

Afterword: International Organizations and Technologies of Statehood

Introduction

International organizations occupy a realm between states as bearers of the “international.” In this sense, they are “above” states yet creatures of these states. But with a few exceptions—notably in the study of countries in the Global South—there has been relatively little research on the specific structures, functioning, and roles of IOs. Students of public administration and organizational theory largely stayed away from the topic for a long time, and the subdiscipline of international relations has historically treated IOs either as epiphenomenal or as intervening variables, and rarely as de facto authorities that could shape states.¹ Historians do study international organizations, but until recently there has been little cross-fertilization with other disciplines.²

This dossier is an important contribution to a significant reorientation among scholars of history, public administration, international law, and international relations in the study of IOs. An important development in this reorientation was the publication of Martha Finnemore and Michael Barnett’s *Rules for the World* in 2004, which argues that the bureaucratic features of IOs matter and that they can shape states in significant ways.³ This new focus produced fresh insights along two dimensions. The first concerned the internal functioning and culture of IOs, as they now appeared to be more than the result of state interests and decisions. The second concerned the causal power of IOs to shape developments in its environment, notably the form and functioning of states themselves.

The contributors to this dossier follow these two tracks, but add a more specific focus on the latter, detailing that IOs have been an integral part of the very functioning of states. The central wager is that IOs produce the very “technologies” through which statehood is enacted and performed. Underlying this emphasis is a nominalist view of the state, allowing for the exploration of variations in how statehood manifests and how IOs help define the technologies through which it takes place. The contributors demonstrate in great detail how IOs are constitutive of statehood by showing that while state sovereignty is a given in a formal-legal sense, it is an on-going achievement in a substantive sense, where IOs play an important, often leading role. They also demonstrate how the “state form” is a global phenomenon in which IOs play a central role in identifying and distilling practices for everything from health and education to security governance.⁴ The contributors do not make sweeping claims about what this implies for our understanding of statehood, but focus on the cases at hand, in rich empirical and historical detail. This is a key strength of the dossier, but it is also a limitation, in that the findings from each paper could have been brought to bear on broader debates about the role of IOs across different

disciplines. For example, scholars working in organizational theory, international law, and certainly in international relations would learn a lot from engaging with these empirical findings and the explicit or implicit theoretical points made in this symposium.

In the remainder of this afterword, I identify three broader debates to which this dossier can contribute but with which the contributors do not directly engage. These are: the recent emphasis on proper historical analyses within international relations, debates about the character and contemporary transformations in the role and character of IOs, and theoretical debates about statehood as “performance.”

Historical International Relations

Students of international relations have typically used history as a means for exploring causal explanations of war, the balance of power, or hegemonic transitions; historical analysis places data or examples into trans-historical explanatory models.⁵ This is now beginning to change. Scholars have, for example, begun to challenge the idea that the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 marks the “birth” of the sovereign state system.⁶ They have also sought to show the diversity across time and space of subsystems and polities (states, empires, etc.), suggesting that there was never really “one” international system.⁷

Many of the contributors to this symposium highlight findings that make us re-interpret standard stories of statehood and the international system. Stephen Legg’s analysis of the Round Table Conference in London (1930–1932) argues that diplomatic infrastructures and forms in the interwar years were a means of statecraft that was productive of future polity formations. These observations tie directly into on-going debates among students of both international law and international relations about the extent to which the form of diplomacy matters for the character of international law, and for political outcomes.⁸ Further, Legg’s analysis brings historical evidence to bear on debates about what, exactly, constitutes an “international organization,” and shows that the Roundtable Conference itself constituted a “technology of statehood.” Compare this, for example, to the role of the G20, which does not have a permanent secretariat and which performs similar functions to conventional IOs in terms of offering “technologies of statehood.” These technologies are of a distinct kind, having less to do with how an IO produces, say, best practices for how to organize domestic sovereignty, than with how a state, or would-be state, can have a level of outward or diplomatic agency through the organization or conference in question.⁹

Similarly, Megan Donaldson’s analysis of the admissions of Ethiopia into the League of Nations builds on recent historical scholarship, such as that by Rose Parfitt and Robbie Shilliam, but takes it one step further to complicate our understanding of how criteria for statehood were produced by the League process. She argues that the “technology” of statehood here emerged—contrary to much extant scholarship that sees international best practices and soft law as disciplining or shaping statehood—through a *process* that placed the League Council in a central role.¹⁰ In thus pointing to the contingent process of defining and interpreting statehood, Donaldson makes an important contribution to debates about the historical meaning of statehood and sovereignty. She also develops new insights into whether the “power” of IOs rests with the standards or norms that they advance, or whether this power is best understood as a result of politically messy processes of negotiation and contestation between “international” and state actors.¹¹ The insights

from the papers by Legg and Donaldson are thus important contributions to debates in cognate fields, and it is hoped that the authors seek to engage with these broader debates in the future.

The Role and Functioning of International Organizations

Innovative scholarship on IOs over the last decade has shown just how much their operating environment shapes their governance strategies, either in the form of “orchestration” or of developing and advancing “soft law” as a means to govern in the absence of sufficient inter-state agreement.¹² Guy Sinclair looks at how the UN was shaped by changing conceptions of “public administration” and “new public management.” These ideas were advanced by a *transnational* network, which helped shape the UN as a bureaucracy. Sinclair shows how the UN appropriated key resources and networks from the interwar years, while relying heavily on professional groups outside the organization to advance and secure authority for its vision of development and public administration. This is an important argument, demonstrating how the organizational form of IOs is shaped by transnational networks. In this regard, his work has direct bearing on our understanding of transnational networks that operate alongside IOs.¹³ It is surprising, however, that the sources and evolution of UN authority are not discussed in more detail, as doing so would have strengthened the argument about the origins of the bureaucratic form of the UN and its impact on newly independent states.¹⁴

Corinna Unger’s fine analysis of how the World Bank’s management practices shaped its approach to the Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA) elucidates the interplay among the World Bank’s culture, internal practices, and the local context of operations in India. This interplay conditioned the Bank’s understanding of what constitutes “development” and how to produce it. Drawing on (among others) Ferguson’s idea of the anti-politics machine, Unger subtly challenges the literature on development and peacebuilding, which emphasizes the “international” outlook that IOs bring to local contexts. Severine Autesserre, for example, argues that the UN and other international actors view conflicts in a way that marginalizes overlapping local sources and privileges frameworks over which IOs have some control, such as organizing elections.¹⁵ Unger’s analysis suggests that the story is more complex, both in terms of the political dynamic internal to India—with Indira Gandhi’s decision to establish the CMDA in part as a re-framing of the “national” issue at hand—and with regard to the political dynamic between World Bank president Robert McNamara and the Nixon administration. Important nuances are brought to light by the history, which are often omitted in research that is primarily interested in IOs as a case of something else: imperial rule or monolithic expertise. Unger’s analysis raises important questions about whether IOs are best understood as actors that define and apply technologies of stateness, or better understood as sites or spaces that structure the content and application of such technologies.

Statehood and Sovereignty

A remarkable feature of the state system is that so-called fragile states generally survive even if they lack most of the key attributes associated with statehood.¹⁶ A central explanation for this is that once international legal sovereignty is recognized, it offers a protective shield against other actors, regardless of the extent of de facto domestic

sovereignty. But the permanence of statehood to which such international legal recognition gives rise depends upon the fact that IOs have made it one of their key tasks to police, monitor, and serve as arena for enacting statehood in the absence of domestic sovereignty. This is a key point from Luis Eslava and Sundhya Pahuja's tour de force essay: international law is productive of statehood in the Global South. They point out that imperial logics of rule have remained central to how international law and IOs operate, using markers of statehood as tools with which to discipline and subordinate states in the Global South. They highlight how, for example, IOs' approach to governance is shaped by a particular view of agency as "existing beyond structural conditions" and as being progressive and transformative once it is freed from "national bureaucratic machineries" and able to interact with market forces.¹⁷ In bringing into view these deep-seated assumptions about the agency of states, Eslava and Pahuja highlight how IOs have defined technologies of statehood that are nominally linked to the state form, but which may be substantively undermining the de facto, domestic, and Westphalian sovereignty of these very same states. This takes us back to one of Donaldson's key points: the "technology" of statehood is perhaps less linked to definitive practices and standards of political rule but more to the framing of the *process* through which it takes place. Formal legal recognition provides the nominal state form, within which a range of different technologies of rule can prevail, some of which undermine domestic sovereignty—such as rent seeking, extraversion, patronage, and so forth. This tension is at the heart of debates about the character and functioning of so-called fragile states, and Eslava and Pahuja's analysis has important insights to share.

The same issue of state form underlies Sara Kendall's argument. She shows how "the rise of expert knowledge in constitutional matters marks a turn toward 'constitutional technicity'" where IOs and their networks become the carriers of a political task seen to be crucial to the founding of a sovereign state.¹⁸ This trend toward constitutional technicity suggests—together with a range of other "technologies" of statehood such as global rankings and benchmarks—that statehood is now performed through practices defined by various international actors. I think this is a correct interpretation. But I also think that this observation about a trend toward a global framing of technologies of statehood must be paired with another—namely, that we can *also* observe significant variation in the degree to which political rule is shaped by local political dynamics, the path-dependency of authoritarian regimes, and a general limit on the clout of IOs.¹⁹ Kendall stresses that the constitution making processes concerns the "production of contemporary state forms," and I agree; the state form is what is immensely powerful as a vehicle for the performance of different forms of statehood, and for engaging in a wide range of different forms of political rule.

If we view statehood nominally and distinguish between statehood and political rule, we can analyse how IOs define and constitute technologies of statehood in the OECD-sphere and elsewhere. Indeed, if we treat statehood as emerging from its performance—that the state is produced through the enactment or performance of technologies of statehood—we can look at all states, and focus both on the internal and external aspects of statehood.²⁰ A rich and powerful state like the United States has a range of technologies of statehood at its disposal through its role in IOs, such as the UN and the Bretton Woods Institutions. These technologies range from peacekeeping operations to

economic reform programs. This is a technology of statehood in two senses: First, IOs serve as an extension and legitimating vehicle for the advancement of powerful states' interests, with IOs serving as an institutional mechanism to present as universal what are arguably particular interests. Second, IOs extend the reach—and thus the political agency—of the United States and other states insofar as they enroll a wide range of actors that represent the authority and alleged impartiality of IOs. IOs themselves are a technology of statehood, because they enable the mobilization of funds, enroll other actors, and legitimize particular interests in the name of the interests of the “international community.” But there is a twist to this, as Eslava and Pahuja argue in their conclusion. It is not only the case that all states, rich and poor, have to perform statehood through technologies of stateness connected to international law and IOs. They also claim that a new technology of statehood is emerging that combines reliance on market mobilization to produce public goods with strict regulatory measures to produce law and order.²¹ This suggests that a focus on technologies of statehood offers a rich vocabulary to explore political rule not only in the south and north, but also within countries to capture similarities and differences that cut across state borders. Indeed, authoritarian states are developing new strategies along these lines to block and undermine IOs as tools to advance specific interpretations of statehood.²²

NOTES

Support from the Research Council of Norway through the project “Evaluating Power Political Repertoires,” project number: 250419, is gratefully acknowledged.

1. Nehal Bhuta and Guy F. Sinclair, “Introduction,” *Humanity* 11, no.1 (Spring 2020). For an overview of this debate, see John J. Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions,” *International Security* 19, no. 3 (Winter 1994–1995): 5–49; Robert O. Keohane and Lisa L. Martin, “The Promise of Institutional Theory,” *International Security* 20, no. 1 (Summer 1995): 39–51.

2. Francis P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965); Inis Claude, *Swords into Plowshares: The Problems and Progress of International Organization* (New York: Random House, 1971).

3. Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore, *Rules for the World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004). There were important forerunners to this argument. See Ernst B. Haas, *When Knowledge is Power: Three Models of Change in International Organizations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). See also the so-called Stanford School in sociology, which argued that IOs embody and advance a “world culture” that is found in all states: John Meyer et al., “World Society and the Nation-state,” *American Journal of Sociology* 103, no. 1 (July 1997): 144–81; John Boli and George M. Thomas, *Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organizations since 1875* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

4. This is also found in studies that focuses on the role of IOs in defining the register or idiom of statehood. See, for example, George Harrison, *The World Bank and Africa: The Construction of Governance States* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2004); Andre Broome and Joel Quirk, “Governing the World at a Distance: The Practice of Global Benchmarking,” *Review of International Studies* 41, no. 5 (2015): 819–41. For an excellent analysis of the World Bank, see Franco Moretti and Dominique Pestre, “Bankspeak: The Language of World Bank Reports,” *New Left Review* 92 (April 2015): 75–99.

5. John M. Hobson and George Lawson, “What is History in International Relations,” *Millennium* 37, no. 2 (2008): 415–35.

6. Benjamin De Carvalho, Halvard Leira, and John M. Hobson, “The Big Bangs of IR: The Myths That Your Teachers Still Tell You about 1648 and 1919,” *Millennium* 39, no. 3 (2011): 735–58.

7. Andrew Phillips, “Global IR Meets Global History: Sovereignty, Modernity, and the International System’s Expansion in the Indian Ocean Region,” *International Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (March 2016): 62–77.

8. See, for example, Rebecca Adler-Nissen and Vincent Pouliot, “Power in Practice: Negotiating the International Intervention in Libya,” *European Journal of International Relations* 20, no. 4 (2014): 889–911; and Tanja Aalberts, “Misrecognition in Legal Practice: The Aporia of the Family of Nations,” *Review of International Studies* 44, no. 5 (December 2018): 863–81.

9. See Minda Holm and Ole Jacob Sending, “States before Relations: On the Bifurcated Symbolic Structure of Sovereignty,” *Review of International Studies* 44, no. 5 (December 2018): 829–47.

10. For example, Jens Bartelson, *Sovereignty as Symbolic Form* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2014).

11. See, for example, Tobias Hagmann and Didier Péclard. "Negotiating Statehood: Dynamics of Power and Domination in Africa," *Development and Change* 41, no. 4 (2010): 539–62.
12. Kenneth W. Abbott, Philip Genschel, and Duncan Snidal, eds., *International Organizations as Orchestrators* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Kenneth W. Abbott and Duncan Snidal, "Hard and Soft Law in International Governance," *International Organization* 54, no. 3 (Summer 2000): 421–56; Jan Klabbers, "Institutional Ambivalence by Design: Soft Organizations in International Law," *Nordic Journal of International Law* 70, no. 3 (2001): 403–21.
13. Leonard Seabrooke and Lasse Folke Henriksen, eds., *Professional Networks in Transnational Governance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Annabelle Littoz-Monnet, ed., *The Politics of Expertise in International Organizations: How International Bureaucracies Produce and Mobilize Knowledge* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).
14. In particular Anne Orford, *International Authority and the Responsibility to Protect* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
15. Severine Autesserre, *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
16. See Arjun Chowdhury, *The Myth of International Order: Why Weak States Persist and Alternatives to the State Fade Away* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
17. Ibid.
18. Sara Kendall, "Inscribing the State: Constitution Drafting Manuals as Textual Technologies," *Humanity* 11, no.1 (Spring 2020).
19. On a global framing of technologies of statehood, see Nehal Bhuta, "Governmentalizing Sovereignty: Indexes of State Fragility and the Calculability of Political Order," in *Governance by Indicators: Global Power through Quantification and Rankings*, ed. Kevin Davis, Angelina Fisher, Benedict Kingsbury, and Sally Merry (Oxford University Press, 2012). See Darren Hawkins et al., eds., *Delegation and Agency in International Organizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Ole Jacob Sending and Jon Harald Sande Lie, "The Limits of Global Authority: World Bank Benchmarks in Ethiopia and Malawi," *Review of International Studies* 41, no. 5 (2015): 993–1010.
20. Mark Laffey, "Locating Identity: Performativity, Foreign Policy and State Action," *Review of International Studies* 26, no. 3 (2000): 429–44; Charlotte Epstein, Thomas Lindemann, and Ole Jacob Sending, "Frustrated Sovereigns: The Agency That Makes the World Go Around," *Review of International Studies* 44, no. 5 (December 2018): 787–804.
21. Luis Eslava and Sundhya Pahuja, "The State and International Law: A Reading from the Global South," *Humanity* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2020).
22. Alexander Cooley "Authoritarianism Goes Global: Countering Democratic Norms," *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 3 (July 2015): 49–63.