Oxford Development Studies

Book Reviews: The United Nations Intellectual History Project

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Published online: 12 Mar 2013.

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Book Reviews: The United Nations Intellectual History Project

Oxford Development Studies includes occasional review articles of books we consider important contributions to development studies. In this issue, we review nine of the 17 volumes that make up the Intellectual History of the United Nations, which was led by Louis Emmerij, Richard Jolly and Thomas Weiss. The Intellectual History Project, originally conceived by a great UN civil servant, Sidney Dell, has provided massive and impressive documentation of the UN's role and influence in political, economic and social affairs. Here Dominik Zaum reviews three volumes concerned with security and politics; José Antonio Ocampo's review covers three books related to the role of the UN in economy and statistics; and Rosalind Eyben discusses three volumes concerning the UN's role in relation to gender, human rights and social justice. As these reviews indicate, these volumes describe and analyse the varied but heavily constrained role of the UN in affecting global norms and policy, its contributions, its failures and the challenges it faces. In each of the three arenas, the reviews illuminate the ongoing tension that confronts the UN project between the ideals of global cooperation and universal rights and the actuality of realpolitik.

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Professor Frances Stewart
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Oxford Development Studies

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Human Security and the UN: A Critical History
Neil MacFarlane and Yuen Foong Khong
Bloomington, University of Indiana Press, 2006, 368 pp., ISBN 978-0-253-21839-1

Preventive Diplomacy at the UN
Bertrand G. Ramcharan
Bloomington, University of Indiana Press, 2008, 296 pp., ISBN 978-0-253-21983-1

Global Governance and the UN: An Unfinished Journey
Thomas G. Weiss and Ramesh Thakur
Bloomington, University of Indiana Press, 2010, 448 pp., ISBN 978-0-253-22167-4

The ongoing crisis in Syria has highlighted both the central role that states and international civil society continue to ascribe to the UN in addressing challenges to international order, and the challenges to and limitations of the organisation when

advancing such efforts. As violence escalated, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon appointed his predecessor Kofi Annan as his joint special envoy (together with the League of Arab States) in February 2012. Within weeks, Annan presented a six-point plan to end the violence, which included the deployment of a UN monitoring mission. The UN Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) was duly authorised and deployed in April,[1] and fighting declined but soon escalated again. As the growing violence and use of heavy weapons made the work of the unarmed observers increasingly impossible and futile, the mission suspended its work in June.

Disagreement among Security Council members on the UN's role in the crisis, and in particular about the approach the UN should take towards the Assad government, meant that the mandate of UNSMIS was not extended and the mission was terminated on 19 August 2012. Two weeks earlier Kofi Annan, the special envoy, had already resigned, in particular over the divisions in the Security Council over Syria.

Amidst mutual recriminations between the permanent Security Council members (with France, the UK, and the USA on the one hand, and China and Russia on the other), the UN had clearly failed in its preventive diplomacy efforts, and in its desire to protect the civilian population. The inability of the UN and its member states to take forceful action has also challenged the idea that, following strong action by (or authorised by) the UN in Cote d'Ivoire and Libya, the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) had become a consolidated international norm. The UN's record over Syria in 2012 underlined that global governance has indeed remained very much an "unfinished journey", as the title of one of the volumes reviewed here suggests.

Over the past decade, the UN Intellectual History Project (UNIHP) has examined the contribution of the UN to the development, consolidation and institutionalisation of a wide range of ideas and practices in international society. The contributions to the series suggest that the advancement of ideas around development, economic and social justice, and governance are among the key contributions the UN has made towards contemporary international order. While most of the volumes cover international economic and social issues (including human rights), three books stand out in addressing ideas related to the provision of international security. These three volumes are the focus of this review. Their core themes—global governance, human security and preventive diplomacy—also relate to the UN's role in the Syria crisis, which therefore offers an opportunity to reflect on the books' findings.

Global Governance and the UN: An Unfinished Journey by Thomas Weiss, one of the UNIHP's directors, and Ramesh Thakur, is devised as a synthesis of the UN's contributions to global governance across the themes examined by other volumes in the series. The authors examine the UN's contribution through the lenses of five interrelated gaps in global governance: knowledge gaps (the lack of authoritative empirical or theoretical knowledge about global problems), normative gaps (the lack of globally accepted norms governing particular issue areas), policy gaps (the lack of guidelines on how to respond to particular global challenges and advance global norms), institutional gaps (lack of institutions and resources to systematically advance a particular policy) and compliance gaps (the difficulty of identifying and punishing non-compliance).

Applied to different areas of global governance (security, human rights and development), these lenses offer a comprehensive and highly readable record of UN involvement in global governance. In particular, they highlight the wide range of UN organs, agencies and individuals, and their distinct contributions to the development and institutionalisation of norms. They also reveal the dual character of the UN, both as a

collection of actors advancing and institutionalising different norms, and as a forum or framework within which different actors—not only from within the UN system, but also member states and civil society—can work to advance particular norms and their visions of international order.

As the chapters in *Global Governance* show, agency within the UN is widely dispersed, ranging from the bureaucracies of the Secretariat and specific specialised agencies to the Secretary-General and some of his Special Representatives, for example Francis Deng on the R2P. One of the main reasons for such agents' ability to advance and entrench particular norms, however, is their association with the UN and its universal membership, from which it draws much of its legitimacy.

They also show how the UN offers a conducive framework within which states, UN agencies and civil society can contest and seek to advance competing norms. The structured character of interaction in the context of international organisations can constrain the exercise of coercion and power politics (Finnemore, 2005), creating a more permissive environment for norm-based discourses. This offers a platform for actors (especially states) who would otherwise find it more difficult to have their voices heard, and to advance their visions of order. Furthermore, international organisations are frequently characterised by a "repertoire of collective understandings" (Risse, 2000, p. 11), which structure their debates, and mean that arguments that reflect these shared normative frameworks are more likely to resonate with an organisation's membership than those that do not reflect them, that such arguments are "better" and more persuasive than others (Johnstone, 2003). The UN, therefore, offers a particularly conducive environment for norms-based discourses, and a structured yet permissive framework to contest competing norms.

Human Security and the UN: A Critical History by Neil MacFarlane and Yuen Foong Khong is the most scholarly and original of the three volumes under review. It examines, first, the ideational antecedents of the term "human security" popularised by the UN Development Programme's (UNDP) 1994 Human Development Report and the historical changes that gave rise to it; second, it provides an overview of the contribution of different UN agencies and fora to the development and institutionalisation of the concept; and third, it critically evaluates the contribution of human security discourses to the understanding and practice of international security.

The concept of human security has shifted the focus away both from the state towards the individual as the main subject to be "secured" and from physical violence as the main threat to security towards economic, social, cultural and environmental sources of insecurity. It has, in the words of Rothchild (1995), both deepened and broadened the concept of security. While this re-conceptualisation has been advanced by a range of states (such as Canada, Norway and Japan) and civil society organisations, UN agencies—in particular the UNDP—have been central to developing the most authoritative elaboration of the concept. It was the 1994 UNDP report, and a report by the Commission on Human Security (2003), *Human Security Now*, that pushed for a broad interpretation of human security, moving beyond freedom from physical violence to include "freedom from want" issues such as health, the environment and development.

The volume is an important case study of norm development. It shows norms do not come out of nowhere but build on normative changes in adjacent fields—in the case of human security, and in particular on what Ignatieff (2001) has called, the "human rights revolution" in the aftermath of the Second World War, as well as a growing focus on the

"human" in economic development. It also highlights how the changing historical context can de-legitimise existing norms and institutions (such as sovereignty), and create the space for the emergence of new norms. As MacFarlane and Khong (2006, p. 246) suggest:

> [t]he reification of the state – privileging state security over the security of individuals residing within it – was a result of specific historical circumstances. Changed circumstances require a renegotiation of the position of the individual vis-à-vis the state.

MacFarlane and Khong offer a cautious assessment of human security's progress in filling some of Weiss and Thakur's global governance gaps. In particular, they focus on the conceptual overstretch of human security: by broadening security to encompass a very wide range of social issues, almost everything becomes a security issue (Paris, 2001). The breadth of the concept arguably made it easier for countries concerned about the implications for sovereignty of a focus on the security of individuals to support it: even opponents of more external political intervention could agree with greater support for economic development, health or education. However, such breadth is obviously problematic analytically and for policy making: prioritising resources towards addressing security concerns is virtually impossible if everything is considered an equally grave challenge to security. The authors therefore unequivocally favour a narrower understanding of human security that makes the individual the subject to be secured, but focuses on threats from organised violence rather than "freedom from want" issues.

A cursory review of UN Security Council resolutions highlights that such a conception of human security has penetrated deeply into the security discourse in UN institutions. Resolutions have increasingly focused on the protection of civilians,[2] and have authorised the use of force towards that end, not least in Libya[3] and Cote d'Ivoire[4] in 2011. However, as the acrimonious debates among UN members in the aftermath of Libya and over Syria have highlighted, conceptual vagueness and overstretch cannot paper over existing divisions and different interpretations of the concept and expectations it raises for long, once it comes to questions of institutionalisation and compliance.

The challenge of institutionalising norms and practices at the UN is also at the heart of the final book reviewed here, Bertrand Ramcharan's *Preventive Diplomacy at the UN*. Ramcharan, who worked for the UN Secretariat for over three decades, focuses on the practice of preventive diplomacy—diplomatic efforts to "head off conflict or human-made catastrophes" (Ramcharan, 2008, p. 1)—rather than its intellectual history. While providing some historical background to the practice, the book focuses almost exclusively on its use by the UN, in particular by successive Secretary-Generals.

The book not only highlights the centrality of preventive diplomacy to the UN's mandate, but also clearly exposes the challenges to its successful practice. While the book does not explicitly use the language of Weiss and Thakur's global governance gaps, it is at the heart of these challenges. Knowledge gaps about the imminence of conflicts or their root causes have hindered both operational and structural conflict prevention. Normative gaps, in particular sovereignty concerns, have made early interventions difficult, and have prevented the development of clear prevention policies. Efforts at building the institutions that could strengthen the UN's—and in particular the Secretariat's—capacity to act preventively (in particular greater analytical capacities) have been hampered by the resistance of member states—most recently over proposals in the High-level Panel report

that the Peacebuilding Commission should have an early warning capacity.[5] Finally, even a cursory look at recent prevention efforts highlights the compliance gaps—as over Iraq in 2003, or in Syria in 2012. It is therefore quite an indictment of the UN's capacity for preventive diplomacy if the book identifies the Secretary-General's role in the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, where his efforts were an important but hardly central part of the way in which the crisis unfolded and was resolved, as its major success.

All three books underline that not only the UN as a whole, but also the wider ideas about international order that it promotes, are on an unfinished journey. More importantly, it is a journey in which the travellers vigorously disagree about the destination. For ideas about global governance, human security or preventive diplomacy to advance further, they need to gain traction with the diverse constituencies that make up and interact with and within the UN. As a consequence of the diversity of constituencies, these ideas will continue to be contested and challenged in a global order that remains characterised by deep political and normative divisions. Ultimately, the UN can only reflect the wider political environment in which it works—it cannot transcend it.

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Notes

[1] SC Res. 2043 of 21 April 2012.
[2] The Security Council has affirmed its commitment to the protection of civilians in conflict through a range of thematic resolutions: SC Res. 1265 of 17 September 1999; SC Res. 1296 of 19 April 2000; SC Res. 1674 of 28 April 2006; and SC Res. 1738 of 23 December 2006. In addition, the Council has passed thematic resolutions on related issues, such as children and armed conflict (SC Res. 1612 of 26 July 2005, SC Res. 1998 of 12 July 2011, SC Res. 2068 of 19 September 2012) and on women, peace and security (SC Res. 1820 of 19 June 2008, SC Res. 1960 of 16 December2010).
[3] SC Res. 1973 of 17 March 2011.
[4] SC Res. 1975 of 30 March 2011.
[5] *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*, Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change, New York, UN Document, A/59/565 of 2 December 2004, para. 264.

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Rothchild, E. (1995) What is security? *Daedalus*, 124(3), pp. 53–98.

The UN and Development: From Aid to Cooperation
Olav Stokke
Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2009, 752 pp., ISBN 978-0-253-22081-3

The UN and Global Political Economy: Trade, Finance and Development
John Toye and Richard Toye
Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2004, 416 pp., ISBN 978-0-253-21686-1

Quantifying the World: UN Ideas and Statistics
Michael Ward
Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2004, 352 pp., ISBN 978-0-253-21674-8

These three volumes of the UNIHP provide a coherent and fairly complete view of the role of the UN in economic and social affairs. The volumes address different dimensions of the UN contributions in these fields. Toye and Toye analyse those in the policy area, particularly in relation to global trade and finance. Stokke deals with the contributions of the UN in technical cooperation and the only partly successful attempt to create a UN development fund, which was transformed in 1965 into the UNDP. In turn, Ward considers the remarkable but commonly ignored legacy of the UN in statistical measurement. In his words:

> The creation of a universally acknowledged statistical system and of a general framework guiding the collection and compilation of data according to recognized professional standards both internationally and nationally has been one of the great and most unsung successes of the UN organization. (Ward, 2004, p. 2)

Despite the division of labour between the three volumes, there are many common and remarkably interesting themes. One of the most fascinating relates to the effects on the UN economic and social agenda of the political tensions that characterised the early post-Second World War decades, and not only those associated with the East–West divide generated by the cold war but also between the major Western powers—particularly, the USA—and the growing group of developing country members of the UN.

The major manifestation of the latter tension was the early and strong support that developing countries gave to the UN as a forum for development cooperation, which frequently faced the unwillingness of the USA and industrial countries to give it a central role in the execution of cooperation programmes. Its main result is what Toye and Toye denominate the "twin-track system":

> The UN General Assembly provides a world forum where economic ideas, interests and policy proposals are presented, discussed, and negotiated. Its authority is, and can continue to be, a moral authority [. . .] Once the process of UN discussion and negotiation produces agreements, however, their implementation is delegated to executive agencies in which the countries that will foot most of the subsequent bills place their confidence. (Toye and Toye, 2004, p. 280).

As these authors also illustrate, although this problem arose early on in the history of the UN, its strongest manifestation has been the growing marginalisation of UN agencies from

the economic agenda since the 1980s, during the era of structural market reforms (discussed below).

Among the effects of the cold war, one of the most interesting was the lack of support by the Soviet Union under Stalin for the growing role of the UN in development cooperation, as well as its weak financial support after Stalin. As Ward illustrates, another by-product of the cold war during the early years was the focus of the UN on economic rather than social statistics, as the latter were considered politically sensitive. This explains, in his view, the concentration by the UN on the system of national accounts and COMTRADE (the system of information of international trade, the roots of which go back to the activities of the League of Nations). In the social area, the exception was population statistics, an area in which the UN took a leading role early on, designing technical standards, providing technical assistance to several developing countries in their population censuses, generating world population projections under alternative scenarios and, equally importantly, avoiding the politicisation of population statistics.

One implication of the complexity of these North–South and East–West tensions was the contradictory (or, perhaps, ambiguous) role played by the USA in relation to the UN's work on economic and social issues. It sometimes promoted it, in part forced to take action in favour of developing countries due to the global environment created by the cold war. At the same time, however, given its growing inability to dominate the decisions of the organisation, it also limited the role of the UN in this area or, alternatively, agreed on areas of cooperation but only on the condition that implementation was not in the hands of UN agencies, thus following the "twin-track system".

The first, remarkable case of this kind was the negotiation of an international trade regime in the second half of the 1940s, viewed initially by the USA as one of the pillars of the post-war economic order. These negotiations led to the 1948 Havana Charter that created the International Trade Organization (ITO). However, some of its provisions, which were central to developing countries (commodity agreements), to Western European countries (colonial preferences) or to both of them (the use of quantitative import restrictions to manage balance of payments crises), were found unacceptable by the USA. For this reason, the US administration did not push for ratification of the ITO by Congress and eventually suspended any attempt to get such approval. As a result of this, the only element of the ITO that survived was the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), agreed one year before the Havana Charter, and which essentially became a framework for trade liberalisation among major Western industrial countries.

As Stokke illustrates, the USA was also the world leader in development cooperation in the early post-war years, including funding the UN's cooperation activities. This became particularly so after President Truman's inaugural address for his second term in January 1949. This followed the equally central role of the USA in European reconstruction under the Marshall Plan. However, the USA refused to support developing countries' more ambitious initiatives and, particularly, the creation of a Special UN Fund for Economic Development (SUNFED) in the 1950s. Under political pressure to act, it eventually agreed in 1958 to create a more limited fund to finance pre-investment, research and advisory services, technical training and demonstration centres. A more ambitious initiative, the creation of the International Development Association (IDA), would be approved a year later, but under the World Bank umbrella. A similar situation arose during the first UN Development Decade in the 1960s, which was launched on President Kennedy's initiative.

Its results, as well as those of the succeeding development decades, would be rather frustrating.

An important aspect of the tensions between the USA and developing countries was the increasing radicalisation of the latter in the 1960s and 1970s as their membership in the UN swelled due to decolonisation. The major effects were the first United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the creation of a Secretariat for this process in 1964, and the launch by the UN General Assembly of negotiations for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) in 1974. As Toye and Toye show in detail, the most positive effect of the trade negotiations of the 1960s was acceptance of the principle of "special and differential treatment" for developing countries, the most important manifestation of which was the asymmetric trade rules for manufactures exported by developing to developed countries under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP). However, as these authors point out, GSP turned out to be neither generalised nor, for that matter, a system. The USA was, again, a stumbling block in its implementation.

There were also partial achievements in another dimension of the trade negotiations pushed by developing countries: the regulation of commodity markets. However, the creation of a Common Fund for Commodities (an idea that can be traced back to John Maynard Keynes) never materialised—or, more precisely, the institution that was created under that name was a pale reflection of that which developing countries and the UNCTAD Secretariat had proposed. Although it had different origins, the creation of the Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) in the 1960s could also be seen as a success, as it gave developing countries a share in the creation of reserve money. However, nothing was achieved in the negotiations of the early 1970s on linking SDR creation with development cooperation, thus ignoring the arguments in favour of such a link made by the UNCTAD Secretariat and the Group of 24 (the major block of developing countries in negotiations in the Bretton Woods Institutions, BWIs, created in 1971).

As Toye and Toye also show, the concurrence of the victory of Margaret Thatcher in the UK in 1979 and of Ronald Reagan in the USA in 1980, the collapse of the NIEO negotiations in Cancún (Mexico) in 1981 and the beginning of the Latin American debt crisis in 1982 would represent a major blow to the UN's role in economic development. The most important result of these interrelated events would be the era of structural market reforms under the axis of the BWIs and, particularly, the shift of economic development cooperation to the World Bank. Another effect would be the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations, which led to the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO). In sharp contrast to the trade negotiations of the 1940s and the first UNCTAD conferences, the principle of special and differential treatment for developing countries in trade would be significantly weakened, except for low-income countries, thus implying that middle-income countries were increasingly seen by developed countries as competitors which should thus be subject to the same international disciplines, rather than as objects of cooperation. Both of these processes were accompanied by an end to radicalism in the position of developing countries, and in particular by a shift to a partnership-based rather than a confrontational approach in international economic negotiations.

The movement of the axis of economic development from the UN to the World Bank also still implied changes in another dimension. The rise of developing countries as major UN actors had represented, as Stokke shows in detail, a victory for the principle that the sovereignty of states must be firmly respected and international support had to be viewed as "help to self-help". In the long term, as the title of his book argues, the concept of "aid"

was also replaced by that of "cooperation". In contrast to these principles, the victory of the BWIs would bring with it the unprecedented structural conditionality associated with their financial assistance in the 1980s and 1990s. UN processes and UN agencies would continue to play a role, frequently proposing alternatives to the structural reforms agenda. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) played a leading role in this regard with the publication, in 1987, of *Adjustment With a Human Face*. Other UN agencies would also contribute to the furthering of a new agenda, notably the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (better known by its Spanish acronym, CEPAL), which had also been central to the early history of UN development ideas from the 1940s to the 1960s, as illustrated by Toye and Toye.

However, and very interestingly, while the UN's influence on *economic* development has weakened since the 1980s, its role has been reinforced by a different process: the broadening of the concept of development, which placed social, environmental and human rights dimensions at the centre of the global agenda. In this process, the UN was a clear winner, both in the realm of ideas and of statistics.

As the three volumes show, most of the new concepts on development that have become a part of the international agenda since the 1970s had either a UN origin or at least, in their spread as global concepts, a UN seal of approval. The first was the concept of basic needs introduced by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in the 1970s. The concept of sustainable development, as a comprehensive notion incorporating the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development, can be traced back to the Brundtland Report, prepared for the UN in 1987, and would become an emblem of the UN after the 1992 Earth Summit. The concept of human development would become, in turn, the icon of UNDP, which started to publish its *Human Development Reports* in 1990. The underlying ideas had clear links not only to Amartya Sen's concept of capabilities, but also to Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "four freedoms", which inspired the Preamble of the UN Charter when it referred to the determination of the Peoples of the UN "to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom". These ideas have also been at the centre of the advocacy role of the UN in recent decades in economic, social and environmental issues.

This trend was also reflected in the leadership played by the UN in the area of social statistics and, later on, in the measurement of the environmental dimensions of development. As Ward shows, social statistics came with a lag to the UN Statistical Commission and Division, but were reflected early in the work of the specialised agencies of the UN system: ILO's work on labour statistics (which preceded the creation of the UN proper), of UNESCO on education indicators, of World Health Organisation (WHO) on the classification of diseases (morbidity) and health problems and, from different approaches, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and WHO's work on measuring malnutrition. As Ward also indicates, the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) took the first steps in the 1960s to analyse the diverging path of economic and social development, and to propose a composite index of development. Later on, UNDP would achieve great success in this area with its Human Development Index. Social statistics would enter the UN Statistical Commission through the satellite accounts of the 1968 system of national accounts, and in a proper way through the guidelines for social measurement approved in 1976 and issued in 1978.

Ward also shows that after the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, the UN Statistical Office started asking countries to collect environmental

statistics and it would be the first organisation to develop a system that would integrate all elements of environmental degradation into a comprehensive accounting framework, treating the deterioration of natural resources as depreciation. Ward also points out that, in the social area, the UN had been disaggregating statistics by gender since its early years, but the major work in this area came much later, with the first report on *The World's Women* in 1991 and, particularly, the second prepared for the Beijing Summit on Women (Fourth World Conference on Women) in 1995.

The three volumes tend to underestimate, nonetheless, the crucial role that the series of UN conferences and summits had in broadening the scope of the global development agenda. Indeed, in a significant sense, the victory of the UN in the broader dimensions of development was closely associated with these global meetings, and particularly with the series of summits that started in 1990 with the World Summit for Children, and which should be seen as one of the most positive effects for the UN of the end of the cold war. For example, in their otherwise remarkable coverage of the UN's contribution to debates on trade and development, Toye and Toye leave aside the 2002 Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development, and Stokke focuses perhaps more on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) than on the sequence of global summits—though some of these receive some attention in his as well as in Ward's work.

The MDGs have become the centre of the UN's and, particularly, the UNDP's policy and advocacy role over the past decade, but as both Stokke and Ward point out, they have their real origin in OECD's 1996 *Shaping the 21 st Century: The Contributions of Development Co-operation*. In contrast to the centrality of the MDGs in the recent global development agenda, civil society and UN specialised agencies have seen them as an excessive simplification of the broader development agenda set by the UN conferences and summits. In turn, developing countries have frequently seen the MDGs as the agenda of the donor community and as under-emphasising the responsibilities of donors, which are only loosely captured in the eighth goal ("develop a global partnership for development"). In any case, the adoption of the MDGs after the 2000 UN Millennium Summit provided the contemporary framework of global development objectives, and gave the UN leadership both in the policy area and in the statistical field, through the coordination, in the latter case, of what can perhaps be considered as the first integrated set of social and environmental statistics. In particular, the MDGs became central to the donor community, provided some accountability to global development objectives (perhaps for the first time in history) and gave the UN a sort of renewed influence on the agenda of the BWIs.

Finally, the three volumes make clear the major tensions that have affected the UN's work on economic and social issues, which have played out in different ways throughout the now close to seven decades of its history. Two of these tensions have already been mentioned: those between the UN and the BWIs and, in recent decades, between the MDGs and the broader development agenda. Another crucial tension has been of that between the respect for national autonomy, and thus for country-led development programmes, and the growing advocacy role of the UN, which is inherent in global standards in economic, social and environmental issues that came not only with the UN conferences and summits, but also with the MDGs.

In the execution of global programmes, there have also been tensions between the roles of bilateral and multilateral cooperation, between the need for planning and the lack of multi-year commitment by donors and, ultimately, due to the dependence on voluntary funding for the UN's development cooperation activities in the absence of mandated

contributions (the major source of funding for the UN Secretariat) or own funds (the major source for the BWIs). This has led to the excessive dependence of UN development cooperation on cycles of donor funding. As an instrument for the implementation of development cooperation, there has also been a constant tension between the coordination of the UN Secretariat and the UNDP and its predecessor programmes, on the one hand, and the several specialised agencies of the UN system, on the other. This tension has exploded in recent decades with the transformation of the UNDP into an executive agency itself. This has generated a veritable competition for donor funds which has weakened the system's capacity for coordination. These tensions, which are discussed in detail by Stokke, led to the creation of the UN Development Group in 1997 and the One United Nations Initiative of 2005, both of which counteracted these trends only in a very partial way.

Viewed as a collection, these three volumes provide, as stated at the onset of this review, a fairly comprehensive view of the work of the UN on economic and social issues. The outstanding role that the UN has played in this area over the past seven decades is emphasised in these contributions, and also its constraints and limitations, which are crucial for rethinking that role looking forward. The UNIHP should be proud to have broadened our knowledge and understanding of the contributions of the most important instrument of global cooperation ever created by humanity—but also one that continues to be under-appreciated by many academic analysts and politicians throughout the world.

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Women, Development and the UN: A Sixty-Year Quest for Equality and Justice
Devaki Jain
Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2005, 256 pp., ISBN 978-0-253-21819-3

Human Rights at the UN: The Political History of Universal Justice
Roger Normand and Sarah Zaidi
Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2008, 528 pp., ISBN 978-0-253-21934-3

UN Voices: The Struggle for Development and Social Justice
Thomas G. Weiss, Tatiana Carayannis, Louis Emmerij and Richard Jolly
Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2005, 544 pp., ISBN 978-0-253-21788-2

My first (indirect) encounter with the UN was when as a small child I saw my mother board a plane bound for Geneva where she was intending to lobby the UN on nuclear disarmament as a member of a women's peace group. Devaki Jain brought back this memory when she commented that in the early years of the UN, during the cold war, it was women who were proactively working for peace, when "peace work was seen as something obscure and at best naive" (Jain, 2005, p. 42). I thought of my mother as very noble. In my early teens I joined the local branch of the United Nations Association and at the age of 20, in my first fleeting visit to New York, my priority was to visit the UN. Later,

married for 20 years to a UN official, myself employed as a UN "expert" and consultant, and subsequently advocating for the UN when I was a UK civil servant, I remained an enthusiast, committed to engaging with the UN as a potentially powerful force for social justice.

Jain, and Normand and Zaidi, the authors of two of the three volumes under review, are concerned with that same struggle from the perspective of their long careers as activists. Jain provides a short and highly readable history of the evolving relations between women's movements and the UN. A distinguished development economist, Jain is a founding member of Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) which, as she puts it, "gave an identity to the voices of women living in the South" (2005, p. 3). She writes from that point of view, triumphantly overcoming the problem that most of the available sources are Eurocentric. Focusing on the ideas and actions of women's networks in the South from 1945 onwards, she confounds the arguments that feminism is an idea created and promoted by the North. Jain provides some fascinating facts. It was Latin American women during the 1930s who used the Inter-American Commission on Women to get the League of Nations to conduct the first-ever survey of the legal status of women. At the San Francisco Conference in 1945, it was Latin American delegations that changed the language of the draft of the UN Charter from "equal rights among men" to "equal rights among men and women".

With the founding of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 1946, it was the Latin Americans who pressured the CSW to focus from the start on women's political rights, leading to the General Assembly adopting the Convention on Political Rights of Women in 1952. Getting the norms changed was not enough. Jain notes that the CSW was very conscious that it needed to pay as much attention to changes in practice. Sadly when I got to know the CSW in the early 1990s things had changed and I found its meetings dreary and its conclusions largely ignored by the rest of the UN. By that time, comments Jain, governments were sending to the CSW cautious bureaucrats—staff from the women's national organisations that, ironically, had been created as a result of pressure from the international women's movement. Jain shows it was very different in the early days when delegates to the CSW were experienced women activists. Bodil Bergtrup, the first Chair of the CSW, had been a member of the Danish resistance during the Second World War, while Chafika Selami-Meslem, head of the UN Division for the Advancement of Women for 10 years, had been a freedom fighter in Algeria. One of the book's attractions are the potted biographies scattered through the text that honour the role of individual women activists, such as Annie Jiagge from Ghana who as a member of the CSW made a major contribution to the drafting of the UN Declaration on Discrimination Against Women.

Subsequent chapters trace the history of the relationship between the women's movement and the UN up to the present day. Jain shows how the first UN Conference on Women in Mexico in 1975 was not just a product of second-wave feminism but the culmination of years of patient work by a small, dedicated group of women within the UN supported by a much larger group on the outside. The end of the cold war, she suggests, did not help women in the South because the disappearance of the Non-Aligned Movement "removed a vital political umbrella" (2005, p. 83) that had legitimised their claim for justice as part of a wider struggle against domination by the great powers. Although since 1995, after the peak moment of the Beijing Conference, there has been a conservative backlash, Jain is relatively positive about the relationship between the UN and the women's movement. She concludes that the UN created useful spaces for women to claim

their rights, but the change that has been wrought is a result not of the UN but of women's networks engaged at local and global levels. These have been the driving force to which the UN has had to respond. The book was published before the movement's most recent triumph—the establishment of UN Women. I hope the series editors will invite Jain to write an updated edition in five years' time to reflect on whether the new agency for women has delivered on the hopes of those who campaigned so energetically for its creation.

Normand and Zaidi's history concentrates on the political relations between states and this may be why they are less positive than Jain about the UN's role. The reasons for their scepticism become apparent when you progress through the book and are provided with detailed historical evidence of the perfidy of the great powers in constructing what Nornand and Zaidi describe as an impotent human rights system. The book concentrates on the period between the Second World War and the end of the cold war, with brief summaries of the history of human rights before and after that period. There is a fascinating analysis of human rights politics during the negotiations over the UN Charter and the construction of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR). The authors argue that the end of the Second World War witnessed the most favourable conditions possible for a new human rights-based global order. There was public enthusiasm, welfare state regimes were being established in the developed world and the cold war divisions had not yet been solidified. "This is why", they write, "the drafting of the Universal Declaration is as much about opportunities missed and hopes betrayed as about the triumphant emergence of the human rights regime" (2008, p. 143). But was the moment so opportune? They themselves offer a counter-argument that the old European powers did not want any international scrutiny of their colonial regimes, while the USA and the Soviet Union were both adverse to any examination of their own internal human rights record. The authors note that these great powers were the only ones consistently opposed to the adoption of the second and third pillars of a global human rights regime, namely a single covenant and measures for implementation. The cold war years—good, Jain argues, for voices of women from the South—consisted of protracted negotiations that resulted in two separate, watered-down covenants: one on civil and political rights and the second even more toothless covenant on economic, social and cultural (ESC) rights. By the time the two separate covenants were adopted in 1966 the UN was rapidly expanding, with new member states born from former colonies. If these countries had been more involved in the negotiations, argue the authors, things might have turned out more positively. Is this just wishful thinking, bearing in mind the extent to which, as they acknowledge, the UDHR derives from Western texts with an emphasis on individuals rather than on rights through relationships, deliberately ignoring an early UNESCO study that sought to reconcile diverse intellectual and cultural rights traditions, including from colonised countries?

Whereas Jain's history has a broader canvas, Normand and Zaidi largely restrict themselves to the actions and ideas of UN and member government officials and the wider group of experts and human rights organisations that engaged with them. I imagine this reflects the reality of a situation in which the cause of universal human rights—as distinct from the rights of particular groups—has never produced a mass social movement. The lack of a broad-based global constituency may have helped human rights become the football of *realpolitk*. The authors paint a gloomy picture. Eleanor Roosevelt turns out to be less than perfect: the first Chair of the Human Rights Commission, she faithfully carried out US policy that included preventing, on a technicality, the National Association for the

Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) from petitioning the General Assembly about racial discrimination in the USA. One reason why the USA largely got its way in the early days is because the Soviet Union sent unimaginative bureaucrats to the Commission and the UK shamefully avoided selecting its most prominent and respected human rights jurist because he was Jewish and not born in England. I was also discomfited to read that despite the UK enjoying a Labour government that was rapidly and successfully building a welfare state, it allied with the USA in seeking to limit the Declaration to civil and political rights. While in spite of these objections ESC rights were established, they were accorded a secondary status in a hierarchy of rights. The authors argue convincingly that the splitting of the covenant had long-term detrimental consequences through the subsequent disconnect between human rights and global trade and security policies.

Because "the fragmentation of human rights was closely contested and historically contingent" (2008, p. 212), the authors argue that the irrelevance of human rights in global economic policy-making was not inevitable—it could have been otherwise. Possibly so— but I was surprised it was a discovery for them that "the modern human rights system was shaped far less by philosophical and legal theories than by the contingencies of historical, political and ideological circumstances" (2008, p. 242). Would one have expected anything else? My expectations appear to have been lower than those of Normand and Zaidi. I never imagined that a global governance regime based on human rights norms could be easily established. As the authors eventually conclude, this would have required a very substantial transformation of the existing power relations within and between states. Hopes rise only to get dashed. The post-cold war flurry of enthusiasm for human rights, including rights-based approaches to development, appears to have waned—as the authors point out, the WTO has far more teeth than human rights treaties—but in a history of the impact of UN ideas, it would be interesting to explore how, in the absence of international enforcement mechanisms, the discursive power of human rights has helped amplify the voices of those struggling for social justice.

Included among such voices, suggest the authors of the third volume under review, are many people who have worked for or been closely associated with the UN. Between 1999 and 2003 the three co-directors of the UNIHP, in association with Tatiana Carayannis, used oral history methods to collect the life histories of 79 such people. The book aims to capture the most interesting elements of the conversations with these individuals, the complete transcripts of which are available on a CD-ROM. Part One looks at their respondents' childhoods and career choices. Part Two presents their perspectives on the history of the UN from 1945 to the turn of the century. Part Three is a synthesis of the main points emerging from this history. Unlike the other two volumes under review, which the Project commissioned from politically positioned authors, the authors of this volume privilege the 79 voices rather than their own and thus, necessarily take a more neutral stance until the final chapter, in which they discuss the most pressing intellectual challenges for the UN.

Depending, of course, on who you talk with, you will get different perspectives and the authors manage to bring in opposing views—for example over the role of UNCTAD or the UN's Global Compact with business although we might have had more focused controversy if a group of respondents had been persuaded to meet together. The book also takes care to provide a warts and all picture of the UN. Thus the description of the early years in New York includes the deleterious impact of the cold war on the UN's work on human rights and the malignant power of McCarthyism, which Hammarskjold allowed to

terrorise US citizens working for the UN. Noeleen Heyzer also comments on how shocked she was in her early career in Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) which, she says, served as a dumping ground for second-rate officials member governments wanted to get rid of and which condoned child prostitution. Robert Cox comments ironically on how the USA had the greatest influence on the ILO in the late 1970s when it had withdrawn from membership "because the ILO was doing everything possible to bring them back and not doing anything the US might object to" (2005, p. 211). There are also many fascinating snippets. My favourite is Perez de Cuellar's remark that his Spanish ancestors in Peru were "constructive" colonizers—perhaps not how it might have seemed to those being colonised.

Organising an interesting flow of personal commentary on 55 years of history is challenging and there are occasional non sequiturs, particularly when the authors try to give equal space to some of the less mainstream voices they have included, such as anthropologist Lourdes Arizpe whose interesting observations about the significance of culture are more locally grounded. Clearly, who to choose was an issue. These voices are also a reflection of who becomes important in the UN (only a quarter are women). They may have been carefully chosen in terms of their geographical origins but a quick scan of their potted biographies reveals how many were educated in the same small number of elite universities in the UK and the USA. This may also be because the authors are particularly interested in what they call "the second UN" of semi-independent secretariats, outside experts and consultants "whose job descriptions include research, policy analysis and idea-mongering" (2005, p. 3). I was disappointed by the exclusion of UN staff— including national professional staff and consultants—who have spent most of their career working in field offices. Such people tend not to rise to the top of the hierarchy and this may be another reason why they are absent, the authors having decided to select only those in senior positions. Sensitive to such criticisms, the authors justify the exclusion of "doers" on the grounds that "their contributions are less frequently written down and accessible" (2005, p. 3). But as this is an *oral* history I would have thought there would have been even more reason to capture some of these voices. One of the recommendations in the final chapter concerns enriching analysis with field experiences, and thus it is a pity that the book lacks voices that could have described how some of the big UN ideas, such as "basic needs", were further developed and translated into practice in different local contexts.

Part of the challenge in deciding whose voices count may be in determining what we mean by "the UN". In her own volume, Jain comments on its diverse and scattered nature, one that "is expressed in regions, countries, agencies and funds" (2005, p. 6). Possibly with greater representation of voices from agencies with extensive field presence, ideas not included here might have been noticed. One that is obviously missing is "participation", an idea that FAO and UNICEF were actively engaged in developing by the mid-1970s. In 1975, UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) approved a resolution concerning popular participation in national development strategies (Cornwall & Brock, 2005). The authors argue—and I agree with them—that ideas and individuals matter in the shaping of history. But what gets recorded as history is influenced by the choices historians make about which individuals and ideas to notice. Hopefully, as the authors themselves wish, their volume will be the first and not the final word in building an institutional memory about the role of the UN in shaping ideas and social change.

In their overview of the UNIHP (Jolly *et al.*, 2005), the co-directors reflect on the remarkable vision of the early UN in terms of human rights and a decent standard of living

for all and on its subsequent importance in constructively dissenting against the dominant discourse of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Arguably, such constructive dissent is the most viable pathway for emancipatory social change for step-by-step progress. To think so certainly gives comfort to those of us who have engaged with the UN with such a purpose in mind. However, I regret that in the volumes under review the authors did not engage more wholeheartedly with the counter-hegemonic argument that UN institutions and ideas are helping sustain rather than change the *status quo*. It is an argument acknowledged elsewhere by Weiss & Carayannis (2001) but disappointingly not pursued by them in *UN Voices*. In his classic piece on Gramsci, Cox (one of the 79 voices) writes:

> Hegemony is like a pillow ... that sooner or later the would-be assailant finds it comfortable to rest upon. ... Only when representation in international institutions is firmly based upon an articulate social and political challenge ... could participation pose a real threat. The co-optation of outstanding individuals from the peripheries renders this less likely. (1983, p. 173).

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