

Cinematic Perspectives on International Law. Edited by Olivier Corten & François Dubuisson. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021. 240 + viii pages.

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Cinematic Perspectives on International Law is an edited collection that sets out to provide an introduction to the field of film analysis from an international legal perspective.¹ It also aims to explore what depictions of international law are presented by films and why they are presented. Edited by Olivier Corten and François Dubuisson, who are both professors at the Université libre de Bruxelles, with the assistance of Martyna Falkowska-Clarys, the managing editor of *The Military Law and Law of War Review*, the twelve chapters in this book cover a variety of topics through the analysis of primarily Western films. Overall, the editors accomplish their goals effectively while providing an accessible and enjoyable read from this student reviewer's perspective.

The book's opening chapter offers a brief overview of the history of the study of international law in film as a field and explains the book's purpose and methodology. The first cinematic example that Corten and Dubuisson use comes from *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, an example that is discussed in a few other chapters within the work.² The film is a natural fit for the book, bearing specific reference to international law while also being a film that earned widespread acclaim internationally. The authors do an excellent job of explaining the film's narrative and historical context, and they dive into a thorough analysis that sets the standard for analysis in the chapters that follow.

The next two chapters analyze specific international law concepts within the film genre of science fiction (or "sci-fi" as it is often called). Chapter 2, by Marco Benatar, focuses on the explorations of both idealist and realist portrayals of international law. He refers to idealist portrayals as those that present international law as an inspirational and powerful force for good, while realist portrayals generally focus more on the power politics inherent within the function of international law. Chapter 3, by Vincent Chapaux, explores inter-species relations and particularly speciesism. Chapaux analyzes depictions of speciesism between humans and extra-terrestrial aliens and sentient robots in science fiction. These chapters cite many popular cinematic works — from classics like *Star Trek* and *Doctor Who* to modern

¹ Olivier Corten & François Dubuisson, eds, *Cinematic Perspectives on International Law* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021).

² *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, film (Culver City, CA: Columbia Pictures, 1957).

blockbusters like *Captain America: Civil War* and *District 9*.³ The wide selection of popular works makes these chapters relevant and engaging to readers who are fans of the sci-fi genre. The early presentation of these chapters also serves to establish the wide and diverse range of films that is used for the book's purpose, revealing that films do not need to focus overtly on international legal principles in order to be analyzed for their representations of these principles.

Chapter 4, by Corten, explores portrayals of the *Charter of the United Nations* using a broad range of popular films within the action genre.⁴ Corten explores the ways in which action movies represent, or, more often, fail to represent, the role of the *Charter*. The chapter draws on examples of films where the use of force is justified through the stretching or the twisting of principles like self-defence or consent, where the *Charter* is displaced by other legal rules and other legal apparatuses, or where the *Charter* is actively portrayed as illegitimate or impractical.

In chapter 5, Dubuisson guides the reader through a history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the lens of various films. His chapter focuses on several different periods in history to build upon the concepts of realist and idealist conceptions of international law that are portrayed in film. While many readers may have less experience with his cinematic choices, Dubuisson explains each film effectively, keeping the chapter engaging and informative.

Chapter 6, by Anne Lagerwall, explores depictions of international criminal law and does so in a distinct style. In comparison to the previous chapters, Lagerwall provides more evocative descriptions of the films observed. The added imagery is useful for immersing the reader in the films being discussed in order to explain the emotional intent of romanticized, apologetic, and critical cinematic representations of international criminal law. Naming specific actors who played significant film roles, and describing specific details in certain scenes such as the music chosen, Lagerwall helps the reader to visualize fully the scenes in question.

Chapter 7, by Martyna Fałkowska-Clarys and Vaios Koutroulis, provides the reader with examples of the ways in which international humanitarian law (IHL) is depicted in films and the ideological motivations behind these depictions and their consequences. The chapter analyzes films that explicitly mention IHL and those that do not, and it explains how these films can offer support for or criticism of IHL and certain military practices.

³ *Star Trek: The Original Series*, television series (New York: National Broadcasting Company, 1966–69); *Doctor Who*, television series (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1963–89 and 2005–present); *Captain America: Civil War*, film (Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2016); *District 9*, film (Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Motion Pictures Group, 2009).

⁴ 26 June 1945, Can TS 1945 No 7 (entered into force 24 October 1945).

For instance, certain films present IHL as a constraint upon the protagonists that puts their lives in danger. The authors effectively tie the chapter's concepts together through a discussion of the military-cinematographic complex: the phenomenon by which films and military administration cooperate in producing films that serve to glorify or justify military actions.

The remaining chapters provide the reader with direct commentary on previous chapters, offering alternative perspectives or further insights. Chapter 8, by Nicolas Kang-Riou, offers further analysis of the sci-fi genre and what sci-fi films can reveal about the nature of international law. He argues that sci-fi film depictions of international law offer flexibility in some cases and irrelevance in others, presenting the true nature of international law as being based on the equality of groups that have a degree of similarity to humanity through traits like communication. Kang-Riou takes a more humorous approach in his writing, using sarcasm to ask: “[A]re we in an alternate universe where publishers give free reign to authors to write without following the genre...?”⁵

Chapter 9, by Gabrielle Simm, expands on previous chapters by offering new avenues for analysis, such as geographically broadening the scope of films considered beyond the West and analyzing topics through feminist and TWAIL (Third World Approaches to International Law) lenses. Simm's feminist analysis of the US justification for its intervention in Afghanistan, in the later portion of the chapter, is gripping and informative.

In Chapter 10, Mario Prost evaluates questions of ethics and the law of war in films in a different manner than the previous authors. Prost digs into the legal questions using cinematic portrayals of the state's use of torture and the use of drones. In doing so, the chapter explores how such representations can exist as symptoms of societal views and how they may serve to justify such acts or to draw attention to the ethical problems associated with these acts.

Chapter 11, by Serge Sur, seeks to evaluate “how much ... is unknown or wrongly known” about international law in film.⁶ Sur does so with a more dramaturgical analysis than the authors of previous chapters, going into more complex discussions of film structure and genre. Sur's writing, by his own admission, veers at times away from any legal analysis, with several paragraphs addressing his stance on sci-fi films, which he declares to be “intellectually ... quite poor,” despite the three previous chapters in the book having focused on this genre.⁷ However, the chapter still feels cohesive within the collection.

⁵ Nicolas Kang-Riou, “Science Fiction Cinema and the Nature of International Law” in Corten & Dubuisson, *supra* note 1, 153 at 153.

⁶ Serge Sur, “Presentations and Representations of International Law in Films and TV Series” in Corten & Dubuisson, *supra* note 1, 199 at 199.

⁷ *Ibid* at 204–205.

The book concludes with a final chapter written by Gerry Simpson. The chapter examines the societal roots and causes of the interdisciplinary field of law and film, before transitioning into a quick synopsis of the main thrusts and most iconic references in the other chapters. This chapter eloquently incorporates most of the book's previous chapters (with the exception of Sur's chapter) into a cohesive summary, serving as a narrative form of a highlight reel for the book as a whole.

For readers interested in the interdisciplinary field of film and international law, the book is an engaging and enjoyable read. The work strikes an excellent balance of focus between both film and law and presents elements of each discipline at an approachable level. The book explores relevant and topical questions of international law, using film analysis that can be easily grasped by those without an extensive background in either field. Advanced topics of international law are also well explained where relevant. While the book discusses an impressive number of films, the range of the selection is somewhat limited in regard to genre. Certain genres have chapters entirely devoted to them (such as sci-fi and action), while others are barely mentioned (such as comedy and fantasy). This limitation is understandable, as certain genres are more likely to include international legal themes within their plotlines. Clearly, it is easier to find a war film that mentions or alludes to the principle of distinction than to find a comedy that does so (although examples do exist). The films covered are also limited to what can be described as geographically Western films with only limited exceptions (such as a brief mention of several works of Japanese animation in Chapter 2). This focus is justified and intentional, rather than a shortcoming, since films produced in Hollywood are consumed by a large audience, which makes the views and messages they present, and the effects they have, ripe for analysis.

Beyond the specific intersectional field of international law and film, or law and film more generally, the book could also be useful in educational settings. Kang-Riou comments that sci-fi films could be used to enhance the teaching of international law principles. Films are an accessible medium for students, and research suggests that films can effectively enhance teaching across a range of disciplines.⁸ Selected excerpts could be useful in teaching some fundamental principles of international law. An instructor could also look to this book for examples of cinematic portrayals that could be screened in class to help demonstrate or explain concepts, perhaps as the opening hook for a lesson. For example, a class focused on discussing the principle of non-intervention could begin by grabbing students' attention

⁸ Heather Kavan & Jacqui Burne, "Using Film to Teach Communication Concepts at University" (2009) 16:10 *Intl J Learning* 429.

with the relevant scene from *Star Trek: Into Darkness*, which is mentioned by Marco Benatar in Chapter 2.⁹

The book accomplishes its stated goals and is an engaging and informative read. The book effectively establishes the state of the field, provides inspiration for further study, and effectively demonstrates how international law can be represented in film as well as the reasons for, and the effects behind, such representations. It effectively inspires readers to change the way they view film. As aptly summarized by contributor Gabrielle Simm, the book “provide[s] a model of how to analyze the stories films tell through visual language on international law.”¹⁰ To do this, the book provides the reader with the frameworks to use in viewing films, helping the reader to think more critically about the films they consume: to question not just the representations of international law in films but also what purposes such representations serve. And, indeed, after reading this book, anyone with an appreciation for international law, or for film, will be inspired to think about the intentions or implications present whenever their favourite film or television series mentions a treaty or a war crime.

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Justice in Extreme Cases: Criminal Law Theory Meets International Criminal Law.

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With his book *Justice in Extreme Cases: Criminal Law Theory Meets International Criminal Law*, Queen’s University professor Darryl Robinson has firmly established himself as a leading and original theorist in the area of international criminal law (ICL).¹ While his earlier work was already welcomed

⁹ *Star Trek: Into Darkness*, film (Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures, 2013).

¹⁰ Gabrielle Simm, “War on Film: Gender Trouble in Siddiq Barmak’s *Osama*” in Corten & Dubuisson, *supra* note 1, 166 at 171.

¹ The book’s overarching topic of a legal theory and its application to the concepts, methodology, and parameters of extended liability has been the subject of numerous articles. For an overview, see Darryl Robinson, *Justice in Extreme Cases: Criminal Law Theory Meets International Criminal Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) at 5 [Robinson, *Justice in Extreme Cases*]. See also Terje Einarsen & Joseph Rikhof, *A Theory of Punishable Participation in Universal Crimes* (Brussels: Torkel Opsahl, 2018), especially at 305–70 (ch 6, “Personal Liability Concepts in the Literature”). For more general