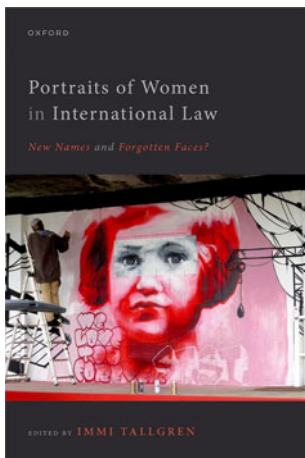


## LIBRARIAN'S PICK



# Portraits of Women in International Law: New Names and Forgotten Faces?

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In *Portraits of Women in International Law: New Names and Forgotten Faces?*, editor Immi Tallgren dusts off an old-fashioned medium for representing the history of a discipline – the portrait gallery – to interrogate the absence of women in the international law canon. A visit to the National Portrait Gallery inspired the project. What if the medium, long used to represent entrenched gendered social roles and hierarchies, could be revisited to challenge the canon, to include “new names” and “forgotten faces”? And so Tallgren enlisted the help of forty-

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nine authors to fill in the blank spaces between the portraits of the illustrious fathers ever-present in academic hallways and textbooks. Are there truly so few women in the history of international law? Or have their contributions been obscured or forgotten?

After an excellent foreword by Karen Knop, the editor lays out the exhibition’s floorplan. The book comprises forty-two portraits of women, at the intersection of biography and intellectual history, authored by a diverse group of historians and international law or international relations scholars and professionals. The portraits exhibit a wide variety of styles: some are purely biographical, while others are deeply personal. Some retrace a chronology of achievements, while some stay anchored in the present and look back, focusing on the portrayed woman’s legacy. The portraitists in this gallery are allowed to paint outside the lines, and this freedom of tone and method well serves the purpose of the book.

The portraits are arranged thematically into ten sections, each representing a room of the gallery. The reader, for instance, is invited to walk through a “Winter Garden of Abolition and Resistance”, a “Hall of Diversity of Feminist Activism in International Law” and a “Roof-top Gallery of Diplomacy and International Relations”. The book thus leans into its organizing idea, with a sincere and self-aware touch, yet not bereft of humour – reminding the reader that it has little in common with Henry James’ *Portrait of a Lady*.<sup>1</sup> Each portrait is accompanied

1 Karen Knop, “Foreword: Looking at Portraits”, in *Portraits of Women in International Law*, p. vii.

by an illustration; the authors have sometimes selected a classic professional headshot, and sometimes a visual bridging the past and the present, like Marika Gysbers' street art fresco of Olympe de Gouges in her hometown of Montauban.

The book aims to bring to light the contributions of forgotten women while acknowledging their systematic exclusion, or at least marginalization, from the academic, institutional and political centres of international law for most of the discipline's history. It thus adopts an inclusive, almost defiant definition of a "woman in international law". The women portrayed are not necessarily scholars or practitioners of international law in the contemporary sense of the term, and there is no requirement for degrees or titles. Rather, the volume is interested in women whose ideas, work and social practices have engaged with international law, nourished the discipline and served its institutions, causes and goals. The women portrayed are diplomats, civil servants, activists, secretaries, judges, artists, journalists, writers or professors, from the fourteenth to the twenty-first century. The book is interested in how these women viewed international law and how they invested in its institutions. It documents the structural barriers they faced, how they navigated discriminatory environments, and how their gender has coloured the reception of their achievements and legacy. Its authors also pay close attention to how gender intersected with social class, race, nationality, sexual orientation or family connections to shape their personal trajectories.

Expanding the history of international law in this way is a promising but delicate exercise. As Frédéric Mégret puts it in his portrait of Ghénia Avril de Sainte-Croix, a pioneer in the abolition of State-regulated prostitution, it can be asking for "intellectual trouble":

What, indeed, does it mean to tell the story of international law beyond its canon by including figures who have traditionally not been associated with it? ... What might writing more "comprehensive histories" tell us about how international law could be conceived differently and about its implicit gendering?<sup>2</sup>

These questions are at the heart of the book. The forty-two portraits offer forty-two diverse and thought-provoking answers.

The opening portrait, as the reader is led into the "Vestibule of the Legendary Ancients", places Christine de Pizan and her *Book of Deeds of Arms and of Chivalry* (1410) in the genealogy of international humanitarian law thinkers. The book then turns to the French national heroine Olympe de Gouges and considers her *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen* (1791) as an early feminist critique of human rights. Starting with women who are well known, but who are overlooked in the international legal canon, a first theme of the book emerges: what is required for women to be remembered for their contribution to international law? Why is their work perceived as more relevant to literature, philosophy, social issues and politics than to law – and

2 Frédéric Mégret, "Ghénia Avril de Sainte-Croix: Abolitionism and the League of Nations", in *Portraits of Women in International Law*, pp. 149–151.

specifically its intellectual history? Similarly, Kate Grady and Gina Heathcote remark that American reformer Jane Addams is better remembered for her practice of social work than for her intellectual contribution to the field.

Janne E. Nijman's portrait of the Austrian pacifist Bertha von Suttner – the only woman featured in the *Oxford Handbook of International Law* (2012) – introduces a second important, connected theme. To fully capture the contribution of women to international legal history means studying sources and spaces not traditionally considered within its scope. In von Suttner's case, this calls for a reconsideration of her diaries, magazine articles and best-selling novel *Lay Down Your Arms!* (1889), as well as the role played by her *salons*, on the periphery of the diplomatic conferences at The Hague, as a space for the development of international legal thinking.

The authors of *Portraits of Women in International Law* are often confronted with a lack of sources. At times, they examine lives lived in contested spaces, on the margins, or on the run – quite far from the conference halls and *salons* of The Hague. The portrait of Mary Ann Shadd is perhaps the most poignant illustration of this issue. Born in 1823, Shadd was an American-Canadian anti-slavery activist, a lawyer, a teacher, and one of the rare women to publish an abolitionist newspaper. Her portrait's author, Sarah Riley Case, grapples with fragmentary archival resources (a single photo, a few relics) and disappeared spaces ("Her home is gone. There is a plaza where she ran her newspaper"<sup>3</sup>), which, under Case's pen, echo the history of the Black diaspora as a history of dispossession. Situating Shadd's work within the history of international law proves equally challenging. Refusing to instrumentalize her work by linking it to international rules against slavery, when international law was complicit or silent for centuries, Case instead celebrates Shadd's action as part of a Black radical tradition.

Multiple chapters reference and expand upon Hilary Charlesworth, Christine Chinkin and Shelley Wright's 1991 article<sup>4</sup> which first questioned the immunity of international law to feminist analysis and paved the way for feminist scholarship in the field. A series of portraits pay tribute to the women who fought to redefine the traditional scope of international law, opposing the public/private dichotomy highlighted by Charlesworth, Chinkin and Wright as excluding issues mostly impacting women from its reach. Vasuki Nesiiah writes a portrait of Avabai Wadia, who brought reproductive rights activism to the international stage. Anna van der Velde's contribution discusses the Women's Caucus for Gender Justice and its advocacy for the inclusion of gender justice concerns in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Titled "The Breakers of the Glass Ceiling: the 'First and Only' in International Institutions", the seventh section of the book interrogates the concept of the "first

3 Sarah Riley Case, "Homelands of Mary Ann Shadd", in *Portraits of Women in International Law*, p. 122.

4 Hilary Charlesworth, Christine Chinkin and Shelley Wright, "Feminist Approaches to International Law", *American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 85, No. 4, 1991.

woman". It includes portraits of Suzanne Bastid<sup>5</sup> (the "first of the firsts"), Marguerite Frick-Cramer,<sup>6</sup> Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit,<sup>7</sup> Felice Morgenstern<sup>8</sup> and Paula Escarameia.<sup>9</sup> The book provides a compelling investigation of the trope, going beyond the myth of the "exceptional woman" and the assumption that breaking the glass ceiling eliminates all barriers. The authors examine the role of individual personal circumstances, privileges and struggles, and the women's own relation to the "gender question" in their work. Jan Klabbers' portrait of Felice Morgenstern is particularly compelling, painting a picture of impressive technical competence, pioneering legal analysis, sharp wit – and bad timing.

With the question of legacy so central to its premise, the book is to be commended for not shying away from figures standing on the wrong side of history. Serena Forlati writes about Lea Meriggi, the first woman to hold a chair of international law in Italy, and her staunch support for the fascist regime. Shinya Murase provides a nuanced portrait of the English writer and international lawyer Thomas Baty, who served as a legal adviser to the Imperial Japanese Foreign Ministry both before and after the Second World War.

While successfully challenging the overrepresentation of men in the canon of international legal history, and being attentive to issues of race and class, the book still features a majority of Western European and North American women. There is room for new wings with portraits of women from regions that are underrepresented or not yet represented in the gallery, notably the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia.

Finding that "most intellectual development depends upon new reading of old texts", the British feminist writer Angela Carter once wrote: "I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode."<sup>10</sup> Without necessarily wishing such a dramatic fate for the international legal history canon, *Portraits of Women in International Law* achieves more than remembering overlooked figures in the history of the field. Tackling blind spots in the canon, it challenges its very construction and perpetuation. More than the sum of its parts, the book opens the door to an inclusive intellectual history of international law and exploration of international law as a professional and social practice. It encourages us all to put new faces into the portrait gallery of the discipline's great names, even if – and perhaps especially if – it means stretching a few paintings' frames.

5 First female professor of law in France, first woman elected to the Institute of International Law and first woman to plead at the International Court of Justice, among other notable achievements.

6 First woman to become a member of the International Committee of the Red Cross and first female drafter of the Geneva Conventions.

7 First woman to preside over the UN General Assembly.

8 First female Whewell Scholar at Cambridge University and first female international lawyer at the International Labour Organization.

9 First woman elected to the International Law Commission.

10 Angela Carter, "Notes from the Front Line", in Michelene Wandor (ed.), *On Gender and Writing*, Pandora Press, London and Boston, MA, 1983, p. 69.