted to the issues of ‘Confidentiality and Transparency’ (Part IV), and those addressing ‘Ethics and Accountability’ (Part V), subjects that underlay the original Call for Papers, and together perhaps may be seen as revealing the *point névralgique* of the whole. The essential quality of the persons or entities here under study is that they are ‘unseen’; and this raises questions as to what extent this invisibility is justified, and what it may cloak. The deliberations of a tribunal must be confidential, and yet its workings must, from a different viewpoint, have some degree of transparency in order to generate and justify trust in the justice of the process. The problem is most marked, as already mentioned, in the case of assessment of the degree and nature of the influence exerted by secretariats, law clerks, interns, legal officers: all those officials equipped by legal training and education to think, write and speak in terms shared with judges, and working alongside them in the preparation of decisions. Might it be the case that their influence, to borrow the terms of the famous UK House of Commons motion of 1780, ‘has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished’? The Chapters of Parts IV and V offer valuable material and reflection on these issues.

It is almost inevitable that questions of language will arise in international dispute settlement. When French and English were selected nearly a hundred years ago as the languages in which the Permanent Court of International Justice (PCIJ) would work, it was expected

the candidates for the role of judges would be capable of working in one of other of these languages, and many would be fluent in both. In much of the modern world, for the purposes of litigation and adjudication, English is today the *lingua franca*,¹ except in the case of tribunals dealing exclusively with a regional group with a common language, e.g. Arabic. Interpreters and translators have already been mentioned; they may provide the bridge between party and judge, or between judge and judge. Arguably they could be left out of the classification of ‘actors’, inasmuch as ideally their activity does not affect the outcome: the only change effected should be to the language of expression, not the sense and purport, of the written or spoken material. However, the matter may be more complicated, in particular following the establishment of international criminal tribunals, which has made it necessary to examine witnesses (including the accused)² to a far greater extent than in general inter-State disputes, where provisions such as Article 70 of the ICJ Rules of Court³ have sufficed; in such context, a wider range of languages and cultures make ‘perfect’ translation less practicable. Chapter 15, on the language services at the ICC, affords a picture of how problems such as this are being met in the context of, in particular, the languages of the African continent.

Finally, however paradoxical it may sound, even the international judge may be an unseen actor, in the sense that some of his or her activities may not be visible to the participants in the proceedings before him, yet may have an impact on, or at least some relevance to, those proceedings. This need not amount to conflict of interest, as normally understood; but it may, as suggested in Chapter 25, have relevance to workload management considerations.

A case can be made for the view that transparency is not necessarily the highest value to be aimed at in international judicial settlement, and that what matters is that the ideas on which the decision is built should be those that ultimately move the judge, even if for their expression, and even to some extent their suggestion, he has a debt to others which evades assessment; that in this field there is something to be said for *quieta non*

¹ A situation very thoroughly studied in Anthea Roberts, *Is International Law International?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 9–10, 260–6.

² Involving, less obviously, medical practitioners as unseen actors: see Chapter 21.

³ Which regulates arrangements for translation and interpretation between the official languages, and into these when a party employs a non-official language

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movere. If investigation there is to be, however, it could hardly be more effectively, efficiently and discreetly done than in this collection, each contribution to which, in Blake's words, 'bodies forth the form of things unseen.'

Hugh Thirlway
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