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# Book Reviews

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Alnoor Ebrahim and Edward Weisband (Eds.), *Global Accountabilities: Participation, Pluralism, and Public Policy*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2007, 366 pp., index, $39.99

Weisband and Ebrahim introduce their edited volume as a marked transition from the current accountability discourse dominated by "technocratic, modernist, and binary" approaches to a new mode of inquiry that highlights the "multileveled, pluralistic, and contested nature" of global accountabilities (p. 16). They frame this emerging "postmodern" perspective with two stated objectives. First, the editors seek to challenge the simplified and "managerial" notions of accountability by demonstrating that the standard principal-agent model fails to address the complex sets of stakeholders and networked processes that characterize transnational public institutions, civil society organizations, and corporations. They also emphasize that the analysis of accountability practices requires a much needed sociological lens by foregrounding how accountability mechanisms are fundamentally social and relational constructs shaped by the asymmetries of power.

The contributing authors apply these analytics to accountability concerns and practices that cover a wide range of global contexts. These contexts are organized into four sections. The first section focuses on the involvement of citizens in the accountability mechanisms of public institutions and draws examples from multilateral organizations (Woods), global finance governance (Germain), and the Indian public sector (Goetz and Jenkins). The second section highlights the complex accountability needs of civil society organizations operating in emergent and fluid

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social networks, as illustrated by multiparty social actions (Brown), the campaign against "blood diamonds" (Smillie), and Bangladeshi NGOs (Lewis). The third section proposes specific "operational innovations" for NGOs that include accountability systems based on a "rights based framework" (Jordon), "multidirectional accountability" (Bryant), and "reflexive accountability" (Ebrahim). The last section examines how the growing demand for accountability in the private sector is playing out in the environments of socially responsible investing (MacLeod), transnational supply chains of the garment industry (Macdonald), and established corporate social responsibility frameworks (Weisband).

Although each chapter offers a distinct articulation of accountability within a unique context, this volume as a whole suggests the emergence of a new accountability model based upon this latest mode of inquiry. The first aspect of this model, found threaded among the chapters, is the significance of incorporating less-powerful groups into accountability mechanisms in the form of meaningful, recursive, and influential participation (also known as "bottom-up accountability"). This type of participation not only promises greater effectiveness in ensuring institutional and organizational compliance, it holds the transformative potential of altering power-imbalances among stakeholders. "Organizational learning" is the other aspect of this proposed model and calls for a strategic shift towards reformulating accountability mechanism to better understand and meet organizational missions, and away from viewing accountability as coercion, compliance, or mimicry. As organizations move away from rote auditing activities to participatory and iterative practices, accountability can be "reappropriated" (Ebrahim) into valuable systems that promote effectiveness, innovation, and strengthen organizational legitimacy. Organizational learning also appears throughout the chapters in a slightly different form as the use of accountability processes to constitute a normative consensus between organizations and their stakeholders. Multiple voices are empowered through organizational learning and as a result, have real influence in the development of external standards and their regulation of organizations and institutions.

In this light, organizational learning becomes a virtual moniker for the reorientation of accountability relationships towards mutuality and trust which can then facilitate the calibration of normative values and expectations among all interested parties. The authors stress these interrelated themes to varying degrees, but their contributions taken as a whole point towards a reframing of accountability that includes an organizational commitment to strategically using assessments to support their missions, as well as an ongoing engagement with multiple parties in order to constitute a shared understanding that reflects stakeholders' needs and especially those who hold the least amount of power.

The complementary nature of the chapters in terms of both their analytical frame of accountability relationships (complex, fluid, idiographic, and socially embedded) and their subsequent remedies for addressing global accountabilities (participatory praxis and organizational learning—both technical and normative), strongly suggests that these scholars are taking accountability in an important new direction. One quibble is the reliance on the "postmodern" label in this volume, particularly in Weisband's conclusion. I found the use of the term distracting rather than

illuminating as it is often the case with other "slippery" and "notoriously ambiguous" terms (i.e., "accountability") (p. 1). In my opinion, this new approach is much better served by Weisband's succinct description: "accountability that permits inter-subjective learning to grow through participatory practices" (p. 327). Exactly how participation and organizational learning facilitate—and possibly constrain—one another in various cultural and material contexts promises to be a rich area for further empirical investigation. I would also suggest that the volume's move toward constituting normative consensus through organization learning begs a new look at Foucault's "technologies of the self" as applied to global organizations and institutions. In sum, this volume offers scholars and practitioners alike an insightful frame of analysis and a promising new framework for constructing accountability in the globalized world.

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Volker Heins, *Nongovernmental Organisations in International Society: Struggles over Recognition*, Palgrave, New York, 2008, 166 pp., bibliography, index

What is distinctive about NGOs? Why did NGOs emerge and prosper? What are NGOs actually doing? Where do NGOs seek involvement? How do NGOs succeed or fail? These questions are pivotal to thinking about NGOs as international actors, and they structure Volker Heins' engaging and critically significant book.

Heins starts by offering two alternative conceptualizations of international NGOs. He brings together ideas from both the English School of International Relations and the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. For the first, he sees NGOs as being key in defining what is considered appropriate state behaviour; and for the second, he refers to the concept of recognition to explain aspects of NGO behaviour. Heins provides a much richer and complex analysis than the prevailing theories of international NGOs, which hold that NGOs are part of a global civil society that is leading to an "end of sovereignty," and that NGOs are agents of western interests—or "Empire."

The book is woven around three claims, the first being that NGOs have to be understood as forces that foster the international society of states instead of transcending it. The second claim is that although NGOs are offshoots of the moral climate of liberal capitalist societies, they are not tools of western elites trying to remodel the world in their own image, but are what Heins terms as "benign parasites" in that they attempt to alter the behaviour of those to whom they are attached. The third claim is that there is a common theme amongst NGOs of organized moral activism on behalf of individuals and groups who are perceived as victims of harm and injustice (p. 159).

In the five chapters dealing with the five questions listed above, this book explores the world of international NGOs using a wealth of case studies to illustrate points. Familiar case studies dating back two centuries to the anti-slavery movement are cited, propagating the imperatives of universal benevolence and justice which

are evident amongst international NGOs. One key theme throughout the book is the way that NGOs are predicated on the distinction between good and evil in order to draw a "new moral map" (p. 70), dating back to the abolitionist movement two hundred years ago. NGOs place themselves in the position of acting on behalf of others who are symbolically represented as victims and consequently their self representation is that of an altruistic advocate and rescuer. Thus, NGOs are active on two fronts—they struggle to influence public option around issues which involve victims and perpetrators, and they develop normative ideals into legally binding rules—therefore, they are "communicative" as well as "regulative" (p. 69).

Whilst the book does give a number of examples of how NGOs are "communicative" and "regulative," what is missing is how NGOs reconcile these two (if not more) functions as organizations. It might be necessary to vilify and point out causal links between the perpetrator, the injustice, and the victims (who are the beneficiaries of NGO work), but these NGOs are also lobbying and providing service delivery (which is sometimes funded by the perpetrator), functions that would be hindered by vilification. The wide choice of examples did not fully address this issue, and an example from a development NGO would have been helpful to illustrate these different organizational tensions present, particularly as a large proportion of international development funding is channeled through international NGOs.

It would have also been helpful to have some additional conceptual clarity around what constitutes an international NGO. The book is very clear about what is distinctive about an NGO—that they are voluntary organizations that do not strive to share government power, that they stand up and speak not for themselves but for others who are oppressed, neglected, or deprived, and that their work is not confined to a particular territory. However, international NGOs are only a small number of organizations which normally fall under the category of NGO and most of the examples used were either European or North American in origin. It would have been even more enlightening to have some Southern examples which would have supported the argument in the book that these organizational forms are not necessarily best explained by using theories of Empire.

However, these points should not distract the reader from the excellent critical analysis and deep understanding of what is distinctive about NGOs, why these organizations have emerged, what NGOs are actually doing and where are they seeking involvement, and how they have succeeded or failed.

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Gert J. F. Leene and Theo N. M. Schuyt, *The Power of the Stranger: Structures and Dynamics in Social Intervention—A Theoretical Framework*, Ashgate, Aldershot and Burlington, 2008, 128 pp., index

The past few decades have witnessed a decline in the welfare state in Western Europe. The direct result of this has been the involvement of corporate organizations, faith-based institutions, and private individuals in the provision and delivery of social services. The book under review introduces a theoretical framework through which the works of these "interventionists" could be approached, and maybe even conceptualized. The authors state that they are not interested in developing a theory as such, but in presenting a framework. One can understand their reluctance in asserting that they are developing a theory, especially since they note that the field of social interventionism is one that does not enjoy the status of an international science. As stated in the introduction, the primary reasons for this include the "impossibility of delimiting the field," the practice-oriented nature of the field, and the lack of an international frame of reference through which the field could be approached. The book seeks to address the last of these reasons.

The theoretical framework that the book sketches is interdisciplinary in nature, largely because the subject of study itself is. It is also at times eclectic, a result of the interdisciplinarity with which it necessarily has to grapple. The fields that inspire the volume include formal sociology as exemplified by the work of Georg Simmel, historical sociology, the sociology of social work, and the study of rituals by socio-cultural anthropologists. The book applies Georg Simmel's conceptualization of the stranger, and in the process it highlights what is called "the triadic social interventional model," a model in which the third party—the stranger—holds an important position in resolving problems (Chapter 1).

The first chapter presents four possible ways of dealing with problems between two parties. The first way would be to end the relationship in which the problem exists; the second is for one of the parties—or even both—to try and assert power over the other and make them accept a situation; the third way is for the two parties to enter into negotiation; and the fourth is to invite a third party to intervene. This situation, however, leaves the reader wondering whether each situation conceptually leads to the other. One sees the lack of transition from the first case to the second, but one could easily see how an agreement to negotiate leads to the invitation of a third party. The authors might have done well to clarify the way they conceptualize the relationship between the four different ways of handling a problematic situation as presented in the chapter.

Another important issue with which the book engages is the problem of the legitimization of the relationship between the third-party and the parties in the relationship in which they intervene. This is normally by the establishment of a contract between the two parties (Chapter 3). A contract "gives 'certainty' and assurance on the one hand, yet also increases the tension required to effect that change" (p. 40). The issue of legitimization is also carried on to the discussion of the similarities between rituals and consultancy. This interesting comparison brings the insight of anthropologists' understanding of magic and rituals to bear on the practice of consultancy (Chapter 6).

The situation in which a third party is invited to intervene invariably invites attention to the problem of how to deal with power; for "[both] power and helping presume inequality" (p. 45). An agreement has been made and a relationship is about to begin, but where is the assurance that the intervening party is not going to abuse the power they have been handed? The authors call attention to the one-sidedness of this question in the fifth chapter. The merit of this chapter is not just in its exploration of asymmetry in a helping situation, but in presenting it in such a way as to be seen from both the sides of the helper and the help seeker. True, there is the self-interested helper who sees altruism as a career, but there is also the career-client who enjoys being in the position of a help seeker. The chapter goes on to discuss the strategies employed by help seekers and helpers in dealing with asymmetry.

The job of theory-building demands a measure of abstraction, an exercise that demands of the theorist the ability to draw wide-reaching conclusions, but one that also demands a measure of consistency in the examples that are offered as proof of the conclusion. As theoretical frameworks go, this is a bit of a let-down. The chapters are not properly concluded and the interesting arguments that are thrown up in the chapters are not executed satisfactorily. But as a call to action—the first few notes in a musical score that promises an interesting tune—it is a worthy endeavor that anyone who is interested in understanding the field of social work and social interventionism would gain immensely from reading.

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Samantha King, *Pink Ribbons, Inc.—Breast Cancer and the Politics of Philanthropy*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2008, 280 pp., bibliography, index, $24.95 (paper)

Since this book's first publication in hardback in 2006, Samantha King has generated a buzz not only in mainstream media and respected journals, but also online as "cancer survivors," feminists, activists, and critics have discussed the pros and cons of "pink washing." The debate has extended to "strategic philanthropy," "subsidized philanthropy," and the "neoliberal" hypothesis that "the key to solving America's problems lies in corporate philanthropy, personal generosity and proper consumption" (p. 2). Few can forget the Bush administration's call to "ordinary Americans" to recover from the 9/11 tragedy by "shopping and volunteering" (p. 63). Based on research conducted for a doctoral dissertation, this book expounds on "consumer-oriented philanthropic activities" that revolve around purchasing a product; participating in a "thon," and survivors being inflicted by the "tyranny of cheerfulness."

King echoes the misgivings of grassroots activists that the mainstream pink ribbon movement is "uncritically promoting mammography, encouraging the use of pharmaceuticals to 'prevent' breast cancer, and avoiding any consideration of environmental links to the disease" (p. 28). Thanks to the Susan G. Komen

Foundation, the largest private funder of breast cancer research in the United States and well known for its Race for the Cure, greater attention is given to "breast cancer above heart disease or other conditions that kill more women each year" (p. 96). This has come at several costs to philanthropy and activism. King states that the mammoth foundation "steers clear of social-justice-oriented breast cancer work and at certain moments has actively opposed measures that might benefit the marginalized and oppressed" (p. 40). Instead, "strategic philanthropy" calls for a "political sentiment [that] is properly expressed by the purchase of products or the donation of money" (p. 124).

Despite its obvious progressive bent, dense language in parts, and datedness (most contemporary events took place prior to 2001), the book raises provocative questions about the "miniscule amount of money that is actually raised" for the enormous marketing and publicity machine put into action by corporate and media partners (p. 24). King also critiques the "production of self-responsible consumer-citizens" (p. 46) and the success of thons and other "awareness" efforts so much so that "fund-raising for breast cancer has become a highly valued commodity in *itself*" (p. 57).

King takes a critical look at the links between "consumer-oriented philanthropic activities," "preservation of national motherhood, normative femininity, and the spirit of 'American generosity'" (p. 65) that is played out during the legislation and issuance of the breast cancer stamp, the first in the United States to raise funds for biomedical research. The stamp issue, the author asserts, fits into a neoliberal model that wants to eliminate "government waste" and instead have philanthropy and volunteerism become "morally and economically viable solutions" to gaps in the social safety net. It has also led to the formation of "narrow, single-issue liberal lobbying and fundraising organizations that have come to dominate national politics and media coverage" (p. 120). While the breast cancer movement is indebted to AIDS activists for the ribbon inspiration and transnational strategies, subsequent cancer awareness movements like prostrate cancer have reinforced "the single-issue, competitive model of disease activism" while trading on "anti-feminist, antiwomen, anti-breast-cancer-movement sentiment" (p. 121). As part of corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts, the breast cancer movement and its model have cast a global net, not only to further a social good, "but as techniques for market penetration and retention both in the domestic market and abroad" (p. 84).

King, associate professor of physical and health education and women's studies at Queen's University, in Kingston, Ontario, concedes that while there is a diversity of opinion on what causes breast cancer, the "informal alliance" of corporations, major cancer charities, the state, and media contributed to breast cancer becoming a "philanthropic cause par excellence" (p. 111). She disparages corporate philanthropy for taking on a "highly measured, profit-conscious approach," but supports Breast Cancer Action's suggestion for "outcome-driven research."

Overall, the book reveals the uneasy alliance between image-conscious corporations and resource-starved nonprofit organizations that is fostered in large part by consumers' propensity for CSR, the ideological belief that big government is always bad, and even tax deductions. As with large donations from individual

benefactors that mostly come with strings attached, corporate contributions for philanthropic activities do not necessarily come with a purely altruistic agenda.

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Andrea Liverani, *Civil Society in Algeria: The Political Functions of Associational Life*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2008, xvi + 195 pp., references, index, £70.00

This book argues that associations in Algeria contribute to preserving the stability of the political system and its institutional arrangements, rather than challenge them.

The period from the mid-1980s to the army coup in 1992 is referred to as Algeria's "associative spring," and this is where the story starts in terms of how "the state" has engaged with the associative sphere: from repressive measures, co-optation, and creation of friendly groups, and using associational life as an opportunity to limit the political damage caused by economic reform (what the author calls "outsourcing failure") to utilizing associations for distributing rents (in the form of subsidies) and keeping patron-client networks alive at various levels. Liverani also demonstrates very skillfully how the legal framework was adjusted to fit each of these strategies.

The main contribution of the book therefore is that it takes us beyond the mainstream view that Algeria's emerging associational life represents "a striking example of associative success taking place in the most adverse circumstances" (p. 48). It convincingly argues that this view is based on misleading figures that do not reflect their true, very limited, scope of activity; and that this view ignores the associations' social bases rooted in "presidentialism" and "familism." The final chapter in particular presents a fascinating account of how the international community's focus on civil society allowed it to remain engaged with the country throughout the civil war. It also includes some very telling evidence and pertinent critique of European Union and other donor's support to "democracy promotion" in Algeria.

The book thus provides a very detailed account of state–society relations in Algeria. One chapter is devoted to analyzing the connections between associations and political parties: while they "allow individual party members an insurance against the risk of political life," the author points to the "the large-scale deployment of civic associations by the executive" during Bouteflika's 2004 re-election campaign (p. 126), an element which helped to further weaken political parties and the legislature, as well as the associations' credibility, but strengthened Algeria's "liberalized autocracy."

The main shortcoming of the book lies in its reification of the state; given that the author places much emphasis on the argument that associations in Algeria reflect the various factions within the state, it would have been helpful to map out these factions (the presidency, army, ruling party, Ministry of the Interior, civil service bureaucracy, etc., some of which are referred to as the *pouvoir*, it seems) in more

detail and spell out the linkages with the various associations. Related to this is the insistence that Algeria is a "weak state" (in the sense used by Joel Migdal) suffering from a legitimacy crisis—however, the evidence presented in this book does not necessarily lead to this conclusion; as Jean Leca points out in his Foreword citing Adam Przeworski, a state may still be legitimate as long as no other formula is "thinkable" by the majority of the population (p. xv).

A reader not familiar with Algerian history and politics may at times find it difficult to place the names of the many personalities in their proper context (the Chronology is of limited use here). Hence, this book would probably be most useful to students of Middle East and/or North African studies, although its critique of mainstream political science theories on the role of civil society and democratization makes it an engaging case study for scholars of politics more generally.

The book is based on Liverani's doctoral research, which included eight months' field research between July 2001 and February 2002 in various cities in Algeria, as well as some later research trips. The main strength of the predominantly qualitative approach lies in the often excellent direct quotations from interviews which really bring this book to life and also compensate for the sometimes convoluted and overly referenced style in the main text (one sentence on p. 79 contains three separate footnotes).

In sum, this book certainly achieves its stated aim, namely to fill the gap in terms of detailed knowledge about Algeria's associational life. The concluding chapter also provides valuable directions for future research, as well as recommendations for donors ostensibly interested in strengthening civil society in the country.

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