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PROJECT

Fantastic Oceans

My project, “Fantastic Oceans,” traces the co-constitution of international law and the ocean from 1945 to now. With a particular focus on the seabed, it seeks to unsettle what we take as the givens of the spatial zones, resource allocations, and functional jurisdictions effected by the law of the sea and to extend the history of international law into new areas, such as ocean depths and bottoms, global commons, marine infrastructures, and techno-utopian imaginaries. Moreover, from the unexplored vantage point of oceanic law-making, it aims to throw new light on current preoccupations of international legal histories: statehood and territory, decolonization and the new international economic order, the Cold War, race and empire, and the emergence of new legal forms and institutions. Using materials from multiple archives, it explores alternative social, political, and economic visions that had emerged with respect to fisheries, oil and gas, seabed minerals, and marine spaces during the making of the law of the sea, and it examines counterintuitive political, social, and economic configurations, institutional experiments, and epistemic contestations that gave shape to the present order.

In addition to this main project, I will continue co-editing two volumes: *The Cambridge History of International Law in the Asian Region* (under contract with CUP) and *The Battle for International Law in the Neoliberal Era* (a successor to *The Battle for International Law: South-North Perspectives on the International Era*, OUP 2019) and complete work on a special issue, “Colonial Loot and Its Restitution,” for the *Santander Art and Culture Law Review*.

Recommended Reading

Ranganathan, Surabhi. “Global Commons.” *European Journal of International Law* 27, no. 3 (2016): 693–717. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ejil/chw037>.

–. “Ocean Floor Grab: International Law and the Making of an Extractive Imaginary.” *European Journal of International Law* 30, no. 2 (2019): 573–600. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ejil/chzo27>.

–. “Decolonization and International Law: Putting the Ocean on the Map.” *Journal of the History of International Law* 23, no. 1 (2021): 161–183. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718050-12340168>.

Writing Histories of the Law of the Sea

This talk will proceed via three suggestions. First, that from the mid-twentieth century on, the order of the ocean has changed as remarkably as that of land, although this development receives relatively little attention in leading histories of this period. Second, that the making of the law of the sea offers rich insights into the worldmaking possibilities and foreclosures of the decolonization moment, as illustrated by the evolution of the regime for seabed mining. Third, that the possibilities for a critical history lie buried under the sediment of a "stock story" that presents the enactment of a liberal regime and erasure of radical possibilities as the victory of moderation, compromise, and multilateralism against the pipedreams of "extremist" careerists. Centering on one caricatured figure, the Cameroonian diplomat Paul Bamela Engo, it will explore avenues for critical legal history by way of "counter-stories" that position Third World diplomats and lawyers as intellectual innovators and rival worldmakers. It will wrap up with some reflections on why a lawyer (this lawyer!) is in search of such histories – and why now.

PUBLICATIONS FROM THE FELLOWS' LIBRARY

Ranganathan, Surabhi (Cheltenham [u.a.],2023)

The seabed and the South : from stock stories to new histories of international lawmaking

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1878681702>

Ranganathan, Surabhi (Cambridge,2021)

The "English School" of international law : soundings via the 1972 jubilee essays

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1811427502>

Ranganathan, Surabhi (Leiden,2020)

Decolonization and international law : putting the ocean on the map

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1811426964>

Ranganathan, Surabhi (Cambridge,2019)

Seasteads, land-grabs and international law

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1811429130>

Ranganathan, Surabhi (Oxford,2019)

Ocean floor grab : international law and the making of an extractive imaginary

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1811428282>

Ranganathan, Surabhi (Oxford,2016)

Global commons

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=181142791X>