


Muir Watt on Private International Law Beyond the Schism

Horatia Muir Watt (Sciences Po Law School) has published *Private International Law Beyond the Schism* in the last issue of *Transnational Legal Theory*. The abstract reads: 

The aim of this project is to explore the ways in which, in the absence of traditional forms of government in a global setting, the law can discipline the transnational exercise of private power by a variety of market actors (from rating agencies, technical standard-setters and multi-national agribusinesses to vulture funds). Traditionally, the cross-border economic activities of non-state actors fall within the remit of an area of the law known as 'private international law'. However, despite the contemporary juridification of international politics, private international law has contributed very little to the global governance debate, remaining remarkably silent before the increasingly unequal distribution of wealth and authority in the world. By abandoning such matters to its public international counterpart, it leaves largely untended the private causes of crisis and injustice affecting such areas as financial markets, environmental protection, pollution, the status of sovereign debt, the bartering (or confiscation) of natural resources and land, the use (and misuse) of development aid, (unequal) access to food, the status of migrant populations, and many more. On the other hand, public international law itself, on the tide of managerialism and fragmentation, is now increasingly confronted with conflicts articulated as collisions of jurisdiction and applicable law, among which private or hybrid authorities and regimes now occupy a significant place. According to the genealogy of private international law depicted here, the discipline has developed, under the aegis of the liberal divides between law and politics and between the public and the private spheres, a form of epistemological tunnel-vision, actively providing immunity and impunity to abusers of private sovereignty. It is now more than time to de-closet private international law and excavate the means with which, in its own right, it may impact upon the balance of informal power in the global economy. This means both quarrying the new potential of human rights in the transnational sphere, and rediscovering the specific savoir-faire acquired over many centuries in the

recognition of alterity and the responsible management of pluralism. In short, adopting a planetary perspective means reaching beyond the schism between the public and private spheres and connecting up with the politics of international law.