



**THE IEL COLLECTIVE
INAUGURAL CONFERENCE
6 – 7 NOVEMBER 2019
UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK, COVENTRY, UK**

**STAGING INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC LAW FROM BELOW: ON LYNN
NOTTAGE'S SWEAT**

**Matthew Windsor
School of Law, University of Reading, Reading, UK**

When *Sweat* received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2017, the playwright Lynn Nottage was commended for 'remind[ing] audiences of the stacked deck still facing workers searching for the American Dream'. Based on extensive interviews with steel workers during the shuttering of industrial factories in the American rustbelt, *Sweat* offers a powerful narrative about the limits of class mobility and the impact of technological change on the conditions of labour.

This paper offers an international economic law reading of *Sweat*. Although the play's central characters are not well-versed in international trade policy – early in the play, one character quips, 'What the fuck is NAFTA? Sounds like a laxative' – its distributional effects are their lived reality, compounding their economic vulnerability. The themes of *Sweat* undoubtedly chime with current appeals in international economic law scholarship for trade policy to both promote social inclusion to combat populism (Shaffer 2019), and become more reflexive about the winners and losers in economic globalisation (Lamp 2019). Yet Nottage was there first. When asked by the *New York Times* how *Sweat* appeared to anticipate the election of Trump and the current agonistic political moment, Nottage responded: 'I showed up and listened'. *Sweat* permits audiences to transcend 'empathy walls' in search of the 'deep story' (Hochschild 2016), and helps rectify the problem of epistemic injustice (Fricker 2009). By carefully illuminating the influence of the global on local spaces (Eslava 2015), Nottage exemplifies the power and potential of the theatrical form to upend conventional narratives about the global economy.