

ABSTRACT

Secrets of the Fetish in International Law's Messianism¹

Judith Grbich

Adjunct Associate Professor, Socio-Legal Research Centre,
Griffith Law School, Griffith University. Australia
Research Associate, Institute for Postcolonial Studies,
University of Melbourne. Australia.

Is it possible to write within the European international law tradition and not foreclose dialogue on peace and humanity with other peoples who do not share these cultural and theological conventions? My paper has a focus on international law's turn to a 'messianic logic' and to its hopes for rethinking the present state of scholarship in international law. It asks how does one retrieve the cultural origins and meanings of messianism in European culture and politics, without, once again, privileging a European or western order in which the figure of Christ as saviour has already been deployed endlessly over the past two millennia to shore up the west against other peoples? With this in mind, one aim is to retrieve some sense of that suffering which has not been tied to the calculation of nation and value, a search in Nancy's sense for 'what might lead us, without either rejecting Christianity or returning to it, toward a point – toward a resource – buried beneath Christianity, beneath monotheism and beneath the West...' ² Some themes of Nancy, Agamben, Derrida and Taubes are pursued for the purpose of linking the theorization of a politics of abandonment to questions of political economy, finance law and sovereignty. It is argued that abandonment is a politics of risking human life against the health of financial beings, and within these practices there is a capture by the state of a Christian messianic logic. The concept of the fetish gives a way of investigating the symbolic structure of this 'economy of what is without measure', and thinking through how to continue Nancy's project of retrieving those resources tied to the differences within western monotheism – the theologies of Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

¹ Judith Grbich 'Secrets of the Fetish in International Law's Messianism' in Anne Orford (ed) *International Law and Its Others*, (Cambridge University Press, 2005) forthcoming.

² J-L Nancy, 'Deconstruction and Monotheism' *Postcolonial Studies*, 6:1 (2003) 37-46, at 40.