

## BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

**Fuyuki Kurasawa**, *The Work of Global Justice: Human Rights as Practices*. Cambridge Cultural Social Studies. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 256 pp. \$US 29.99 paper (978-0-521-67391-4), \$US 85.00 hardcover (978-0-521-85724-6)

In the realms of both practice and scholarship, the field of human rights has traditionally been dominated by the law and legal perspectives. This has gradually begun to change, and scholars from the social sciences and the humanities have increasingly contributed to evolving understandings of international human rights law, movements, and practice. Fuyuki Kurasawa's latest book, *The Work of Global Justice: Human Rights as Practices*, joins with other recent texts that consider human rights through a cosmopolitanism lens, such as Pheng Cheah's *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights* (2006), and Costas Douzinas's *Human Rights and Empire: The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism* (2007). Kurasawa's cosmopolitanism deliberately sets aside the role of law and focuses instead on global justice as "ethico-political labour" (p. 4). Although global justice is theorized, it is left vaguely defined as an "emancipatory" project that seeks to "counter the sources of structural and situational violence around the planet and to give birth to a different world order" (p. 2). Rather than further elaborating justice as outcome, the emphasis is on the processes of enacting justice.

The well-organized text is structured around five sets of practices that constitute efforts to obtain or enact global justice — bearing witness, forgiveness, foresight, aid, and solidarity. These are the practices of the multitudinous actors of "global civil society," and within each practice, "struggle represents the core" of the enactment of global justice (p. 15). Kurasawa explicates the dimensions of each category of practice, and although his focus is not empirical, he provides illustrations for each. In addition, he identifies three features — intersubjectivity, publicity, and transnationalism — as common to all of the practices to further develop the analysis of the shared labours of global justice. Kurasawa contends that the dominant legal and institutional framework of human rights is inadequate and obscures the actual practices of justice. These practices are engaged with moral and political responsibility, as well as legal responsibility.

*Global Justice* makes several important contributions to the existing human rights literature. Perhaps the most compelling contribution is in the deliberate and creative effort to destabilize the traditional opposition of civil and political rights to economic, social, and cultural rights (which also takes shape as distinctions between negative and positive rights or first generation and second generation rights). The five sets of practices blur the entrenched boundaries that have often stymied progressive efforts and offer the potential for more transformative engagement. This is most evident in the identification of foresight, aid, and solidarity as human rights practices; the descriptions of practices of bearing witness and forgiveness largely tread familiar ground. In part, this is because practices of bearing witness and forgiveness have become institutionalized in formal methods such as international tribunals and truth and reconciliation commissions, but also in less formal but equally institutionalized practices of human rights monitoring and reporting. The examples offered in the text, unsurprisingly, involve mass atrocities and gross violations of human rights, such as crimes against humanity. These sections might have raised new insights by considering these practices in the context of more quotidian human rights violations.

The chapters on foresight and aid go the furthest in exploring the transformative potential of a new framework of human rights practice. Preventative foresight — or “farsighted cosmopolitanism” (p. 95) — responds to oft-repeated cries of “never again” with efforts to establish “a sense of responsibility for the future by attempting to anticipate and avoid severe and structurally based injustices and crises” (p. 97). The rise of these practices of anticipation, prevention, and early intervention has been a significant, and yet underexamined, development in human rights. Although there are few specific examples provided in this section of the text, it does provide a welcome first step in elaborating this emerging set of practices and exploring both the possibilities and the risks inherent in them. Practices of aid are more familiar, but the reintegration of aid as human rights practice also transgresses traditional distinctions between rights, as well as between development and human rights. Kurasawa reconceptualizes aid as “a form of normative and political labour that implicates both those helping and those being helped in substantiating the latter’s socio-economic rights, while simultaneously struggling against the conditions which cause and sustain vulnerability for vast sections of humankind” (p. 131). The example of global work regarding HIV/AIDS neatly illuminates the pitfalls and potentials in framing this work as human rights practice.

Despite its many contributions and intriguing potential, Kurasawa’s analytical model is also unsatisfying in some respects. Its ambition is

to trace and interpret the patterns of practice that emerge in the interactions among the concrete actors of “observable reality” and more abstract structures and institutions (p. 9, fig. 1). Too often, however, the text instead veers between description and prescription as it tries to settle in a middle ground of “critical hermeneutics” (p. 8). For example, despite an early aside that “relations of power structure the fields of action within which modes of practice operate” (p. 15), much of the text reads as if power relations are completely outside global justice practices. The analytical model stresses the “dialogical” nature that is supposed to be a characteristic feature of global justice practice. While this may describe some specific practices such as, perhaps, the “bearing witness” work of truth and reconciliation commissions, it seems aspirational at best in aid work, which is certainly relational but lacks the parity usually associated with dialogue. In addition, the analytical device also results in locating all action in “global civil society,” an ever flexible and ill-defined body that seems to include just about everyone, from individuals to inter-governmental bodies and nongovernmental organizations, from ad hoc groups to governments, and so on. Although it eschews empiricism, the text draws widely from “real” examples, sometimes at some depth. This makes for an interesting and wide-ranging account of human rights and global justice, but it also risks overreaching and elides important differences among actors and practices.

Throughout the text, Kurasawa makes a compelling argument for a new cosmopolitanism, “cosmopolitanism from below” or “critical cosmopolitanism” (pp. 22, 205). For those interested in cosmopolitanism, that alone makes it a useful resource. For those with other interests in human rights or in global justice, it offers something more: a fresh framework for engaging with many of the enduring and intractable issues of human rights and a re-imagining of justice as “a laborious and imperfect working-through without finality” rather than as an endpoint or particular achievable goal (p. 200).

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