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Peter Hilpold & Giuseppe Nesi (eds.), *Teaching International Law*, Brill/Nijhoff, Leiden, Boston: 2024, pp. XVIII+ 510

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INTRODUCTION: OPENING THE “HIDDEN ROOM”

In the vast and ever-expanding palace of international law scholarship, there is, as Peter Hilpold describes in his introductory chapter, a “hidden room”.¹ It is a space everyone assumes exists, one whose importance is readily acknowledged at law faculties and scientific conferences, yet the door to this room has remained stubbornly difficult to find, let alone open for systematic inspection. At a moment of intense geopolitical tensions, when the very foundations of the post-war international order are questioned and the relevance of international law is debated with renewed vigour in political fora, the question of how we transmit our discipline to the next generation has never been more critical. Editors Peter Hilpold and Giuseppe Nesi have entered into this timely and vital conversation with their collection, entitled *Teaching International Law*. This is no mere assortment of reflections; it is a carefully curated, comprehensive and deeply thoughtful examination of the current state of affairs. I believe that the editors have not only found the key to the hidden room, but have thrown its doors wide open, inviting the global community of international lawyers to a necessary dialogue about the art, science and politics of their craft.²

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¹ P. Hilpold, *Teaching International Law in the 21st Century. Opening the Hidden Room in the Palace of International Law*, in: P. Hilpold, G. Nesi (eds.), *Teaching International Law*, Brill/Nijhoff, Leiden, Boston: 2024, p. 21.

² Note that another book on the same topic was published almost simultaneously: J.-P. Gauci, B. Sander (eds.), *Teaching International Law Reflections on Pedagogical Practice in Context*, Routledge, New York: 2024.

The volume assembles a veritable “who’s who” of contemporary international law to reflect on the challenges and opportunities of teaching it in the 21st century. The result is a work of great value, not only for scholars but also for anyone interested in relevance of the international legal order. It is a landmark contribution that succeeds on multiple levels: as a practical guide filled with innovative ideas, as a theoretical exploration of the discipline’s identity and as a sociological snapshot of the “invisible college” reflecting upon itself.

1. THEMATIC COHESION: CHARTING THE MODERN PEDAGOGICAL LANDSCAPE

Across its many contributions, several recurring themes emerge, providing a coherent narrative that paints a rich, complex portrait of the contemporary state of teaching international law (TIL). These themes provide the intellectual frames of the book, allowing it to function as a unified whole rather than a disparate collection of essays.

A central tension, articulated by several authors, is the evolving and often contested role of the international law teacher. The traditional image of the teacher as a high priest of a sacred legal text, a direct descendant of Grotius or Vattel, has given way to a more fraught identity. Today’s teacher, as Hilpold notes, may be seen as anything from a “saint” or “prophet” to a “miserable apologist” or an “entrapped tin soldier bowing to bureaucratic edict”.³ This spectrum reflects the precarious position of international law itself, caught between its universalist aspirations and the raw realities of state power. Therefore, it is better to see the teacher not as a mere transmitter of settled doctrine, but rather a navigator of a complex field, tasked with equipping students with knowledge that will allow them to understand a system that is simultaneously a tool for justice and an instrument of power.

This leads to a second critical theme: the dynamic interplay between theory and practice. The book skilfully navigates this long-standing debate on whether TIL should prioritise doctrinal knowledge or practical skills. The contributions collectively argue for a combination of the two. Pierre-Marie Dupuy, with his extensive experience before international courts, cautions against excessive dogmatism, noting that the law must be understood “as it is in force and actually practiced.”⁴ Conversely, he underscores the indispensability of a solid grounding in the theory to understand international law as a coherent legal order rather than a “junk shop” of disparate norms.⁵ Giuseppe Nesi’s personal reflection on his career as a “diplomat-jurist” pro-

³ Hilpold, *supra* note 1, pp. 3, 24 and 71.

⁴ P.-M. Dupuy, *Is There an Art of Teaching International Law?*, in: P. Hilpold, G. Nesi (eds.), *Teaching International Law*, Brill/Nijhoff, Leiden, Boston: 2024, p. 188.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 186.

vides a compelling case for this synergy. He argues that practical experience enriches teaching by lending credibility, overcoming cynicism and providing a “greater depth of knowledge” that benefits both the classroom and the chancellery. The volume makes it clear that the most effective pedagogy lies not in choosing one over the other, but in finding a productive and mutually reinforcing balance.

A third theme (and perhaps the most urgent one) concerns the institutional environment in which teaching takes place. Several chapters sound a powerful alarm about the threats to academic freedom and the integrity of legal education. Gerd Morgenthaler identifies the rise of a technocratic “new Managerialism”⁶ as a profound danger, one that seeks to impose business-style governance models on universities, potentially stifling the “pure and independent thinking” that is the lifeblood of academia. Carlo Focarelli echoes this concern with his critique of “supermarketized universities” and the “commodification of knowledge”.⁷ He argues that the relentless push towards measurable “output” and marketable skills risks producing “generations of useful machines, rather than complete citizens who can think for themselves”.⁸ This critique is vital, as it reminds us that the purpose of TIL extends beyond preparing students for a career; it is about cultivating citizens capable of navigating a complex global reality with wisdom, responsibility and a deep-seated commitment to justice.

Finally, the book grapples with the tension between the universal and the particular. While international law claims universality, its teaching is a deeply local practice. This tension manifests in debates over curriculum design: should we strive for a universal canon, or should teaching be grounded in national and regional contexts? Jan Wouters makes a compelling case for a “European perspective”, not as an exercise in Eurocentrism, but as a necessary reflection of the multi-layered legal reality of the continent.⁹ Andreas Ziegler argues for teaching international law as the “law of the land”, emphasising the domestic nexus to make the subject more concrete and relevant for students.¹⁰ This move towards localisation is, as Lucas Lixinski observes in his survey of the literature, a major trend that pushes back against the grand, often Eurocentric, universalist projects of the past.¹¹

⁶ G. Morgenthaler, *Teaching International Law in Germany*, in: P. Hilpold, G. Nesi (eds.), *Teaching International Law*, Brill/Nijhoff, Leiden, Boston: 2024, p. 344.

⁷ C. Focarelli, *Teaching International Law Today and the Human Person*, in: P. Hilpold, G. Nesi (eds.), *Teaching International Law*, Brill/Nijhoff, Leiden, Boston: 2024, pp. 132 and 149.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 125.

⁹ J. Wouters, *Teaching International Law from a European Perspective*, in: P. Hilpold, G. Nesi (eds.), *Teaching International Law*, Brill/Nijhoff, Leiden, Boston: 2024, pp. 211 et seq.

¹⁰ A. Ziegler, *Teaching International Law as “Law of the Land”*, in: P. Hilpold, G. Nesi (eds.), *Teaching International Law*, Brill/Nijhoff, Leiden, Boston: 2024, pp. 303 et seq.

¹¹ L. Lixinski, *Scholarship on the Teaching of International Law*, in: P. Hilpold, G. Nesi (eds.), *Teaching International Law*, Brill/Nijhoff, Leiden, Boston: 2024, pp. 435 et seq.

2. A TOUR OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS: FROM GLOBAL VISIONS TO PRACTICAL TOOLS

While thematically coherent, the strength of this book lies in the specificity and depth of its individual chapters. The editors have organised them logically, allowing the reader to build a comprehensive understanding of the field.

Part II, entitled “Global Perspective” (and which comes immediately after the Introduction), starts with Hilpold’s chapter (“Teaching International Law in the 21st Century”), which provides a detailed overview and situates the contemporary teacher within a historical and institutional context. Charlotte Ku (“U.S. Approaches to Teaching International Law in a Global Environment”) offers a pragmatic and insightful analysis of the US approach, highlighting the constraints of a curriculum geared towards the bar exam and immediate employment, but also arguing persuasively that an international-law mindset is increasingly essential for all legal fields, especially in the wake of global crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Carlo Focarelli’s contribution (“Teaching International Law Today and the Human Person”) challenges us to consider what “teaching” is ultimately for and provides a powerful defence of a humanistic pedagogy. This is followed by concise yet insightful reflections from Natalino Ronzitti (“What Is a Good International Law Teacher?”) on the essential qualities of a good teacher, whom he argues must possess deep doctrinal knowledge, practical experience and, above all, “independence”. Pierre-Marie Dupuy (“Is There an Art of Teaching International Law?”) writes on the “art” of teaching, warning us against doctrinal fads and stressing the importance of confronting theories with their practical effectiveness. Giuseppe Nesi’s personal account of being a “diplomat-jurist” provides a compelling narrative anchor for the theoretical reflections included in this part (“Teaching International Law”).

Part III delves into national, regional and methodological perspectives, showcasing the rich diversity of TIL. Jan Wouters makes a strong case for teaching from a “European perspective”, demonstrating how the European Union and the Council of Europe have created a unique multi-layered legal order that fundamentally shapes the practice of international law on the continent (“Teaching International Law from a European Perspective”). Barbara Marchetti’s lucid introduction to Global Administrative Law and Sergio Dellavalle’s exploration of interdisciplinarity and the “paradigms of order” demonstrate the book’s engagement with cutting-edge theoretical developments that are reshaping our understanding of global governance. Andreas R. Ziegler’s practical and pointed recommendations – such as making public international law a compulsory subject early in the curriculum – serve as a necessary corrective to programmes that marginalise this subject (“Teaching International Law as ‘Law of the Land’”). The inclusion of a multi-authored section

on the specific challenges of TIL in Germany, featuring Rüdiger Wolfrum, Heribert Hirte and Gerd Morgenthaler, provides a fascinating and detailed case study (“Teaching International Law in Germany”). It reveals a system where international law’s constitutional importance is not fully reflected in a legal education system heavily orientated towards the *Staatsexamen* and the needs of the domestic judiciary, a situation that many readers from other jurisdictions will find strikingly familiar.

The volume then turns in Part IV to the teaching of specific sub-disciplines, an acknowledgment of the field’s increasing specialisation. Ernst-Ulrich Petersmann’s chapter on international economic law is a tour de force, advocating for a value-orientated approach grounded in human rights, theories of justice and the Sustainable Development Goals. He challenges teachers and students to move beyond narrow, formalistic analyses and to engage with the profound ethical and political questions at the heart of the global economy. Nikos Lavranos complements this with a call for a “true holistic approach” to teaching international investment law, warning against the dangers of “clinical isolation” and stressing its deep connections to constitutional law, EU law and the broader rule of law.

Perhaps the most forward-looking section is Part V, which examines the tools, instruments and resources available to the modern teacher. The chapter by Markus Beham, Melanie Fink and Ralph Janik, called “Visualising International Law”, is a creative and practical guide to using movies, images and cultural references to make abstract concepts tangible and engaging. It is a welcome reminder that pedagogy can and should be innovative. James Summers’ candid reflection on the travails and triumphs of “Writing an International Law Textbook” offers a rare and valuable behind-the-scenes look at a process central to our discipline’s pedagogy, exploring the delicate balance between authority, clarity and market constraints. Finally, Pierre d’Argent’s chapter, “Teaching International Law Massively”, is an inspiring account of how technology can be harnessed through massive open online courses (MOOCs) to realise Elihu Root’s century-old call for a broader “popular understanding of international law”.

The final substantive part of the book, Part VI, turns the perspective of scholarship back onto itself. Lucas Lixinski’s “Overview of the State of the Art” is an indispensable contribution, a meta-analysis that maps the trends and preoccupations of the very literature to which this volume belongs. His observation that much of the writing on TIL remains self-reflective and only pays lip service to genuine interdisciplinary engagement with pedagogy is a crucial challenge for future research. The book fittingly concludes this section with Bartłomiej Krzan’s insightful tribute to Manfred Lachs and his seminal work, *The Teacher in International Law*. This chapter serves as a powerful bridge, connecting the contemporary debates within

the volume to the intellectual legacy of one of the 20th century's most dedicated teachers.

3. THE OVERALL ASSESSMENT AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Teaching International Law is an outstanding and deeply satisfying scholarly achievement. Its primary strength lies in its remarkable synthesis of breadth and depth. The editors have curated a collection that is at once theoretically ambitious and intensely practical, globally minded yet attentive to local specificities. The sheer quality of the contributors ensures that each chapter is a thoughtful, well-argued and often provocative piece of scholarship in its own right. The book successfully avoids the common pitfall of edited volumes – a lack of coherence – by virtue of the clear thematic threads that run through its diverse contributions. It is a work that can be read from cover to cover as a sustained conversation, or dipped into for specific insights on particular topics.

If there is a constructive criticism to be made, it is one that Lixinski's chapter anticipates and that is inherent in a project of this nature. While the volume boasts a section on the "Global Perspective" and features authors with extensive international experience, its intellectual centre of gravity remains discernibly European and North American. The detailed case study of Germany is a significant strength, but one is left wondering about the pedagogical landscapes in major legal cultures in Asia, Africa and Latin America. This is not so much a critique of the present volume as it is an observation of the current state of the scholarly conversation and an invitation for future work. The editors themselves acknowledge in the prologue their hope for "extended future editions". One hopes that such future endeavours will build on this excellent foundation to incorporate even more perspectives from scholars and practitioners in the Global South, further enriching the dialogue and moving closer to a truly global understanding of TIL.

In conclusion, *Teaching International Law* is more than just a book about pedagogy; it is a reflection on the identity and future of international law itself. It serves as an indispensable resource for professors and junior scholars alike, offering a wealth of practical ideas, theoretical frameworks and, most importantly, a renewed sense of purpose. It reminds us that teaching is not a secondary activity to be squeezed in between research projects, but a central, formative practice through which the international legal order is constantly being reproduced, contested and reimagined.