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THIRD WORLD APPROACHES to INTERNATIONAL LAW *Review*

TWAILR: Dialogues ~ 5/2021

Decolonizing Labour Law: A Conversation with Professor Adelle Blackett

Professor [Adelle Blackett](#) asks ‘what happens when labour law is forced to see itself in historically rooted, relational, and contextualised terms’? While refusing continuity for its own sake, Blackett stresses the need for developing spaces in which alternative and counter-hegemonic narratives about the purpose of (labour) law are taken seriously – those emerging from labour law’s peripheries in colonised land, dispossessed and disenfranchised people in the global South and North. On 31 August 2020, [Amin Parsa](#) and [Niklas Selberg](#) from Lund University conversed virtually with Professor Blackett to discuss the trajectory of her research and teaching on decolonisation of labour law, as well as the Othering of labour law by even the most progressive factions of international legal scholarship. Professor Blackett also reflects on the significance of the #BLM movement, the role of legal academia in sealing out historical frames of oppression and exploitation, and our responsibility to cultivate a learning environment that enables students to engage with endemic anti-Black discrimination, racism and police brutality. [Reflecting on her own entry to academia](#), Blackett once concluded that we all have ‘homework’ to do, including ‘the redemptive work of transforming the institutions we inhabit, including our universities and law faculties’. Parsa and Selberg conducted this interview in this spirit and as a step in this direction.

Amin Parsa & Niklas Selberg: You are engaged in a project on decolonising labour law. How did you end up in this endeavour? What does this project entail?

Adelle Blackett: It feels like I have been working on this for most of my time in labour law without necessarily having had a name for it. My early work on international labour law has always been about looking back and using a historical lens to reframe debates that are sealed within a particular intellectual trajectory, into a broader

trajectory. Moving beyond the project of understanding labour law as exclusively linked to the industrial revolution implies tying together longer links to histories of slavery, colonisation, and various forms of unfreedom and seeing how they intersect with labour law. The project became one of weaving understandings of the world together – and it increasingly became possible to speak from within the discipline of labour law about these intersections with an understanding of capitalism that was inextricable from the processes of enslavement, of colonisation.

Amin & Niklas: Is there anyone at the intersection of labour law and capitalism that you feel that your work is a continuation of?

Adelle: Without a doubt there is a huge intellectual debt to classic thinkers in the field of slavery. Much of this work started with Eric Williams' *Capitalism and Slavery*. We have witnessed a resurgence of interest in the research that he led in the 1940s, as seen in the work of Sven Beckert, Greg Grandin, and a number of others who have pieced together the way in which labour history and the history of capital deeply intersect. From the racial capitalism side, Cedric Robinson's work is pivotal as it traces a longer story, including that which engages deeply with how we understand Europe and divisions along racial lines prior to the transatlantic slave trade. Stuart Hall and Angela Davis as well. But these thinkers are rarely engaged with by labour law scholars.

My trajectory started with thinking about something as basic as the labour and trade linkage – and why we think about this linkage as new. If you understand this linkage through the lens of slavery, through the lens of colonialism, they are inextricable. When I started writing about this linkage, one of my footnotes alluded to the space for a Critical Race Theory analysis of labour-trade linkage. One of my colleagues pointed to this footnote and he was like 'what do you mean? Do more work there'. The footnotes weren't just placeholders for me, they were part of my own grappling with the fact that the narrative I had received from within the field did not yet feel complete to me. I was already in the process of exploring and deepening the narrative. Those footnotes have held me to account. Much of my trajectory has been expanding on those footnotes, bringing together elements that for me were based on my own community history and my own intellectual trajectory that seemed to me to be uniting. Finally, I could make the move toward being able to name this project as one of decolonising the field as part of the collective work of transforming the discipline.

Amin & Niklas: At the later stages of this process, the conceptualisation of transnational labour law comes in. Could you discuss the linkages between the two?

Adelle: These days my work feels like one big project. Transnational labour law was a move away from thinking about international labour law in a purely Westphalian, 'hierarchy of norms' kind of way: 'states enact international law and through either the dualist or monist tradition, international law will have effect within their domestic law, and it will follow a traditional legislative process through implementation and court process enforcement and so on' – the received story that assumes the national or domestic as the appropriate regulatory space. This is the story we know, but this is also the story that increasingly is challenged. The 'transnational' provides a way to open up, but it does so not without risk. It is a concern that some theorising around transnational law takes us away from a framework focused on investing legitimacy in the claims of peoples, of polities, of communities, and instead takes us towards *lex mercatoria* and large corporations in no way accountable to such polities. The framing of 'transnational labour law' is an attempt to grapple with what we have always known in labour law – the central importance of social movements to social change, the bottom-up framing of rights, the importance of also thinking through how demands for redistribution have become the subject of capture.

Working through how governance of labour has been spatially and temporally separated from the governance of the economic has been central to developing an understanding of transnational labour law. The 'transnational' focuses on rethinking what law itself should be understood as embodying, taking on a more pluralist vision of law making that sees actors such as workers as having a role in determining the condition of their work. The labour dimension keeps transnational law focused on issues of relative power and attentive to perils and possibilities. My work on transnational labour law has been an attempt to broaden discussions in ways that centre counter-hegemonic contestations of law and legal ordering. Central to those contestations is rethinking the appropriate level at which labour is meant to be governed. My work challenges the assumption that labour law is naturally or most appropriately a matter of domestic governance and calls into question the assumption that only commerce should be liberalised transnationally. And by 'liberalised', we know this means regulated – often with hard law instruments like bilateral investment agreements – at a different governance level. My project is an unmooring of the basic assumption that the most appropriate regulatory level is the national. I am using this language carefully because I am not suggesting that through theorising of transnational labour law one should exclusively or even primarily regulate beyond an individual state – but I am calling into question the methodological nationalism that is associated with treating labour as purely a domestic matter, and that in the process enables a deep

asymmetry to be perpetuated. European experiences speak poignantly to the perils of asymmetry in the governance of the social dimensions; so, increasingly, this work is taking me to more of the intellectual histories of the post-war architecture. Some of Quinn Slobodian's work is particularly helpful on understanding the very active encasing of the economic at the international level and the strong resistance to addressing the social at another governance level than the domestic – and that becomes a crucial part of where one goes on a project of transnational law.

Amin & Niklas: How does consideration of the past in the present inform (or how should it inform) legal education, the organisation of academia and legal practice? Legal scholars are often educators of lawyers. How can we take these insights with us into our teaching?

Adelle: These are questions I grapple with every day in my own teaching. So much of law is actually about forgetting the past. For instance, the notion of legal principle as refined through precedent oftentimes aspires to strip away context as far as possible and retain only the narrow legal principle to guide future interpretation. That very process enables the past to be left behind, while carrying forward the abstract principle. So much of the movement around decolonisation has been about remembering the past as in part a way to challenge the foundation of the principle that is moving forward. One of the clearest examples are cases in property law and insurance law and the like that are about enslaved persons. There is violence in teaching cases that emerged from slavery without seeing the contradiction of building legal principle upon an historical wrong. That is at the core of keeping the past ever present. Decolonisation of law is about holding us to acts of remembering where our principles have come from, and to grappling with whether and how they should be guiding our present and future. Part of teaching is to communicate how and why the past matters and to acknowledge the shadow it casts on what we are doing. This is hard work. It is destabilising for many scholars and disciplines because, rather than simply saying 'we are doing something else out here and we are going to form a new discipline, say decolonial law studies', we are saying 'this happens in your labour law class, this happens in your property law class'. This is about fundamental rethinking and alternate methodologies. It is about instigating a different set of conversations as one moves through the general curriculum.

Amin & Niklas: In the process of preparing for this interview we read a couple of your works, especially Follow the Drinking Gourd, which was very helpful. Not just for its content, but as a blueprint of practice for both teachers and researchers. In that

article you speak of the troubles that come with certain framings of legal questions and problems to which you call for a need to 'rebuild the canon'. Could you expand on the epistemological assumptions and methodological tools behind the decolonisation of labour law? Who can produce this kind of knowledge and who can be an ally to this? How is decolonising (labour) law in itself localised; how does it differ depending on location and position?

Adelle: I start from the epistemological assumption central to settler colonialism – it is ongoing. It is often hard to grapple with the persistence of the past in the present. Even the language of legacy, while important, can obscure the persistence of racial capitalism for example in prison labour and mass incarceration of Black and Indigenous populations. The opposite of colonial is not postcolonial, it is anticolonial, it is decolonial, it is an active process. The opposite of racist is not non-racist, it is anti-racist – as we are reminded in this moment. The quest for legal principles, legal rules, that we can apply in a neutral manner is deeply challenged by these affirmations.

Our starting points matter in our disciplines. In labour law we cannot start without acknowledging the narrow reach of the labour models that we have held up as universal, transplantable, fit for the world of work. Otherwise, we re-enact the erasure of the so-called atypical but ultimately resolutely typical workers in the global North, sometimes referred to as the South of the North, and we reinforce the deep incongruity in most of the world between labour law frameworks and the labour market. To acknowledge this incongruity is not to reify these deeply exploitative conditions but to question the paradigms that we have held up as applicable and appropriate. These paradigms include a production/consumption-based model of how the economy should function – a model that is called into question by climate justice and Indigenous movements.

Amin & Niklas: Old cookbooks were foundational for your analysis of the historical trajectories leading up to the development of the regulation of domestic work. What alternative sources, subjects, links and practices does labour law research committed to decolonisation and/or transnationalism bring to the forefront?

Adelle: I confess that I stumbled upon the cookbooks. It was deeply eye-opening for me as I tended to gravitate around historical sources. My current work is taking me back to the archives of the ILO and the League of Nations, investigating the foundational understanding of what labour was, and it is really striking to see that the kind of disconnect that we have erected now around the division between slavery and

labour and forced labour were not at all sealed in that historical moment. In fact, the link was understood to be quite clear by some leading actors, including the ILO and its first Director General. But the cookbooks, they are at once an historical source, but as you rightly point out, a source that would not have been thought a source at all. They brilliantly focus what can happen when you bring a gender focus, when you bring an outsider focus, and when you bring a deep commitment to the idea that it is the subjects of labour law who make the law. Workers weren't just *there*, they were actively, of course, resisting, and creatively reformulating the terms of their engagement with whatever spaces that they had. In domestic labour there are not a lot of artefacts. A clean child is not clean an hour later, food is consumed, neat rooms become dirty. Cookbooks, which are deeply mediated of course, actually remain. The very act of publishing means that a group of workers in times of widespread illiteracy were able to gain access to these modes of exchange. These books are not tell-all novels or autobiographies – yet so much comes through this material, particularly when you read them as a whole. I was committed to reading the recipes, and the biographies that came from them, and learned a lot. One gets a deeply humanising sense of what this meant and how workers were able to navigate and convey important messages and make a record. So yes, these were sources. Some of these sources were preserved because of the revival of the culinary origin-stories – *who actually cooked these Southern recipes?* There is digitalisation of these sources and an acknowledgement of a code that emerges. I was looking through these sources with a very different sense of what I understood as code: a legal pluralist understanding of law making, alive to power that happened because of these actors in their household. This power was deeply understood and could, at different times, in different often subtle ways, be transgressed by the workers themselves, because they more than anyone understood the pressure points in the different positionalities and dependencies in their household-workplaces.

Amin & Niklas: International law, even in its most progressive articulations, including TWAIL, has surprisingly overlooked labour law. In fact, you note that international labour law is *othered* by international law. What has caused this othering? How can it be reversed?

Adelle: This is an important question. Part of what has been interesting about looking into the history of international labour law is the realisation that this decentring was not always the case. When international labour law first emerged, it was actually paradigmatic international law. The ILO is what survived of the League of Nations, and it had a massive corpus of international law. It is after the post war period that one sees a shift in particular to the human rights corpus, to international economic

law, both of which are directly relevant to and include international labour law. So of course, international labour law nowadays is far from the centre of international law, despite the critical and changing nature of work and what used to be referred to as the international division of labour. One has to make a case for talking about international labour law, as I had to do recently for the work around the ILO centenary, in a leading international law journal.

The othering of international labour law partly has to be understood through the ILO's focus on linking world peace with social justice through a very deliberate, detailed commitment to particular forms of state-based regulation. The contribution of the ILO framework to building welfare states became eclipsed in precisely those states that moved far forward so that the universalist ILO started to be seen as largely irrelevant in the global North. Instead, the ILO was considered useful as a technical cooperation vehicle for regulating elsewhere. It became a basis for exporting hegemonic notions of 'modern industrial man' from industrialised market economies to the 'Third World', ignoring the structure and dynamism of labour markets and labour organising in most of the world. Universalist labour codes came to be framed as general labour law. That they covered less than 10 per cent of the labour market was simply ignored.

In one of my first law jobs in Canada, when a senior partner learned that I had spent time at the ILO, he literally rolled his eyes and said, 'Oh, if the ILO has to save us ...'. This firm later became one of the major firms bringing cases to the ILO Freedom of Association Committee, and encouraging the Supreme Court of Canada to rely on international labour standards to interpret Canada's constitutional Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Very strong human rights claims flow through the international labour law corpus. If you have a framework that is focused on building a welfare state, and you increasingly get a breakdown of an embedded liberal approach – in other words, the state showing ability or commitment to sustaining a welfare state – then the corpus that comes through international labour law will turn out to be an important counterweight in the global North to the neoliberal dismantling of the welfare state.

And in the global South, the Othering of international labour law affected the historical memory of Third World engagement to challenge racial capitalism and ongoing colonialism. The ILO was the institutional structure where many decolonial struggles took on particular significance, the anti-apartheid movement being a key example. South Africa was forced to withdraw from the ILO in 1963 and did not return for thirty years. This was part of the Third World mobilising through that space alongside

the workers' group of the ILO to force a reckoning between settler colonialism and labour. One might use later language and refer to that episode as an understanding of racial capitalism flowing through interventions that linked apartheid and labour. The ILO consistently called for change – so much so that when soon-to-be president Nelson Mandela was released from prison, the ILO was one of the first forums that he addressed in 1990 and he acknowledged this effort. This account and engagement with what happened at the ILO, and the reasons why international labour law is increasingly silent on issues of race and slavery, are largely absent from TWAIL scholarship. While in 1944, under its Declaration of Philadelphia, the ILO was at the forefront of addressing racial non-discrimination, the 2019 [Centenary Declaration of the ILO](#) does not make any mention of race. Now I realise, as I am saying this, that there are exciting contemporary discussions happening between CRT scholars and TWAIL scholars, some of which I had the privilege to be involved in, where spaces are opening to make these connections in a forthright manner, carefully centring slavery and racial capitalism. This should open spaces to engage closely with international labour law within CRT and TWAIL. Tendayi Achiume and Asli Bâli have created space for engaging the social in the dialogue between CRT and TWAIL at UCLA, including in a [forthcoming symposium](#) in the *UCLA Law Review*. Adrian Smith's [TWAILR Reflection](#) is another compelling example, and it was great to see several other contributors – [Obiora Chinedu Okafor](#), [Titilayo Adebola](#) and [Basema Al-Alami](#) – also address TWAIL themes at the ILO.

Amin & Niklas: What can scholars of international law learn from international labour law, specifically in relation to questions of social and economic inequality? [Anne Orford](#), for example, confronted 'liberal internationalism' with the need for a project she labelled as 'asking the social question': 'how do we limit the capacity of the market to demand that everything be sacrificed to its logic?' Haven't international labour lawyers always asked this kind of question? What would make you happiest for international lawyers to take away from your projects on transnational, international, decolonised labour law?

Adelle: Thanks for this question, I love this question. I have real appreciation for the way in which Anne Orford has centred the critique of Othering in her work. And this work really just crystallises the contemporary marginalisation of international labour law that some of us, notably through the Labour Law and Development Research Laboratory, have been seeking to undo over the last decade. There is a reckoning with the fact that the central dimension of the field has become so Othered that is not even recognised by leading scholars as actively being part of the project of recentring.

Part of the question is how we revive an understanding of what core international labour law starting points are about – they are all about the social question. This involves in some cases moving not away from but through the granularity of international labour law. It is quite a detailed corpus that sometimes may seem inaccessible or may seem to speak in a language that is not as familiar as human rights treaties. It makes a bit of a parody of the abstraction of asking the 'social question' – it has been doing that with precision and care for the past century.

An important dimension of how international labour law has engaged with the 'social question' is its consultative or participatory character. In other words, it is not just the corpus, it is the approach, it is the robust engagement of social movements and key actors (with extremely important critical engagement with the current limits of ILO tripartism), it is law making rooted in the experience and understanding of workplaces.

So, what would make me happiest, what would I most want to be taken from my own project? It would be that international labour law offers a centring of marginalised voices, of social movements, and a method for how one goes about fostering that. It would also be pivotal for the project of rethinking international law to start from the rethinking and centring of labour – as a social question, of course, but a social question that is understood to mediate the economic rather than something other than the economic question. The ILO understands this so deeply that it is part of its 1944 Declaration of Philadelphia.

My own historically focused work on settler colonialism and slavery is a reminder that in discussions of international labour law, land must remain central. We need to grapple with the relationship between labour and land as a central way to engage with claims of decolonisation, as well as climate justice.

Increasingly questions have been raised of multiple pandemics that we are currently facing alongside the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic of inequality, pandemic of racial injustice. In light of this, the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has interestingly called for a global new deal. Like Orford's call, the Secretary General's call engages with these strands that I would argue that international labour law has had at its core for some time. These are not new debates for international labour law, by any stretch of the imagination. But they remain urgent ones.

Amin & Niklas: We are again witnessing a mobilisation of people across the world who are protesting systemic racism. These protests started with the murder of George Floyd by a police officer in the United States. Like Trayvon Martin, whose murder ignited the Black Lives Matter movement, Mike Brown, Eric Gardner, Breonna Tylor, and countless more, George Floyd was a victim of racial violence entrenched in policing. The BLM movement has reverberations far beyond the United States. Recently, Angela Davis pointed out that globalized capitalism cannot be understood adequately if its racial dimension is ignored, and similarly police violence and its formative forces cannot be comprehended without the proper acknowledgement of its racial function. When speaking of decolonising (labour) law, how can we understand the specifically local versions and, at the same time, globally shared experiences of racist police violence as a technology of creating order for capitalist production?

Adelle: This is such an important question, thank you for asking it. I couldn't agree more. We are in a moment of reckoning with the centrality of racial capitalism to the social ordering of societies. This is crystallised in the US context, but by no stretch of the imagination is it limited to the US. In the labour market we see this so powerfully, so palpably. Many have said that COVID-19 has exposed these fault lines, in particular, that essential workers are Black workers, Indigenous workers, and racialised workers –least likely to confine themselves from their workplace and most likely to be exposed to the virus. These workers are dying in disproportionate numbers. We are seeing the contradictions and painting a picture of what racial stratification looks like in the labour market, and how essential racial stratification is to the ongoing process of organising and caring for our societies. Our starting point is to recognise the deep and unfinished business that emerges from the centuries long transatlantic slave trade, that this trade was global, and that most states were implicated and involved in it. It deeply profited the global North. Its continuation is found in colonial relationships, including settler colonialism. It continues through the structure of our labour markets. It continues through the differential access to labour rights and the asymmetrical ability to participate in labour movements.

Part of what we have to be asking ourselves is whether the frameworks we built on these exclusions are the frameworks we need to challenge these very exclusions? These are not questions to be raised lightly in moments of deep assault on labour rights, where international institutions such as international financial institutions are readily able to name workers and unions as privileged minorities. One needs to be extraordinarily attentive to the tenor of challenges to exclusion, for their ability to –

and this is a familiar strategy – pit different categories of workers against each other, rather than to challenge structures that depend on those divisions. These kinds of questionings emerge in W.E.B. Du Bois' writings about the First Reconstruction, in this moment aptly referred to by key thinkers like Robin Kelley, at least in the US context, as the 'Third Reconstruction'. The Civil Rights Movement is the Second Reconstruction, and there is insightful work on how at the height of McCarthyism this Movement came to centre education as the litigation strategy for inclusion rather than the deeply segregated workplace. The 'Third Reconstruction', surrounding this summer's uprisings in the Movement for Black Lives, is unfinished business, and it includes fundamentally rethinking the broader economic, social and political conditions of Black communities in the US, Indigenous communities, and those who bear the legacies of colonialism. The Third Reconstruction includes forcing labour law frameworks into a position of acknowledging and remedying their own exclusions.

Much of my work is focused on domestic workers who have literally been written out of labour laws. In that case the question one asks is: are we looking at a rewrite that includes them? Departing from this framework implies a broadened understanding of representation and social protection. The very inclusion of these workers challenges us to do something that is radically deeper: to see what it means to take care work as the centre of what the regulations of labour are about. These are just some of the questions that this kind of refocus takes us to. I think the current Movement allows us to see these questions with greater acuity. They are not tangential. They are not add-ons. They are critical challenges to the way that we understand the field and demand closer interrogation in this moment.

Amin & Niklas: Is the point made by Audre Lorde, and often reiterated by BLM, that 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house' relevant for labour lawyers, and if so, what should labour law take from Lorde's sentiment? Here one could think of the deep connection that the Black Lives Matter movement made with organised labour in the form of the members of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) who in 2015 as well as June 2020 organised strikes in support of #BLM.

Adelle: This is crucial. If we redefine what labour is about, we are going to be redefining what our labour actions are going to be about. In the best of traditions around migrant worker rights in various contexts, we have seen shifts in the understanding of labour issues towards asking what issues are closest to the concerns of the workers you are centring. Earlier versions of this that have now become more

broadly understood have concerned gender, childcare and the like. These were initially met with similar responses and it was said: 'well the paradigmatic worker includes women with childcare responsibilities, so men with childcare responsibility should also be included'. Now Black Lives Matter is very different and becomes foundational if you are taking your attention back to racial capitalism. How can you not then be bringing claims that relate to anti-racist struggles? What can we understand, for example, about strikes – quintessentially framed through industrialisation – if we analyse them alongside slave revolts and strike action to end forced labour in many of the colonies? They were very much about workers' collective action, taking it upon themselves to refuse their labour power and in the process, affirming their human dignity. They acted from the understanding of their freedom that included the right to stand up against their own subjugation. This starting point is at the centre of labour law's emancipatory aims. It is from that starting point that I look at labour struggles, and in that sense I am not prepared to hand the strike over, and call it the master's tool. Rather, there are longer and thicker histories we need to claim as part of labour law's founding narrative.

Amin & Niklas: Here we could think about how many people in the United States are surprised to discover that Martin Luther King spoke frequently about labour. The 'I have a dream' speech is known but this other history is less acknowledged, including his [1968 speech to the striking Memphis sanitation workers](#).

Adelle: I just finished a short paper on that for the [Democratizing Work](#) manifesto, recently [published by Les Éditions Le Seuil](#). So much of what we remember Dr King for in his 'I've Been to the Mountaintop' speech was actually pronounced at a gathering in support of the Memphis Sanitation Worker's strike in April 1968. King knew that going to Memphis was going to be extraordinarily risky, but going there was part of his understanding of the Poor People's Campaign and the need to build structures deeply supportive of the most marginalised workers. The sanitation workers were treated with utter contempt; their life, dignity and working conditions were beyond atrocious. King came and insisted on the right to strike – and the right to strike was linked to the 'I am a Man' claim. It is so fundamental. How we as a labour movement could miss the power of that framing and proceed as if the call for reconstruction was something other than labour law, is deeply disturbing to me. It is time to move away from what Vincent Harding called 'the conventional King' and move towards the 'inconvenient hero': the Dr King who saw these links and increasingly made them central to his platform. King was prescient: he knew those who espoused a more liberal vision would be okay with basic civil rights such as not being beaten up for wanting

to vote (to be considered in the context of ongoing widescale voter suppression in the United States) but would be deeply uncomfortable with the push for socioeconomic rights of the kind that the Sanitation Workers in Memphis were striking for, and for his broader Poor Peoples' Campaign. When Dr King in 1967 asked 'where do we go from here', he asked the question we are all asking now. Much of his agenda, which included for example universal basic income, remains relevant.

Amin & Niklas: How can we as (legal) academics contribute to the transformation of moments into movements and movements into principled and reflective commitments and radical social change?

Adelle: This is such a unique moment. We must teach about it. I start my labour law class with an excerpt from King's speech to the Sanitation Workers' Strike. It is about reminding students how deeply connected social movement action for racial justice, for climate justice, for Indigenous rights are to labour law. Then when we work through the technicalities of the labour law frameworks, students are able to see what it accomplishes but also what it seals out and excludes. Because they are holding up a different lens about labour laws' aspirations. In teaching international labour law, be alive to the lost, unspoken, broader histories of the discipline and foreground them so that teaching keeps alive the transformative potential of the work that students are well placed to carry forward. As legal academics we have a responsibility to have truthful discussions with our students, where the vision we provide is open and purposeful rather than limited and narrow. The legal academy is not only a training ground for practitioners, it is not Bar School, and it is part of the university for a reason. I think we as a discipline sometimes allow ourselves to forget that and too readily allow ourselves to be at the beck and call of the local and international Bar, when they too know that the legal world is shifting from under them and that they need to be able to name alternatives. People who are able to engage with a broader range of alternatives are needed now. This is about seeing racial injustice more clearly. Perhaps we realize this not only because of the appalling 8 minutes and 46 seconds of the taped version of George Floyd's killing, but because we have experienced the sudden change of a global pandemic that has forced us to stop, be alarmed about our inherent vulnerability, and acknowledge a need to listen and move. If we have come to see how quickly the world has changed right under us, we need to focus on cultivating a learning environment that enables our students to engage with core issues in a world that desperately needs change. It should feel terrifying because that's what it is, but it is also incredibly important to be claiming these spaces for radical social change. The other dimension flows from any serious engagement with praxis. It is a shared project, it is

not the educator just coming in and teaching; teaching is shared – students are also the teachers in much of this. Many of the students are the ones who are in the streets making claims audible. That challenges legal academia in the ready assumption the students come to us for us to fill their minds with 'how to think like lawyers'. Critical scholars in the TWAIL tradition have challenged this for a long time. We are doing something deeply different and moments like these perhaps just provide a little bit more of a space to be clear about that.

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This interview emerged out of two events at Lund University. On 5 December 2019, the Department of Gender Studies invited Professor Blackett to present her recent [monograph](#) in an event titled 'Everyday Transgressions - Domestic Workers', as part of the [Gender, Work, and Feminist Political Economy Seminar Series](#). On 6 December 2019, Professor Blackett participated in a seminar organised by the [Law & the Social Research Network](#) at the Faculty of Law on 'Decolonising Labour Law and Conceptualising Transnational Law'.

[Adelle Blackett](#) is the Canada Research Chair in Transnational Labour Law and Development at the Faculty of Law, McGill University, where she teaches and researches in the areas of labour and employment law, trade regulation, law and development, critical race theory and slavery and the law. In 2020 she was elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada.

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[Niklas Selberg](#) holds a doctoral degree in private law from the Faculty of Law, Lund University, Sweden and is a senior lecturer at the same institution.

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