
BOOK REVIEWS

Fair Trade, Corporate Accountability and Beyond: Experiments in Globalizing Justice

Kate Macdonald and Shelley Marshall

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Reviewed by Elisabeth Riedl

This book, as the title suggests, tackles an emerging research agenda in identifying and examining ‘experiments in globalizing justice’. It embarks on an ambitious agenda, seeking to critically examine distinct but also increasingly linked ethical initiatives like ‘fair trade’ and ‘corporate social responsibility’ (CSR), problematising the role and responsibilities of civil society, businesses, mobilised workers and the State within this discussion. These actors and initiatives, are subjected to a broad and challenging question: ‘How can production and trade within transnational supply chains be governed effectively so as to protect core human and social rights and advance broader principles of justice within a global economy?’ (p. 5). While this question risks being overly ambitious in scope and may overwhelm the reader initially, it is indeed pertinent for an examination of the promises and potential of initiatives such as CSR, which are gaining increasing leverage as market-based alternatives to broad-based structural change.

In the context of proliferating social justice initiatives, spanning public and private, government and non-governmental actors, from corporate to civic led initiatives, to the domain of government regulation – the key question raised by the editors is a theoretical one – where should responsibility lie? The editors, Macdonald and Shelley (2010), develop and outline a conceptual framework for examining this question in the introductory chapter to this book. They use the metaphor of ‘embedding’ (drawing on the theoretical work of a range of scholars, notably Polanyi 1944) to frame the discussion and analysis of the ethical initiatives examined, with the argument that these serve as ‘attempt(s) to re-embed capitalism in social justice norms’ (p. 7). As such, the editors position these ‘experiments in globalizing justice’ at the interface between market

imperatives and the social justice values that markets arguably reject (akin to Hayek's 1976 argument). Essentially, 're-embedding', for the editors, assumes that a process of 'dis-embedding' has occurred (a phenomenon traced to the rise of neoliberalism from the 1970s, p. 9). Some readers may question the stance taken by the editors and the literature they consult, as the process of dis-embedding which they refer to could, alternatively, reflect a contestation over social values rather than their expulsion.

The conceptual framework of (dis)embedding raises two key tasks for the authors: to identify 'ethically defensible norms', by which standards capitalism *should* be regulated, and; to identify and evaluate the institutional arrangements which are necessary for a process of 're-embedding' to occur (p. 8). The admittedly 'hazy' 'yardstick' by which they seek to evaluate the capacity of the initiatives examined is through the concept of 'social justice' (p. 5). To add clarity to this concept, the authors derive 'norms of social justice' from relevant theoretical literature and public discourse. In examining the mix of actors and currently relatively *ad hoc* models for ethical change, the editors further seek to engage and contribute to scholarly discussions over regulation – particularly debates over the legitimacy of voluntary (or soft) over legal (or hard) mechanisms (p. 7).

While individual chapters do not necessarily engage explicitly with the analytical framework developed by the editors (as forewarned in the introduction on p. 27), instead working to their own methodologies, the editors return to the questions they raise in chapter 1 with a strong analysis and reflection in the concluding chapter to the work. Indeed, both the introduction and conclusion serve as highlights in this book, effectively tying together the variety of case-studies contributed by individual authors.

The editors identify that the scope of the book encompasses 'ever-expanding numbers and variants of governance initiatives' (p. 5). Accordingly, this collection is organised into eighteen chapters that focus on 'Individual and Civic Action through Fair Trade' (part 1), 'Responsible Consumers and Corporations' (part 2), 'Mobilised Workers' (part 3) and 'A Strengthened and Transformed Role for the State' (part 4) respectively. Part 1 offers five chapters on fair trade, including a focus on fair trade in Asia for chapter 2. Indeed, further

examples are drawn from the region for the remaining parts of the book, including an examination of CSR in the Australian garment Sector (Part 2, Chapter 8), of workers' representation in China (Part 3, chapter 11), and of regional trade agreements in the Pacific (Part 4, chapter 16).

Importantly, given that this work engages themes at the interface of scholarly and policy debates, contributors include scholars *and* practitioners (see notes on pages xi-xv). Steve Knapp, the Executive Director of Fair Trade Australia and New Zealand (FTAANZ) and Fairtrade Labelling Australia and New Zealand (FLANZ), appropriately authors the first chapter on Fair Trade (chapter 2). Other contributors include Andrea Maksimovic (from the European NGO SOLIDAR, chapter 13), Serena Lillywhite and Emer Diviney (from the Sustainable Business Unit of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, chapter 8) and Nic Maclellan (a journalist and researcher in the Pacific, chapter 16). This input from practitioners ensures that the work remains grounded in the practical experiences and knowledge such contributors can provide.

This collection edited by Macdonald and Shelley, admittedly examining a highly experimental terrain, is eminently suitable and significant in an era marked by the increasing popularity of 'market-based' ethical initiatives. The rise of efforts to harness the power of the market is demonstrated by the advent of the fair trade labeling model in the late 1980s and the proliferation of CSR initiatives, including the United Nations Global Compact, at the turn of the century. These initiatives underscore the importance of rigorous scrutiny of the role and effectiveness of 'experiments in globalizing justice'. This collection will be of interest to scholars, students and practitioners alike, with an interest in this dynamic debate.

References

- Hayek, Friederich A. von (1976) *The mirage of social justice*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- Polanyi, Karl (1944) *The great transformation*, Farrar and Rinehart, New York.