



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

The dissemination of international scholarship

The future of books and book reviews

Baetens, Freya; Prislán, Vid

DOI

[10.1017/S0922156514000193](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0922156514000193)

Publication date

2014

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Leiden Journal of International Law

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Baetens, F., & Prislán, V. (2014). The dissemination of international scholarship: The future of books and book reviews. *Leiden Journal of International Law*, 27(3), 559-569. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0922156514000193>

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

EDITORIAL

The Dissemination of International Scholarship: The Future of Books and Book Reviews

FREYA BAETENS* AND VID PRISLAN**

I. INTRODUCTION

How often do *you* read an international law book from cover to cover?

A question such as this one usually results in a slightly incredulous smile on the addressee's face, as if it implies an assumption that there is time to spare in the life of an international lawyer faced with a myriad of interesting-looking publications. For a long time, writing a monograph used to be the keystone, the ultimate test, to join the academic ranks – yet today, universities grant PhD titles based on the writing of separate articles on a common theme and doctoral researchers are increasingly encouraged to choose this option, so as to ensure their ideas actually reach the intended audience. Arguably, today's academic audience is assumed not to have, or at least not to make, the time to read an entire book.

An additional element is cost. The average monograph from an established publisher easily costs approximately €80 – a non-trivial amount for junior academics in developed countries, and even more so for academics elsewhere. University press publishers consider a book to be successful when a few hundred copies are sold, mostly to university libraries, through which, of course, a wider audience can be reached.

In this context, editorial boards of international law journals, and particularly their book review editors, face the question: should we still routinely review books?

This editorial is written from the perspective of the book review editors of the *Leiden Journal of International Law* (LJIL), but its scope and findings may well expand beyond this field, as the same situation exists in relation to book publications in other legal fields, and even in academic scholarship more generally. The question for all

* Associate Professor of Law, Director of Studies, and Head of the LUC Research Centre, Leiden University; Visiting Professor, World Trade Institute (WTI), Berne University; and Associate Lawyer with VVGB (Brussels). Since 2010, she has been the senior book review editor of the *Leiden Journal of International Law* ('LJIL').

** Research Fellow, Grotius Centre for International Legal Studies. He has been a book review editor with LJIL since 2008.

academics is the same in this regard: how do I distribute the fruits of my intellectual labour as broadly as possible?¹ In this editorial, we first address why books are still a preferred vehicle for the dissemination of scholarship, touching upon their enduring value and their place in international rankings, among other factors, as compared to other vehicles such as journal articles and edited book chapters. Subsequently we discuss the contribution of book reviews to the successful dissemination of books and finally, we outline the strategy of the LJIL to ensure the quality and variety of such reviews.

2. WHY PUBLISH BOOKS?

2.1. Enduring value

The digitization of the traditional modes of scholarly production has certainly challenged established academic institutions, such as books and law journals. But the age of cyberspace does not need to signify the end of either of them. As noted in a previous LJIL editorial, journals may not be capable of competing with blogs as providers of information and disseminators of ideas. Their role, instead, is in serving as a medium for in-depth reflection and analysis. In contrast with blog posts, journal articles – particularly those peer-reviewed, or those subject to some other form of editorial review mechanism – enjoy the benefit of hindsight that is necessary for quality control and production.² For that reason alone, they will probably remain in existence for quite some time to come.

The same considerations hold true for books. Not only can books take years to write, but, due to the time lag involved in their production process (which inevitably follows from rounds of peer review and editing), they are less apt to provide the latest and most updated information on a current topic. In terms of turnaround time, books mostly fare even worse than journals, as many of the latter, including the LJIL, nowadays even offer advance, pre-publication access to their articles. But just as journals, academic and scholarly books – given that they undergo a thorough peer-review process that is often more extensive and intensive than the peer review involved in journal articles, and pass through layers of editorial editing – perform the function of quality control, and the filtering and ordering that is necessary for scholarly production. Indeed, the longer time lag between a particular event and a book's publication can actually have the advantage that the information provided in the book is more complete, and the conclusions more fully developed, particularly with regard to causal effects and long-term consequences.

But books also have additional advantages over other means of disseminating ideas. Most importantly perhaps, and in contrast with journal articles and blog posts, books allow for sufficient space to work out and present a research topic in depth.

1 Questions relating to scholarship and its dissemination have already been discussed in an earlier editorial in this journal. See C. Stahn and E. De Brabandere, 'The Future of International Legal Scholarship: Some Thoughts on "Practice", "Growth", and "Dissemination"', (2014) 27 LJIL 1, at 1.

2 See L. van den Herik, 'Introduction: LJIL in the Age of Cyberspace', (2012) 25 LJIL 1, at 4–8. The questions raised there do not arise only in relation to journal articles, but also in relation to books.

Books are the kind of long-form scholarship that enables a rigorous and extensive presentation of arguments, sustained potentially over a broader set of areas, and placed in context with other important issues, both within and outside of a discipline. Take the example of the classic academic monograph, where one is expected to find detailed discussions on trends and contradictions in jurisprudence, comprehensive accounts of research or scholarship on a given topic, and/or presentations of valuable and interesting historical or statistical data, all supported by numerous examples and extensive referencing. This is not always a possibility in a journal article that (at least in Europe) is often limited to approximately 10,000 words. Nor is this level of depth likely to occur on a blog, which, albeit providing unlimited space for developing an idea, remains subject to the constraint that too long a blog post will not be read.

An additional advantage of books is that they can be used to reach a wider audience than the readership of specialized academic journals or blogs. Take the example of scholarly books that approach a topic from a multidisciplinary approach and can thus be of interest not only to international law scholars, but also to academics in the field of international relations, international political economy, or political science. Or take the example of scholarly books that, in view of their specific methodology, present a kind of thinking that can be used in classrooms outside of the specific field. Or take the example of books that are actually written to target other markets than pure academics – as in the case of non-fiction works that scholars occasionally write for the general audience.

Last but not least, there are also books that perform specific roles which cannot be adequately performed by journal articles. Take the example of textbooks, which are aimed at introducing the reader into a specific field, or comprehensively presenting a field to an advanced student. Journal articles are too narrow in their focus to serve such purposes. A typical international law textbook does not only deal with the substantive principles and rules that govern a specific sub-field of international law, but also touches upon epistemological questions, such as the theory of sources of international law, or meta-issues, such as the methodology of international law research.

2.2. Hard versus electronic copy

It is open to question to what extent books will continue to exist in hard copy. It is certainly true that books published on paper offer a tangible format, not subject to the more fleeting nature of an electronic publication. For that reason alone, they may not easily disappear. Electronic publications, on the other hand, could be viewed as a more democratic vehicle allowing for a more immediate discussion, in which readers who do not have the time or means to either buy the books themselves or travel to one of the great international law libraries in Heidelberg or The Hague can also partake. Then again, this democratic element ought not to be overstated as an internet connection is as of yet far from a universally acquired good – and the emergence of e-books has partially abolished the need to physically visit a library, putting books on much the same level as journals.

One further step is to offer wider public access for books through the Open Access system.³ Such a system offers several advantages, but also raises many intricate issues, particularly concerning copyright matters.⁴ Nonetheless, several book publishers have already started developing such a system,⁵ which has the potential to greatly enhance books' chances of survival in the next centuries.

2.3. Citation indexes, impact factors, and publication rankings

One significant disadvantage of disseminating ideas via books is that the latter do not, to the same extent as journals, feature in so-called 'citation indexes'.⁶ Unlike the LJIL itself, for example, books are not included in the Social Science Citation Index prepared by Thomson Reuters, which in turn is used – justifiably or not – by many universities as a yardstick for assessing a scholar's academic performance. As a consequence, indicators reporting the impact of books are practically non-existent. The currently existing 'impact factor', which measures the frequency with which the average journal article has been cited in a particular year, applies only to periodical publications. This is only logical, since this factor purports to measure the influence of a particular journal, thereby arguably serving as a proxy for the journal's quality, and not the quality of an individual article in it. If a similar impact factor were to be designed for book publications, it would ultimately measure the impact and quality of publishers.

It is often said that where you publish is as important as what you publish. Book authors, particularly junior scholars in the early phase of their career, who are eager to get a tenured position at a university, seem well aware of this, and many of them carefully chose where to publish their academic work. In practice, even in the absence of a publishers' impact factor, there exists informal consensus in every academic discipline about a list of top publishers. The publication of a book by a known university press is often considered as an indication of excellence, which can be instrumental to establishing the scholar's position among his or her academic peers, and may even influence that scholar's success in obtaining new research grants. Admittedly, such considerations may be of less relevance to the general readers, although they too, are more likely to buy a book published by an internationally-known publishing house.

Impact factors – and the publication rankings resulting from them – certainly have their merits. If anything else, they aid scholars in their choice for publication in that they provide some quantifiable data, other than the mere *appearance* of a

3 For a more extensive analysis of Open Access options and the implications of open access on international legal scholarship, see F. Baetens and W. L. Cheah, 'Being an International Law Lecturer in the 21st Century: Where Tradition Meets Innovation', (2013) 2 *Cambridge Journal of International and Comparative Law* 974.

4 See L. van den Herik, *supra* note 2, at 7–8. The question of open access has been further discussed in C. Stahn and E. De Brabandere, *supra* note 1, at 9.

5 For an overview, see the Directory of Open Access books, listing books from more than 57 publishers, available at <<http://www.doabooks.org>>.

6 To our knowledge, exceptions are the Thomson Reuters' Book Citation Index <<http://thomsonreuters.com/book-citation-index/>>, which then features in the Thomson Reuters Web of Science, and the Google Scholar Citation Index, which reportedly includes some scholarly books <<http://scholar.google.com/intl/en/scholar/publishers.html#questions>>.

publisher's prestige and importance. Yet, the pertinent indexes, factors, and rankings increasingly also shape the way in which academic research is conducted and published. This is not devoid of problems and has had many unintended consequences.⁷ In the hard sciences, publishing monographs (as distinct from textbooks) is now virtually extinct; careers are built on publications in top-tier journals with high impact factors such as *Nature* or *Science*. A similar evolution seems to be emerging in the legal field, particularly in the US but increasingly also in Europe: publishing one's work as such is no longer sufficient; one has to aim for 'the highest ranking international journals'.

Here international lawyers encounter a problem: unlike in the hard sciences, where a limited number of journals form the commonly accepted gold standard, no recognized listing of international law journals exists. Instead there are several independent rankings, such as Google Scholar and the Washington and Lee University Ranking.⁸ But these offer little help to strategically-minded academics in deciding where to submit their work: some top five journals in one ranking do not even feature in the top twenty of the other.⁹ Some journals in the same ranking are far from interchangeable. For example, how to rank a journal on criminal justice in reference to one on international economic law? The manner of calculating a journal's position in the ranking is often unclear, using a variety of criteria such as journal cites, currency factors, case cites, cites/cost, and impact factors. Several of these seem to be mostly based on data obtained from the US market, as shown by the abundant presence in these rankings of US journals virtually unknown or rarely cited elsewhere. This is a known problem that the publishers of European journals will most likely have to address in the near future.¹⁰

2.4. Edited books

One type of publication addressing the problem of the time one needs to read a book is the publication of edited books, where chapters can be read independently of one another. Ideally, these contain several papers on one topic, written by various authors with diverse backgrounds. Thus they contain a wider variety of perspectives than one author would usually manage and often even attempt to start a debate through the inclusion of opposing views. Publishers take care that not any random collection of conference papers is published as they require editors of such volumes to formulate a coherent book proposal and even subject chapters to blind peer review. Of course, in view of the collaborative nature of such academic contributions, it is notoriously

7 For a perspective from the natural sciences on some of these problems, see, e.g., E. Marder, H. Kettenmann, and S. Grillner, 'Impacting Our Young', (2010) 107(50) *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 21233; for a perspective from international legal scholarship, see, e.g., J. Weiler, 'Editorial: Impact Factor – The Food is Bad and What's More There is Not Enough of It', (2012) 23 *EJIL* 607.

8 These rankings are available at <http://scholar.google.nl/citations?view_op=top_venues&hl=en&vq=soc_internationallaw> and <<http://lawlib.wlu.edu/LJ/>>.

9 Google Scholar, for example, lists the *American Journal of Comparative Law* and the *Human Rights Quarterly* in its top five, which do not feature in the top twenty of the Washington and Lee University Ranking. The Washington and Lee University Ranking lists the *Harvard International Law Journal*, the *Tulane Law Review* and *The Yale Journal of International Law* in its top five – none of which appear in the Google Scholar ranking.

10 See Weiler, *supra* note 7, at 609–10.

difficult to make edited books coherent, and they obviously remain a challenge for any editor. This notwithstanding, edited books are not likely to disappear yet. To the contrary, if there is one particular form of book publication that seems to have reinvented international legal scholarship, these are the (research) handbooks, published by university as well as by trade academic presses, and which have now become standard reference works in practically any sub-field of international law.

But the weight attached to book chapters differs between academic cultures and book chapters suffer from one major disadvantage: most libraries, even if they have an adequate book budget, do not catalogue the different chapters as individual papers, listing only the (often rather generic) title of the book itself (a notable exception is the Peace Palace Library).¹¹ This makes it much more difficult for researchers relying on search engines to find the specific chapters that are relevant to their research. Because of this, book chapters also generate fewer citations, and consequently less impact. Indeed, after exploring how citations of academic book chapters fare in Google Scholar in comparison to citations of journal articles, a scholar recently came to the conclusion that 'if you write a chapter for an edited book, you might as well write the paper and then bury it in a hole in the ground'.¹²

3. WHY REVIEW BOOKS?

Bearing all this in mind, why does a journal such as the *Leiden Journal of International Law* – and many others – still review books, except out of habit and tradition? As an increasing number of books is published every year by publishers old and new, readers lack the time even to browse book catalogues, whereas their interest might be sparked by reading a thought-provoking review of a new book. Book reviews therefore have an informative role.

But book reviews also serve other purposes. First, they offer independent advice to aid the international readership in its decision whether or not to expand its library with this particular book. In other words, they can prompt libraries to purchase the book and readers to read it. In the absence of a book ranking system, reviews can have the role of a quality indicator. Having one's book reviewed in a leading journal is in itself to some extent a sign of recognition or merit. In that, it is perhaps not always a fully reliable one, for there are still excellent books that remain unreviewed; still, a positive review in one or more legal journals usually attests to the quality of a particular book. Thirty years ago, a significant monograph could expect at least a dozen reviews or more; these days, two or three is more the norm.

Second, reviews serve the purpose of quality control. This type of quality control is, of course, a different one than the one performed by journal articles. In the view of the LJIL, the control performed by journal articles is in the tracing and

¹¹ Available at <<http://www.peacepalacelibrary.nl>>.

¹² See D. Bishop, 'How to Bury your Academic Writing', available at <<http://deevybee.blogspot.co.uk/2012/08/how-to-bury-your-academic-writing.html>>. The author of the blog is a professor of developmental neuropsychology at Oxford University.

certification of quality as such of the scholarship that is published.¹³ In the case of books, this kind of quality control is primarily performed by the publisher itself via external peer reviewers. The quality control performed by book reviews, on the other hand, is post-publication quality control, which is, moreover, performed openly, and potentially by a broader set of reviewers than the field-specific experts that are usually selected to perform the original (single or double) blind peer review. Such control obviously pertains to the quality of the argumentation and research as such, but may also pertain to matters of intellectual honesty and scientific integrity. Thus, book reviews may not only point out errors or omissions in the book author's research. They can also uncover those errors and omissions that have not been made in good faith, and border instead on fraud. There is at least one example in recent years of a book review leading to a re-examination of the author's obtainment of an academic title.¹⁴

Finally, book reviews incite academic debate, and so not merely reflect upon, but also add to, academic scholarship.

In our view, the purposes of book reviewing have not fundamentally changed with the advent of the age of cyberspace. The digitization of the traditional modes of scholarly production has affected the medium through which scholarly ideas are distributed, but not the process of book reviewing. In fact, this Journal has already published reviews of electronic books.¹⁵ As book review editors, we embrace these developments for, by increasing the accessibility of certain books, digitization may increase the chance that books will be read.

4. WHICH BOOKS TO REVIEW?

In the view of LJIL, academic journals perform an important role in the structuring and ordering of the flow of information and opinions.¹⁶ In the context of book reviews, one could say that this ordering plays a role in the selection of books that are reviewed in our Journal. In the limited amount of space allotted to our section, we can only present a fraction of the books that are published each year, which demands a certain degree of selectivity. There are a number of considerations that affect this selection.

First, there are practical concerns regarding the fact that some books are more amenable to review than others. A monograph written by a single author is capable of being adequately presented in 2,000 words, while an edited work containing contributions from ten or so different scholars may be less so, particularly if the aim is not to produce an expanded description of the table of contents. Furthermore, there are some types of academic works, such as commentaries and encyclopaedias,

13 See on this J. D'Aspremont and L. van den Herik, 'The Public Good of Academic Publishing in International Law', (2013), 26 LJIL 1.

14 See, e.g., the review by A. Sari in (2006) 17 *EJIL* 863, which noted the 'at times cavalier use of sources' by the author of one of the reviewed books, and the academic repercussions that this review has had, as described in *Nederlands Juridisch Dagblad* (27 November 2006), available at <http://juridischdagblad.nl/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=4257>.

15 See, e.g., F. Williams, (2013) 26 LJIL 772.

16 See J. D'Aspremont and L. van den Herik, *supra* note 13, at 3–4.

which require a distinct approach to reviewing. In our experience, reviewing such books has not always yielded successful results.¹⁷

Second, there are important policy considerations concerning scientific integrity and objectivity. For the past few years, we have strictly adhered to the principle that we do not review books written or edited by members of our editorial board, or allow our own editors to review books for us.¹⁸ For the same reason, we do not allow books to be reviewed by scholars who had some involvement in the book under review – even if, admittedly, this is not always easy to discover and we still rely on the sincerity on the part of the reviewer. Furthermore, we are particularly concerned about arranged book reviews – the practice whereby authors approach us with the proposal to have their book reviewed by a certain person. But again, it is difficult to ensure that an unsolicited book review has not actually been arranged by the book's author.

Third, we seek to achieve a balanced representation of the books that are published each year. The goal is to maintain diversity in terms of subject matter of the reviewed books (avoiding to publish in the same issue, for example, three book reviews on the topic of investment arbitration), as well as in terms of authors. Furthermore, we are conscious about the need to ensure a balanced representation of publishing houses, as well as languages. That is easier said than done. In terms of output, some publishers produce annually more books on international law than others. Furthermore, the English language continues to dominate in international law scholarship. But in addition to reviewing books from the traditional university presses and trade academic presses, we still manage to review (and intend to continue reviewing) books published by publishing houses that are less established, or still emerging, in the field of international law,¹⁹ and books written in, for example, French²⁰ or German.²¹

5. HOW TO REVIEW BOOKS?

A well-written book review can be a piece of scholarship in itself, yet in research assessment and promotion exercises, book reviews and even review articles rarely count. It takes a significant amount of time to read a book, check points where necessary, and draft a balanced, yet critical appraisal. This is a delicate exercise, considering that one is openly evaluating one's peers' work.

In this regard, it has been with some discomfort that the LJIL has followed one author's infamous attempt to interfere with the publication of a critical book review

17 Which is why such works only exceptionally feature among the books reviewed by LJIL. See, e.g., E. Newalsing, (2008) 21 LJIL 255, presenting the ICRC study published as J.-M. Henckaerts and L. Doswald-Beck (eds.), *Customary International Humanitarian Law* (2005); or J. d'Aspremont, (2008) 21 LJIL 282, presenting O. Corten and P. Klein (eds.), *Les Conventions de Vienne sur le Droit des Traités: Commentaire Article par Article* (2006).

18 Although reviewers have occasionally later become members of the editorial board.

19 See, e.g., C. Zimmermann, (2013) 26 LJIL 497; or F. Williams, (2013) 26 LJIL 772.

20 See, e.g., F. Mukwiza Ndahinda, (2007) 20 LJIL 699; J. d'Aspremont, (2008) 21 LJIL 282; F. Zarbiev, (2009) 22 LJIL 211; I. De La Rasilla Del Moral, (2009) 22 LJIL 629; R. Uruña, (2011) 24 LJIL 793; J. K. Dunin-Wasowicz, (2012) 25 LJIL 1029; or C. Ahlborn, (2013) 26 LJIL 223.

21 See, e.g., J. Rauber (2013) 26 LJIL 201.

by a fellow international law journal.²² In the view of the LJIL, the publication of a book entails a voluntary decision on the part of its author to enter the public domain. By entering this domain, the author accepts that the book may be subjected to review, and that the reviewer may potentially also disagree with the author's writings. It is inherent to academia that scholars hold different views on substantive matters. The process of review is an essential part of academic debate, and with debate, there is always diversity of opinions. This is why it has never been our editorial policy to limit the level of criticism expressed in the reviews that we publish (save for the event that the review would clearly go beyond general standards of decency and fair scholarship, such as in the extreme cases of hate speech or excessively aggressive reviews – but that has not yet happened). On the contrary, a certain amount of constructive criticism is actually necessary if a book review is to differ from marketing material.

There is no specific recipe for writing a good book review. The LJIL has always maintained a preference for reviews that are comprehensive and analytical, and not a mere reproduction of the table of contents. Furthermore, there is the tendency to fall in what Joseph Weiler calls the ABA trap – to state that the book is a good one (A), to note that there are problems with it (B), and to finally reaffirm that it is a valuable addition to the literature (A).²³ We are not necessarily averse to such reviews, as long as they remain objective. In terms of method, the more engaging reviews are appreciated, which, while briefly outlining the book's contents and structure, present and take issue with the book's main arguments and ideas. Apart from that, the LJIL does not demand that reviewers should follow any particular form. We have published reviews that discussed a book's arguments in the form of propositions,²⁴ or which focused almost exclusively on the book's shortcomings.²⁵ However, we are still awaiting a book review in the form of a haiku.

6. OUR APPROACH TO BOOK REVIEWING

Many journals try nowadays to be more ambitious and innovative in their reviewing of books. In that endeavour, the LJIL follows a five-pronged approach. First and foremost: quality is more than ever key, so the number of published reviews will only represent a fraction of the number of reviews actually submitted – based on the same stringent peer review process to which all other journal articles are subjected. Reviews can be solicited, but peer review is not thereby dispensed with.

Second, some books are so rich in content that cannot be adequately presented in the 2,000 words of a traditional book review. Therefore, it is an established practice of the LJIL to publish longer contributions, which are commonly called 'review essays', although these too can take a variety of forms. On the one hand, there are comparative review essays, which jointly review two, three, or more books

22 See J. Weiler, 'Editorial: Book Reviewing and Academic Freedom', (2010) 20 EJIL 967–76.

23 See J. Weiler, 'Editorial', (2008) 19 EJIL 459–62, at 459.

24 J. Friedrichs, (2010) 23 LJIL 712–15.

25 See, e.g., F. Zarbiev, (2009) 22 LJIL 211–16, or A. Varga, (2012) 25 LJIL 843–6.

(published within the same year or two), on the same or similar topics. Such essays usually revolve around the books' common theme, and their purpose is primarily to situate these books within the context of existing scholarship. Review essays typically compare the books' analytical approaches, evaluate their doctrinal assumptions and theoretical arguments, appraise their substantive findings,²⁶ and sometimes touch upon issues of style.²⁷ They can also assess the books from the vantage point of a specific function,²⁸ or simply evaluate the books in relation to a specific position in international legal discourse.²⁹

On the other hand, we have also published essays devoted to the discussion of single works. Single book review essays are particularly suitable for reviewing edited books that deal with divergent themes and topics which would otherwise be impossible to properly discuss in the form of a traditional book review.³⁰ Occasionally, they may even provide a useful means to present a specific book written by a single author, particularly if the book's author and the reviewer share fundamentally different views on a particular question.³¹ For the past five years, almost every issue of the LJIL has featured approximately one or two review essays in addition to roughly the same amount of traditional reviews. We will strive to maintain such balance in the future.

Third, in our quest for innovative approaches to reviewing books, we are now exploring the option of accepting multiple reviews of one book, written by several people, either as a joint effort, or even independently of each other, and including a brief reply by the author of the book. An obvious advantage of such combined reviews is that they can diversify the debate by offering, within the confines of a single article, a variety of views on the subject matter dealt with in the book. This contrasts with the more traditional book reviews, which are often written from the perspective of a particular school of thought or academic standpoint. Furthermore, such combined review puts critical remarks in perspective, and eventually also allows the author to respond to potential criticism.

-
- 26 See, e.g., R. Liivoja, 'Regulating the Private Military and Security Industry: A Quest to Maintain State Control and Preserve Public Values', (2012) 25 LJIL 1019–28, J. Rauber, 'On Communitarian and Constitutional Approaches to International Law', (2013) 26 LJIL 201–17; or J. Paine, 'Kelsen, Legal Normativity, and Formal Justice in International Relations', (2013) 26 LJIL 1037–53.
- 27 See, e.g., S. Chesterman, 'International Territorial Administration and the Limits of Law', (2010) 23 LJIL 437–47, at 445, noting how one of the book's chapters are 'subdivided in legal numbering that would challenge the average word processor, including a heading in chapter 14 numbered "3.2.3.2.2.b(2)".
- 28 See, e.g., V. Engström, 'Two Ways of Knowing International Law', (2014) 27 LJIL, discussing two international law textbooks from an educational perspective.
- 29 See, e.g., C. Schwöbel, 'The Holy Trinity of International Legal Debate', (2011) 24 LJIL 1035–56, examining in particular the political orientation assumed in the books under review in relation to the debate on constitutionalism.
- 30 See, e.g., U. Özsü, 'The Question of Form: Methodological Notes on Dialectics and International Law', (2010) 23 LJIL 687–707, M. Paparinskis, 'Investment Law of/for/before the Twenty-First Century', (2012) 25 225–37, or R. Holtmaat, 'Hovering Between Resistance and Compliance or Time to Take a Break from International Law? A Review of "Feminist Perspectives on Contemporary International Law"', (2014) 27 LJIL 283.
- 31 See, e.g., R. Van Steenberghe, 'The Law against War or *Jus contra Bellum*: A New Terminology for a Conservative View on the Use of Force?', (2011) 24 747–88; or R. Kolb, 'Discussion of T. H. Cheng's Monograph *When International Law Works*, and in Particular a Defence of the *Nicaragua* Judgment of the ICJ', (2013) 26 LJIL 751–66.

Fourth, we are considering other ways in which authors of reviewed books could be offered (at times upon their own motivated request) the opportunity to respond to the review. In the past, we were once approached by a book's author with the request to publish a reply to an unfavourable review, on the ground that the review misrepresented some portions of the empirical analysis contained in the book. In the circumstances of that case, we decided not to publish the reaction since this was not likely to lead to a substantial legal debate that would have been of interest to our readers. But we are aware that such exchange of views could occasionally be warranted. In some cases, it can be only fair, for example where important new circumstances relevant to the topic of the book have arisen after its publication, which the reviewer has relied upon in constructing the review. However, the option of providing the possibility of reply has to be used sparsely, as generally, authors who cannot anticipate and adequately respond to certain points of criticism while writing the book, will most likely also not be able to do so in the brief space of a response to a book review. At any rate, one way of enabling the book's author to respond to the review could be by organizing an online debate between the reviewer and the author of the book, possibly with the participation of other scholars, as we have already done in the context of a symposium held at the *Opinio Juris* blog.³²

Fifth, we are contemplating the introduction of some type of literature review, whereby one reviewer scrutinizes scholarship on the same topic published in various media – thus, beyond the confines of books. This is a relatively unexplored but thought-provoking way to evaluate for example edited collections. These are often difficult to review as chapters may not be closely linked. Journal articles could also be among the papers to be reviewed in this manner, allowing cross-reviewers to explore the gamut of scholarship published in a delimited period of time on one particular issue. We realize, however, that the line between a book review and a proper journal article could then become rather thin.

Finally, what does the LJIL need in order to maintain high-quality book reviews? We are continuously looking for volunteers from all over the world, with various specializations and at different stages of their careers. Potential reviewers are warmly invited to contact us at f.baetens@law.leidenuniv.nl or v.prislan@law.leidenuniv.nl.

As such we hope, if not to revolutionize book reviewing, then at least allow it to evolve in a manner that does justice to the authors and remains interesting for an international readership.

32 See the book author's comments on the review essay <<http://opiniojuris.org/2012/07/06/ljil-symposium-vol-25-2-beyond-constitutionalism-pluralisms-promise/>>, and the comments of another scholar <<http://opiniojuris.org/2012/07/06/ljil-symposium-vol-25-2-beyond-constitutionalism-a-comment-on-nico-krisch/>>, coupled with the reply of the reviewer <<http://opiniojuris.org/2012/07/06/ljil-symposium-vol-25-2-beyond-constitutionalism-how-radical-pluralism-bites-its-own-tail/>>.