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The Individual in the International Legal System

Continuity and Change in International Law



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Foreword

The reach of the international legal system beyond traditional inter-state relations has been the subject of much writing in recent times. Work lamenting the inability of the international legal system to address the challenges of non-state actors obscures, in large part, the reality that the system has come a long way in a short time. Sir Hersch Lauterpacht, one of the first and most fervent advocates for recognition of individuals as subjects of international law,¹ wrote in 1947 that '[a]s a rule, the subjects of the rights and duties arising from the Law of Nations are States solely and exclusively'.² Only a few years later, the International Court of Justice recognised that the United Nations was an international legal person;³ within a decade one could hardly doubt that the individual had a certain standing in international law, albeit in a specialised way. The international legal system, although principally controlled by states, now encompasses a broad range of actors, including with increasing regularity, individuals.

Kate Parlett's study examines afresh one of the classical topics of public international law: the position of the individual in the international legal system. This is – remarkably – the first general work on the individual's standing in international law since the 1960s, and the first study which addresses the topic in a systematic and comprehensive way, explaining how the individual engages and is engaged by international law across a number of fields, covering those areas of international law which are the most significant for individuals.

¹ See, e.g., H. Lauterpacht, *An International Bill of the Rights of Man* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1945).

² H. Lauterpacht (ed.), *International Law: A Treatise*, by L. Oppenheim (6th edn, London, Longmans, 1947), 19 (§13).

³ *Reparations for Injuries Suffered in the Services of the United Nations*, ICJ Reports 1949, p. 174.

The book quite properly takes a historical approach to the subject. Indeed it is hard to imagine not doing so, given the rather fortuitous and episodic character of the various developments. A highlight in that regard is Dr Parlett's account of the PCIJ's famous dictum in *Danzig Railway Officials* – a dictum which not only challenged the received wisdom in general, but specifically appeared to contradict the strongly dualist views of President Anzilotti. Willy-nilly, the system changed from one seen as limited to inter-state relations in the nineteenth century through to the present day where things are much more variegated, not to say confused (confused in that states retain many of their monopolies despite the variegation).

Dr Parlett illustrates the changing scene by focusing on four areas of international law which have the clearest potential to engage individuals, whether as beneficiaries or rights-holders. These are:

- *international claims*, covering diplomatic protection and claims brought directly to an international forum by individuals;
- *international humanitarian law*, covering both international and internal armed conflict;
- *international criminal law*, focusing on the responsibility of individuals directly under international law; and
- *international human rights law*, covering both doctrine and practice and international claims in human rights courts and supervisory bodies.

The book thus reflects on issues relating to structural change and development in the international legal system, building on historical research to dispel certain generally accepted myths. It is a valuable addition to the literature on the doctrine of subjects in international law. In particular it suggests that analysing the relation of particular entities to the international legal system requires a more nuanced and sophisticated approach than the binary – and hoary – categories of 'subjects' and 'objects' permit.

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Acknowledgements

This book began with a quizzical inquiry, after the English High Court had held that a bilateral investment treaty which had not been incorporated into English law could nevertheless form the basis of a domestic law claim. This decision stood in contrast to the treatment of human rights treaties: a solid line of authority held that prior to the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights by the Human Rights Act 1998, that Convention created no justiciable rights for individuals. This differential treatment may have been explicable on technical bases under domestic law, but it indicated an inherent and more general uncertainty about the relationship of individuals to international law. In an effort to bring clarity to this question, this book explores how the international legal system has changed from the exclusive inter-state Vattelien construct to a system in which individuals have a certain status, and aims to identify more clearly what that status is.

This book is based on my doctoral thesis completed at the University of Cambridge, under the supervision of Professor James Crawford SC. The experience of a doctoral thesis is an inherently solitary one, but the difficulty of embarking on such a project was considerably eased by the supportive and vibrant research community in international law in Cambridge, fostered by the Lauterpacht Centre. It is a testament to Sir Elihu Lauterpacht and a fitting tribute to him and his father, the late Sir Hersch Lauterpacht, that the Centre provides such a welcoming environment for Cambridge students and visitors, and that it fosters academic community in international law. I am grateful to the fellows of the Centre for allowing me to participate in and contribute to the life of the Centre over my five years of residence in Cambridge. My research benefitted from discussions with many of its resident and visiting members and my well-being benefitted from the many friendships formed

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I dedicate any good parts in this work to the memory of my mother, Ruth Parlett, who was interested in life, in learning and above all in people.

Kate Parlett
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Select list of abbreviations

ACHPR	African [Banjul] Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights
ACHR	American Convention on Human Rights
Additional Protocol I	Protocol I Additional to the 1949 Geneva Conventions and Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts
Additional Protocol II	Protocol II Additional to the 1949 Geneva Conventions and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts
BIT	bilateral investment treaty
CAT	Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CERD	International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination
CROC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CTS	Consolidated Treaty Series
ECHR	European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
ECT	Energy Charter Treaty
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
GA	UN General Assembly
Geneva Convention I	Geneva Convention I for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field

Geneva Convention II	Geneva Convention II for the Amelioration of the Condition of Wounded, Sick and Shipwrecked Members of Armed Forces at Sea
Geneva Convention III	Geneva Convention III Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War
Geneva Convention IV	Geneva Convention IV Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ICRC	International Commission for the Red Cross
ICSID	International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes
ICTR	International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
ILC	International Law Commission
LNTS	League of Nations Treaty Series
NGO	non-governmental organisation
PCA	Permanent Court of Arbitration
PCIJ	Permanent Court of International Justice
SC	UN Security Council
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNRIAA	United Nations Reports of International Arbitral Awards
UNTS	United Nations Treaty Series
UNWCC	United Nations War Crimes Commission

Table of cases

<i>Abbasi and another v. Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs</i> [2003] UKHRR 76	page 89
<i>Access to German Minority Schools in Upper Silesia</i> , PCIJ Rep. ser. A/B no. 40 (1931)	285
<i>Acquisition of Polish Nationality</i> , Advisory Opinion, PCIJ Rep. ser. B no. 7 (1923)	285
<i>Administrative Decision No. II</i> , German-US Mixed Claims Commission, 1 November 1923, VII UNRIAA 23	74
<i>Administrative Decision No. V</i> , German-US Mixed Claims Commission, 31 October 1924, VII UNRIAA 119	68, 74
<i>Administrator of Germany Property v. Knoop</i> [1932] 1 Ch. 439	72
<i>Ahmadou Sadio Diallo (Republic of Guinea v. Democratic Republic of the Congo)</i> , Preliminary Objections, ICJ, 24 May 2007	85–6, 93, 106
<i>Akdivar v. Turkey</i> , Just Satisfaction, Grand Chamber, 1 April 1998, ECtHR, 23 EHRR 365	332
<i>Albert and LeCompte v. Belgium</i> , Judgment, 10 February 1983, ECHR ser. A no. 58	330
<i>Aloeboetoe et al. v. Suriname, Reparations and Costs</i> , 10 September 1993, Inter-Am. Ct HR ser. C no. 15	104
<i>American Manufacturing and Trading, Inc. v. Republic of Zaire</i> , Award, 21 February 1997, 5 ICSID Rep. 11	59
<i>Antoine Fabiani</i> , French-Venezuelan Commission of 1902, 31 July 1905, X UNRIAA 83	70, 266
<i>Appeal from a Judgment of the Hungaro-Czechoslovak Mixed Arbitral Tribunal (Peter Pázmány University v. State of Czechoslovakia)</i> , PCIJ ser. A/B no. 61 (1933)	66

<i>Archer Daniels Midland Company and Tate & Lyle Ingredients Americas, Inc. v. United Mexican States</i> , ICSID Case no. ARB (AF)/04/01, Award, 21 November 2007	4, 114, 116–18
<i>Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo (Democratic Republic of the Congo v. Uganda)</i> [2005] ICJ Rep. 116	194
<i>Arrest Warrant of 11 April 2000 (Democratic Republic of Congo v. Belgium)</i> , Preliminary Objections and Merits, Judgment [2002] ICJ Rep. 3	85, 325
<i>Asian Agricultural Products Ltd v. Republic of Sri Lanka</i> , Award, 27 June 1990, 4 ICSID Rep. 254	104
<i>Association of Italian Knights of the Order of Malta v. Piccoli</i> , Italian Court of Cassation, 6 June 1974, 65 ILR 308	33–4
<i>Attorney General (Israel) v. Adolf Eichmann</i> , Israeli Supreme Court sitting as a Court of Criminal Appeal (1962) 36 ILR 5	272
<i>Avena and Other Mexican Nationals (Mexico v. United States)</i> [2004] ICJ Rep. 12	85, 95–6, 112
<i>Baboeram et al v. Suriname</i> , Human Rights Committee, Communication no. 154/83, 10 April 1984	222
<i>Bámaca-Velásquez v. Guatemala</i> , Merits, 25 November 2000, Inter-Am. Ct HR ser. C no. 70	222
<i>Banković and others v. Belgium and others</i> , Admissibility, Application no. 52207/99, ECtHR, 19 December 2001	194
<i>Barberà, Messengué and Jabardo v. Spain</i> , Judgment, 6 December 1988, ECHR ser. A. no. 146	93, 311
<i>Barcelona Traction, Light and Power Co. Ltd (Belgium v. Spain)</i> [1970] ICJ Rep. 4	85, 88, 91, 323, 326
<i>B. E. Chattin (United States) v. United Mexican States</i> , US-Mexican General Claims Commission, 23 July 1928, IV UNRIAA 284	79
<i>Beaumont v. France</i> , Application no. 15287/89, ECtHR, 25 November 1994, [1994] ECHR 40	89
<i>Bodenkreditbank in Basel and the Swiss Confederation v. Gebrüder Roher GMBH and the German Federal Republic</i> , Mixed Commission for the Agreement on German External Debts, 7 November 1956, 25 ILR 326	98
<i>Bouzari v. Islamic Republic of Iran</i> , Court of Appeal of Ontario, 30 June 2004, 128 ILR 586	326
<i>Broniowski v Poland</i> , Application no. 31443/96, ECtHR, Judgment, 22 June 2004	333

<i>Campbell v. MGN</i> [2003] 1 WLR 740	337
<i>Cape Law Society v. Van Aardt</i> (1926) South African Law Reports CPD 312; (1925-6) 3 ILR 43	291
<i>Captain W. H. Gleadell (Great Britain) v. United Mexican States</i> , British-Mexican Claims Commission, reported in G. H. Hackworth, <i>Digest of International Law</i> (Washington, US Government Printing Office, 1943), vol. 5, p. 805	69
<i>Československá Obchodní Banka AS v. Slovak Republic</i> , Decision on Objections to Jurisdiction, 24 May 1999, 14 ICSID Rev. 251	113
<i>Civilian War Claimants' Association v. The King</i> [1932] AC 14	72
<i>CMS Gas Transmission Company v. Republic of Argentina</i> , ICSID Case no. ARB/01/8, Decision on Annulment, 25 September 2007	110
<i>Coard and others v. United States</i> , Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 29 September 1999, 123 ILR 156	194
<i>Community of Heirs of the Late Fritz Cahn v. Federal Republic of Germany and Pensionsverein</i> , Mixed Commission for the Agreement on German External Debts, 12 November 1964, 35 ILR 253	98
<i>Compañía Aguas del Acquija SA and Vivendi Universal v. Argentine Republic</i> , Decision on Annulment, 3 July 2002, 6 ICSID Rep. 340	111
<i>Competence of the ILO to Regulate Agricultural Production</i> , PCIJ Rep. ser. B no. 3 (1922)	31
<i>Competence of the ILO to Regulate Conditions of Labour in Agriculture</i> , PCIJ Rep. ser. B no. 2 (1922)	31
<i>Corn Products International, Inc. v. United Mexican States</i> , ICSID Case no. ARB(AF)/04/01, Decision on Responsibility, 15 January 2008	4, 114, 116-18
<i>Costello-Roberts v. United Kingdom</i> , ECtHR, 1993, ser. A no. 247-C	337
<i>Cyprus v. Turkey</i> , Application no. 25781/94, ECtHR, 10 May 2001	194
<i>Dallal v. Bank Mellat</i> , HC, 26 July 1985, QB Division, 75 ILR 151	101, 103
<i>Dames and Moore v. Regan</i> , 2 July 1981, US Supreme Court, 72 ILR 271	100
<i>Décision et demande en vue d'obtenir l'identification, la localisation, le gel et la saisie des biens et avoirs adressées à la république Portugaise (in prosecution of Jean-Pierra Bemba Gombo)</i> , ICC-01/ 05-01/08, International Criminal Court, 27 May 2008	271

<i>Decision No. 1, Criteria for Expedited Processing of Urgent Claims: For Individuals under Categories A, B and C, UN Compensation Commission, 1991, UN Doc. S/AC.26/1991/1(1991)</i>	102
<i>Decision No. 18 on Distribution of Payments and Transparency, UN Compensation Commission, 1994, UN Doc. S/AC.26/Dec18 (1994)</i>	102
<i>Decision on State Succession to the Obligations of the Former Yugoslavia under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Human Rights Committee, 19 October 1992, (1992) 15 EHRR 234</i>	223
<i>Delgado Paéz v. Colombia, Human Rights Committee, Communication no. 195/1985, 12 July 1990</i>	337
<i>Denise Matthews v. United Kingdom, Application no. 24833/94, ECtHR, 18 February 1999</i>	337
<i>Dickson Car Wheel Company (USA) v. United Mexican States, US-Mexican General Claims Commission, July 1931, IV UNRIAA 669</i>	81
<i>Doninelli v. Ebeling, Mixed Commission for the Agreement on German External Debts, 28 October 1965, 35 ILR 261</i>	98
<i>Douglas v. Hello!; Venables v. News Group [2002] 2 WLR 992</i>	337
<i>Douglas G. Collie MacNeill (Great Britain) v. United Mexican States, British-Mexican Claims Commission, 22 July 1931, V UNRIAA 135</i>	80
<i>EG v. Poland, Application no. 50425/99, ECtHR, 23 September 2008</i>	333
<i>Egduardo Trucco, Decision No. 1 (unpublished), Italian-Mexican Claims Commission, cited in A. H. Feller, The Mexican Claims Commissions 1923–1934: A Study in the Law and Procedure of International Tribunals (New York, Macmillan Company, 1935), p. 96</i>	69
<i>El Oro Mining and Railway Company (Great Britain) v. United Mexican States, British-Mexican Claims Commission, 18 June 1931, V UNRIAA 191</i>	81
<i>Elettronica Sicula SPA (ELSI) (United States v. Italy) [1980] ICJ Rep. 15</i>	85, 92
<i>Employment of Women during the Night, PCIJ Rep. ser. A/B no. 50 (1932)</i>	31
<i>Eritrea's Claims 2, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 22, Central Front, Eritrean-Ethiopian Claims Commission, The Hague, Partial Award, 28 April 2004, available at www.pca-cpa.org</i>	192

<i>Eritrea's Claims 15, 16, 23 and 27–32, Civilians Claims, Eritrean-Ethiopian Claims Commission, The Hague, Partial Award, 17 December 2004, available at www.pca-cpa.org</i>	192
<i>Eritrea's Claim 17, Prisoners of War, Eritrean-Ethiopian Claims Commission, The Hague, Partial Award, 1 July 2003, available at www.pca-cpa.org</i>	192
<i>Esphahanian v. Bank Tejarat, Case no. 157, Award no. 31-157-2 (1983-I) 2 Iran-US CT Rep. 157</i>	99
<i>Ethiopia's Claim 2, Central Front, Eritrean-Ethiopian Claims Commission, The Hague, Partial Award, 28 April 2004, available at www.pca-cpa.org</i>	192
<i>Ethiopia's Claim 4, Prisoners of War, Eritrean-Ethiopian Claims Commission, The Hague, Partial Award, 1 July 2003, available at www.pca-cpa.org</i>	192
<i>Ethiopia's Claim 5, Civilians Claims, Eritrean-Ethiopian Claims Commission, The Hague, Partial Award, 17 December 2004, available at www.pca-cpa.org</i>	192
<i>Eureko v. Poland, Partial Award, 19 August 2005, 12 ICSID Rep. 335</i>	111
<i>European Commission on the Danube, Advisory Opinion, PCIJ Rep. ser. B no. 14 (1927)</i>	31
<i>Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations, Advisory Opinion, PCIJ Rep. ser. B no. 10 (1925)</i>	22, 285
<i>Factory at Chorzów (Claim for Indemnity), Merits, PCIJ ser. A no. 17 (1928)</i>	70, 105, 271
<i>Fifield v. The Insurance Co. of the State of Pennsylvania, 47 PA 166 (1864)</i>	201
<i>Fisheries Jurisdiction (Spain v. Canada) [1998] ICJ Rep. 432</i>	85
<i>Free Zones of Upper Savoy and the District of Gex, PCIJ Rep. ser. A/B no. 46 (1932) 96</i>	25
<i>Frelinghuysen v. Key, 110 US 63 (1884)</i>	58
<i>F. W. Flack, on behalf of the Estate of the Late D. L. Flack (Great Britain) v. United Mexican States, British-Mexican Claims Commission, Decision no. 10, 6 December 1929, V UNRIAA 61</i>	69–70
<i>German Settlers in Poland, Advisory Opinion, PCJ Rep. ser. B no. 6 (1923)</i>	285
<i>H v. Belgium, ECtHR, Judgment, 30 November 1987, ECHR ser. A no. 127-B</i>	93, 311

<i>Håkansson and Sturesson v. Sweden</i> , ECtHR, Judgment, 21 February 1990, ECHR ser. A. no. 171-A	93, 311
<i>Herrera Rubio v. Colombia</i> , Human Rights Committee, Communication no. 161/83, Views of 2 November 1987	222
<i>Ilaşcu and others v. Moldova</i> , Application no. 48787/99, ECtHR, 8 July 2004	222
<i>Interhandel (Switzerland v. United States)</i> , Preliminary Objections [1959] ICJ Rep. 6	85, 92
<i>International Fisheries Company (United States) v. United Mexican States</i> , US-Mexican General Claims Commission, July 1931, IV UNRIAA 691	80
<i>International Status of South-West Africa</i> , Advisory Opinion [1950] ICJ Rep. 128	289
<i>Interoceanic Railway of Mexico (Acapulco to Veracruz) (Ltd), Mexican Eastern Railway Company (Ltd) and Mexican Southern Railway (Ltd) (Great Britain) v. United Mexican States</i> , British-Mexican Claims Commission, 18 June 1931, V UNRIAA 178	80
<i>Interpretation of Article 3, Paragraph 2, of the Treaty of Lausanne</i> , PCIJ Rep. ser. B no. 12 (1925)	291
<i>Interpretation of Peace Treaties with Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania</i> , Advisory Opinion [1950] ICJ Rep. 71	305
<i>Interpretation of the Greco-Turkish Agreement of December 1st, 1926</i> , PCIJ Rep. ser. B no. 16 (1928)	285
<i>Interpretation of the Statute of the Memel Territory</i> , PCIJ Rep. ser. A/B no. 49 (1932) 294	24
<i>Islamic Republic of Iran v. United States</i> , Case nos. A/15 (IV) and A/24, Award No. 590-A15(IV)/A24-FT, (1998) 34 Iran-US CT Rep. 105	98, 99
<i>Islamic Republic of Iran v. United States</i> , Case no. A/18 (1984-I) 5 Iran-US CT Rep. 251	99
<i>Islamic Republic of Iran v. United States</i> , Case no. A/21 (1987-I) 14 Iran-US CT Rep. 324	99
<i>ISSA and others v. Turkey</i> , Application no. 31821/96, ECtHR, 16 November 2004	222
<i>Ituango Massacres v. Colombia</i> , Preliminary Objections, Merits, Reparations and Costs, 1 July 2006, Inter-Am. Ct HR ser. C no. 148	222
<i>Jerusalem, Jaffa District Governor v. Suleiman Murra</i> (1926) ER Appeal Cases 321	291

<i>Juridical Condition and Rights of the Undocumented Migrants</i> , OC-18/03, Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Advisory Opinion, 17 September 2003	326
<i>Jurisdiction of the Courts of Danzig (Pecuniary Claims of Danzig Railway Officials who have Passed into the Polish Service, Against the Polish Railways Administration)</i> , PCIJ Rep. ser. B no. 15 (1928)	17, 19–26, 28–9, 71, 96, 218, 266, 347, 359–60
<i>Khatsiyeva and others v. Russia</i> , Application no. 5108/02, ECtHR, 17 January 2008	222
<i>LaGrand (Germany v. United States)</i> [2001] ICJ Rep. 466	85, 94–5, 349, 360
<i>Lanco International Inc. v. Argentina</i> , Preliminary Decision on Jurisdiction, 8 December 1998, 5 ICSID Rep. 11	104
<i>Las Palmeras v. Colombia</i> , Preliminary Objections, 4 February 2000, Inter-Am. Ct HR ser. C no. 67	222
<i>Lederer v. German Government</i> , Anglo-German Mixed Arbitral Tribunal, <i>Recueil des Décisions des Tribunaux Arbitraux Mixtes</i> (Paris, 1924) 762	73
<i>Legal Consequences for States of the Continued Presence of South Africa in Namibia</i> , Advisory Opinion [1971] ICJ Rep. 6	304
<i>Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory</i> , Advisory Opinion [2004] ICJ Rep. 36	193, 195, 318
<i>Legal Status and Human Rights of the Child</i> , Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Advisory Opinion OC-17/02, 28 August 2002, (2004) 11 IHRR 510	359
<i>LG&E Energy Corp., LG&E Capital Corp. and LG&E International Inc. v. Argentina</i> , ICSID Case no. ARB/02/1, Decision on Liability, 3 October 2006	110, 112
<i>LG&E Energy Corp., LG&E Capital Corp. and LG&E International Inc. v. Argentine Republic</i> , ICSID Case no. ARB/02/1, Award, 3 October 2006	116
<i>Lonrho Exports Ltd v. Export Credits Guarantee Department</i> [1996] 4 All ER 673	72
<i>Lord Corporation (a claim of less than US \$250,000 presented by the United States, Claimant v. Iran Helicopter Support and Renewal Co., Respondent)</i> , Award no. 346-10973-2 (1988-I) 18 Iran-US CT Rep. 377	99
<i>Lundevall v. Sweden</i> , ECtHR, Judgment, 12 November 2002 (unreported)	93, 312

<i>Maffezini (Emilio Agustín) v. Kingdom of Spain</i> , Decision on Objections to Jurisdiction, 25 January 2000, 5 ICSID Rep. 396	113
<i>Mamatkulov and Askarvo v. Turkey</i> , Application nos. 46827/99 and 46951/99, ECtHR Grand Chamber, 4 February 2005	334
<i>Mapiripán Massacre v. Colombia</i> , Merits, Reparations and Costs, 15 September 2005, Inter-Am. Ct HR ser. C no. 134	222, 330
<i>Maria Guadalupe A. Vve. Markassuza</i> , Sentence No. 38 (unpublished), French-Mexican Claims Commission, cited in A. H. Feller, <i>The Mexican Claims Commissions 1923–1934: A Study in the Law and Procedure of International Tribunals</i> (New York, Macmillan Company, 1935), p. 97	69
<i>Mavrommatis Palestine Concessions</i> , Judgment no. 2, PCIJ ser. A no. 2 (1924)	65–6, 70, 291
<i>McGonnell v. United Kingdom</i> , ECtHR, Judgment, 8 February 2000, ECHR Rep. 2000-II	93, 311
<i>Melcer Mining Company (USA) v. United Mexican States</i> , US-Mexican General Claims Commission, 30 April 1929, IV UNRIAA 481	82
<i>Mexican Union Railway (Ltd) (Great Britain) v. United Mexican States</i> , British-Mexican Claims Commission, Decision no. 21, February 1930, V UNRIAA 115	82
<i>Mexico City Bombardment Claims (Great Britain) v. United Mexican States</i> , British-Mexican Claims Commission, Decision no. 12, 15 February 1930, V UNRIAA 76	81
<i>Ministry of Finance v. Association of Italian Knights of the Order of Malta</i> , Italian Court of Cassation, 3 May 1978, 65 ILR 320	34
<i>Minnie Stevens Eschauzier (Great Britain) v. United Mexican States</i> , British-Mexican Claims Commission, Decision no. 64, 24 June 1931, V UNRIAA 207	69
<i>Minority Schools in Albania</i> , PCIJ Rep. ser. A/B no. 64 (1935)	285
<i>Mondev International Ltd v. United States</i> , Award, 11 October 2002, 6 ICSID Rep. 192	105
<i>Nanni v. Pace and the Sovereign Order of Malta</i> , Italian Court of Cassation, 13 March 1935, 8 ILR 2	33
<i>Nationality Decrees Issued in Tunis and Morocco</i> , Advisory Opinion PCIJ Rep. ser. B no. 4 (1923)	309
<i>North American Dredging Company of Texas (United States) v. United Mexican States</i> , US-Mexican General Claims Commission, 31 March 1926, IV UNRIAA 26	80

<i>Oberschlick v. Austria</i> , ECtHR, Judgment, 23 May 1991, ECHR ser. A no. 204	93, 311
<i>Oil Platforms (Iran v. United States)</i> [2003] ICJ Rep. 161	85
<i>Pailot v. France</i> , ECtHR, 22 April 1998, ECHR Rep. 1998-II	311
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<i>Prosecutor v. Kunarac, Kovać and Vuković</i> , Case no. IT-96-23-T, Judgment, 22 February 2001	326
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