

## Report of the ESIL Interest Group on Critical Approaches to International Law

The ESIL Interest Group (IG) on Critical Approaches to International Law was established in 2025 by Julia Emtseva, Kanad Bagchi, Tim Lindgren, Valeria Vázquez Guevara, and Rohini Sen. At this stage, no election has yet been held. The IG was founded with the aim of creating a distinct and much-needed space within ESIL for intradisciplinary scholars of international law, with a particular emphasis on supporting early-career researchers.

Our commitment is to foster an inclusive and supportive environment that places alternative and marginalized voices and experiences at the center of international legal research and practice. The IG grounds its vision in the conviction that international law must be interrogated not only through doctrinal analysis, but also through the critical lenses that illuminate its silences, exclusions, and complicities.

### Objectives of the IG

The IG on Critical Approaches to International Law pursues three interrelated objectives:

1. **Foregrounding critical perspectives:** We provide a platform to identify, examine, and contest the silences and marginalization that structure international law. Drawing from feminism, Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL), political economy, Marxism, anarchism, queer theory, and decolonial and anti-colonial thought, among others, the IG seeks to push the boundaries of research and praxis in the field.
2. **Community building and solidarity:** The IG is committed to fostering exchange, dialogue, and collaboration, within our group and in cooperation with other ESIL Interest Groups.
3. **Contributing to intellectual diversity within ESIL:** The IG formalizes the role of critical scholarship within the Society and provides an institutional home for perspectives often sidelined in mainstream international law. We aim to inspire early-career scholars to engage with ESIL, while also encouraging greater participation from scholars based in the Global South.

### Activities and Launch in 2025

Since its creation earlier this year, the IG has concentrated its efforts on organizing its official launch and the first pre-conference workshop in Berlin in September 2025.

Departing from conventional academic formats, the workshop was designed to spark sustained conversations across individual papers, thematic questions, and broader methodological concerns.

A central thread running through the workshop was the ongoing genocide in Gaza and the broader occupation of Palestine. Together, participants examined how these realities press on every aspect of international legal thought and practice, and what they reveal about both the failures and the promises of international law.

The workshop comprised two panels (three speakers each) and a concluding roundtable with five prominent experts. Discussions highlighted how the genocide and occupation expose the structural limitations of international law in addressing colonialism, racialized violence, and gross human rights violations. Importantly, the event also reflected on the role of international lawyers and institutions, including ESIL itself, in responding to such crises, and on how we might critically reconsider our scholarship and professional practice.

The launch and workshop were a success, attracting around 40 participants and generating vibrant discussions. The coordinating committee is currently exploring publication avenues for the contributions.

## **Next Steps**

Looking ahead, the IG is preparing to initiate an online reading group series. The first iteration, *Reading Group: Critical Approaches*, will bring together international lawyers to engage with foundational and emerging texts that have shaped the field of critical international legal scholarship. The reading group will be convened and facilitated by the coordinating committee, with a deliberate emphasis on combining established voices with rising scholars. Our aim is to meet online on a monthly basis. In the medium and long-term we plan to publish a set of articles or research-based pieces to share with the broader academic community and general public what we have learnt through the Reading Group.

Through these initiatives, the IG seeks not only to advance rigorous critical scholarship but also to build a community of solidarity, exchange, and shared commitment to rethinking the role and practice of international law in the face of contemporary crises.

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ESIL IG CAIL, Coordinating Committee Members