



Lecture Series “Signatures of World Society”

The Political Economy of Sovereignty: Natural Resources in Postcolonial International Law

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The global distribution of natural resources continues to expose structural asymmetries at the heart of international law. Sovereignty over natural resources, formalized in the aftermath of decolonization, was initially conceived as a tool for economic self-determination. Yet the legal architecture that emerged – fragmented across investment, environmental, and trade regimes – has frequently served to entrench postcolonial patterns of extraction and dependency.

Rather than constituting a coherent body of law, resource governance remains dispersed and shaped by overlapping public and private norms. The principle of permanent sovereignty over natural resources operates as a paradox: it asserts autonomy while facilitating appropriation through transnational legal forms. Multilateral efforts at redistribution, such as the deep-sea mining regime, have largely failed to resolve these contradictions.

By situating natural resources within the broader political economy of sovereignty, this presentation highlights the enduring role of legal form in organizing global inequality – and the need to confront its colonial inheritances.

This lecture will also be broadcast via Zoom
Meeting ID: 696 7099 4418 – Passcode: 609070