

Call for Papers: **Deconstructing International Law**

Hybrid conference, Maastricht University, 7 April 2022

An air of reverence permeates the solemn corridors of the Peace Palace and the halls of the United Nations. International law and its institutions are seen as a force for the greater good in the world, as a bastion of civilisation. In accordance with this picture, international law is seen as being built on a foundation of peace, equality, and justice.

These foundational ideas, however, may turn out to be foundational myths. Critical scholarship is increasingly questioning the purported neutrality of international law. It is apparent to many that not everyone benefits equally from the operation of international law; that it is, in fact, built upon a multitude of implicit assumptions that are woven into the way we teach, think, and talk about the international legal order. These include assumptions about individuals, their needs, characteristics, and intentions; assumptions about legal regimes and institutions, and the purposes for which they were constructed; and assumptions about law itself, and what it can and cannot do. International law was and is largely written by a limited demographic, yet we are led to believe that it serves only the interests of justice, and not the interests of the much-maligned white, Western, upper class, cis-male: the so-called ‘Fathers’ of international law.

First coined by Jacques Derrida, the concept and accompanying methodology of deconstruction has been used in recent decades to critically assess and reassess narratives, discourses, ideas, and ideologies. As such, it seems an eminently suitable methodology to re-examine the foundational myths of international law. Similarly, other critical methodologies – feminist approaches, post-colonial approaches, TWAIL, Marxist approaches, NAIL, and other critical schools – have an important role to play in this process of much-needed deconstruction, and possibly reconstruction, of international law.

In deconstructing these foundational myths of international law, we lift the veil on the hidden inequalities that exist and pave the way for a new international legal order. International law undoubtedly does a lot of good in the world, and it has potential to do more, yet these persistent myths hinder necessary reflection

and debate. Seemingly neutral norms reinforce existing power relations. Human rights law, international criminal law, and humanitarian law are not immune to critique: there is much there to be proud of, but also much to be answered for.

The Maastricht Study Group for Critical Approaches to International Law thus warmly invites applications for the upcoming conference entitled *Deconstructing International Law*. The conference will be held in hybrid online/offline format at Maastricht University, Netherlands, on 7 April 2022. It seeks to bring together legal researchers from around the globe to deconstruct the assumptions that plague international law, and perhaps to reconstruct our view of the international legal order; to paint a picture of what international law could be.

We will consider abstracts on all subjects relating to *Deconstructing International Law*, using any methodology/ies, and would be particularly glad to receive abstracts on the following themes/topics:

1. Deconstructing the history of international law, including the role of the so-called ‘Fathers’ of international law
2. Deconstructing the role and/or notion of the nation state in international law
3. Deconstructing the ideas and purpose behind international humanitarian law and international criminal law
4. Deconstructing foundational ideas of human rights law

Abstracts of maximum 500 words can be submitted through [this online form](#) before 23:59 CET on 16 January 2022. Successful applicants will be notified by the end of January 2022 and will be expected to submit a paper of 6,000-8,000 words by 24 March, and to present their paper at the conference on 7 April 2022. Participation in the conference is possible both offline and online, subject to applicable health and travel regulations. Researchers from outside Europe and/or in an early stage of their career are especially encouraged to submit an abstract. Any questions may be directed to Sally Thin at sarah.thin@maastrichtuniversity.nl.

Financial support for travel to and from, as well as accommodation in, the Netherlands can be provided to a small number of participants. Please indicate in the online form whether such support is necessary. This will have no bearing whatsoever on the success of the application.