Symposium on Early Career International Law Academia: Introduction

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The entire symposium is accessible in PDF format here.

Being an early career scholar in international law is a fun and strange journey: most of us made a conscious choice to hop on a train that is made out of international treaties, court decisions, draft and not-draft articles, case studies, and so forth. Yet, before buying the tickets to this ride by enrolling in PhD and research programs, how long did we think about the caveats intrinsic to 'going on a world tour' with international law and not staying in our own jurisdictions?

This symposium's idea was born out of at least four reflections on that question – the experiences of the four editors. While our experiences are unique, we

could agree on one thing: there are junior international legal scholars struggling with various challenges that are inherent to the field. The hierarchies of academic institutions, the political economy of modern universities, geographical location, language, race, gender, and mental health struggles are some of the issues of concern to junior legal researchers, and often even to those advanced in their career. Difficulties emerge not only from structures of oppression and exclusion but also from insufficient familiarity with basic aspects of academic life. All four of us agreed that at the beginning of our careers we had/have little understanding of how to prepare a book proposal, an abstract for an interesting conference, a polite rejection email for an attractive offer, a teaching plan, a justification for chosen methods, and much more.

This symposium is animated by a desire to offer broad reflection and practical advice to junior international law researchers. We remain mindful of the fact that many of the problems we face are structural and cannot be resolved through better advice and adaptation of our personal behaviour. Collective problems only admit to collective solutions. At the same time, some of the inequities of academic life manifest themselves as unequal access to useful information: those lucky, savvy, or demographically predetermined to attend prestigious institutions, access helpful mentors, and closely observe successful colleagues, are better placed to acquire a clearer understanding of the 'unspoken' parts of the job. The rest are often unaware that these 'unspoken' parts even exist. With that in mind, we started thinking about how we could pass on the knowledge that we and our excellent contributors gained with time and experience. That is how this symposium emerged – it took a village to assemble this "road map for early career scholars" and we are incredibly grateful for everyone who took their time to participate in this project. The breadth and depth of responses evidence both the anxieties but also the generosity, patience, and creativity of the 'invisible college'.

The first half of the symposium, hosted by *Opinio Juris*, opened with a two part post by Eliav Lieblich who offered a nuanced yet also practical guide to the complex issue of choosing one's method/ology in international legal scholarship – hopefully these posts offered useful advice on what else one could tell to their thesis committee apart from singing Taylor Swift! This was followed by an interview with Sundhya Pahuja, who, drawing from her long experience as PhD supervisor, explored the challenges and opportunities associated with

undertaking a doctorate. Offering a view from the other side of this process, Immi Tallgren discussed the experience of being an external PhD examiner with all its uncertainties, unknown unknowns, and joys.

We continued with Frederic Mégret who shared his experiences of being "a foreign academic." The field of international law is distinctive, and as mentioned earlier – it is a train that usually brings you overseas, which can present distinct challenges when it comes to teaching a nationally-specific subject, such as law. Gabriele Chlevickaite also focused on insiders-outsiders by exploring the relationship between academic work and legal practice in the complicated field of international criminal law.

Further, Ntina Tzouvala explored the gap between perception and reality when it comes to the qualifications required for an entry-level job in the UK and in Australia. The topic of the academic job market was then nicely elaborated by Alexander Gilder, whose two part post explained how to secure a first academic post in the United Kingdom (there was also a nice bonus accompanying this post).

Even after securing a permanent academic post, junior international lawyers may struggle with aspects of the job that a doctoral degree does not effectively prepare us for. We had two great contributions from Başak Etkin and Fleur Johns who shared their experiences and skills on how to craft convincing abstracts and pitch your ideas to conference organisers. Mastering abstracts could be of use for many of your projects, including writing a longer-form "abstract" for your manuscript with the aim of securing a publishing contract. Yet, there are some peculiarities to this process: Barrie Sander and Rebecca Sutton shared their experiences with writing book proposals in their interview-style contribution (and you will also be able to access their proposals, which were attached to their post). The next post by Lucas Lixinski offered indispensable insights on how to not only balance research and teaching but on how to make sure that they inform and improve each other. Yvonne McDermott then provided some tips on securing research funding drawing on her recent experience securing an ECR Starting Grant. This part of the symposium concluded with a post by Raghavi Viswanath and Tejas Rao who discussed the complicated issue of social media, and especially Twitter, as professional tools.

We are now delighted to welcome you to the second part of this symposium, hosted by *Afronomicslaw*. We begin by focusing on how to look after your mental health while being an international legal scholar. We start with a very important contribution by Douglas Guilfoyle who reflects on dealing with mental health issues triggered by professional, workplace, and personal pressures. Michael Lane then discusses strategies for tackling 'imposter syndrome' in academia, including how to overcome doubt as an early career researcher. We continue with a creative contribution by Medes Malaihollo, who outlines how Indigenous conceptions of time enabled him to manage his own time better. In two frank and joyful posts, Aoife O'Donoghue and Sophie Rigney share their own "best practices" on how to take time off work and still enjoy what our lives offer outside the walls of our office or beyond our working laptop screens.

The last part of our symposium illuminates some structural problems of the field – problems that one cannot easily resolve by mastering new skills. Posts by Radhika Jagtap and Akhila Basalalli open the discussion of challenges related to geography and gender. Radhika and Akhila candidly share their experiences of what it means to be a female international lawyer from the Global South. They focus on challenges specific to scholars in underfunded institutions who are also being pressured for not 'performing' traditional female roles. Speaking of gender disparities, Aphiwan Natasha King makes an important intervention by highlighting the problem of gender disparity in academic citations. In her post, she also gives advice for rectifying the gender gap in academic publishing, especially in international law. This part closes with a contribution from an anonymous author who offers a somber account of the challenges faced by early-career 'Blackademics' in international law. Drawing from extensive interviews, this post concludes with a call for an honest discussion about race/ism in our field.

We are well aware that the posts that follow only offer a glimpse into the wide variety of challenges experienced by early career researchers. We aimed to bring together a diverse group of early-career scholars with particular attention to those often left out in the mainstream maze. We also included mid-career and senior colleagues with a view to offer practical advice publicly. We consider this symposium a modest, initial effort, and we are looking forward to seeing similar efforts unfold elsewhere.

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