

**Celebrating the ‘Historical Turn’:
International Law in Global Histories**



Wednesday 27th May 2020 14:00-19:00

British Institute of International and Comparative Law

Charles Clore House, 17 Russell Square, London WC1B 5JP

Over the last two decades, both the role of international law in global history and the history of the discipline of international law itself have increasingly come under scrutiny from critical and often interdisciplinary perspectives that challenge what Slotte and Halme-Tuomisaari call the ‘textbook narrative’, a reading of history as having an ‘internal coherence, logical continuity and seeming comprehensiveness’ (Slotte and Halme-Tuomisaari, 2016). Rather, international law scholars have turned to explore the ‘dark sides’, the ‘hidden histories’ and the counter-narratives to the dominant assumptions about international law’s past as a field and within global history. This ‘historical turn’, or return to history, by international lawyers mirrors a similar phenomenon in other academic disciplines and has brought to the fore the role of international law in instrumentalizing and reproducing the political and economic projects of powerful hegemony and other actors through the twentieth (and earlier) centuries.

Studies have explored international law’s role in the history of empire, colonialism, peace-making, the development of international human rights law and international criminal law, and so on. Others have developed intellectual histories of prominent figures, periods or movements within the discipline. These works often deploy diverse methodologies, including those that aim to de-centre conventional or epochal narratives, for instance by deploying post-colonial or Marxist perspectives. This ‘historical turn’ has also included the increasing use of archival material either to examine the internal perspectives of particular protagonists or to create innovative historical methodologies. As Orford has argued, it marks a ‘turn to history as method, rather than a turn to history in terms of engaging with the past rather than the present’ (Orford, 2017).

In celebrating and engaging with this 'historical turn', the 2020 Workshop on *Theory and International Law* aims to investigate histories within and of international law, including, but not limited to: the role of international legal argument, norms, or its protagonists in shaping historical events; intellectual histories of disciplinary figures or movements; the role of international legal theory and methodology in historical perspective; the deployment of archival and other empirical methods to shed light on critical moments or challenges in international legal history.

We invite paper proposals which aim to engage with questions on the role of international law in global history from various disciplinary and inter-disciplinary perspectives. In addition to those grounded in legal and historical research, papers that draw insights from other scholarly disciplines, including but not limited to climate science, geography, philosophy, politics or economics are particularly welcome. We particularly welcome papers which employ innovative methods and/or are self-reflexive about methodology.

We are pleased to announce that the opening **keynote** address will be delivered by **Professor Jean d'Aspremont** (Sciences Po; University of Manchester)

The Closing Keynote will be delivered by **Professor Aoife O'Donoghue** (Durham).

Application Process

Submission of abstracts is open to academics, including graduate students, and to legal practitioners.

Please submit an abstract in Word or PDF of no more than one page to Dr Aisling O'Sullivan (A.O-Sullivan@sussex.ac.uk) and Dr Richard Collins (r.collins@ucd.ie). The following information should also be provided with each abstract:

- The author's name and affiliation
- The author's CV, including a list of relevant publications
- The author's contact details, including email address

The deadline for submission of abstracts is Friday 12th April 2020. Applicants will be informed by Wednesday 17th April 2020.

Regrettably, we are unable to provide funding for travel to and attendance at the conference, but there will be a reception at the end of the conference.

Aisling O'Sullivan and Richard Collins
February 2020

Images:

Fig 1. 'Fons Americanus' by Kara Walker, Tate Modern (Turbine Hall) 2019. See further here: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/kara-walker-2674/kara-walkers-fons-americanus>