

Foreword

KAREN FAULK'S *In the Wake of Neoliberalism* is a compelling argument for how necessary critical ethnographies of human rights have become in broader debates over the relationship between international law and national politics, the changing nature of sovereignty after the end of the Cold War, and the limits of cosmopolitan ethics within grounded struggles over legacies of atrocity and its aftermath. Her book shows the value in responding to these key problems of our time from the inside out, in terms of the lives, reflections, and commitments of people who find themselves—willingly or not—on the normative frontlines in what has become a destabilizing moment of ambiguity and historical paradox. The triumph of human rights as a language of political change and moral protest over the last twenty-five years is grounded in a globalized ideology of human fulfillment and cultural evolution that has shaped the contours of resistance and provided a discursive toolkit that has proven to be remarkably versatile across a wide range of cultural, political, and legal vernaculars. But at the same time, underlying political economic vulnerabilities and multi-scalar structures of inequality have resisted the final coming of what Mary Ann Glendon called “a world made new”—a world remade under the sign of radical human equality protected in both form and spirit by laws.

Faulk's book is a carefully wrought study of these currents of ambiguity as they have swirled in and around Argentina over several decades. During this time, the experience and history of Argentina have become an iconic part of the story of human rights, from the images of the intrepid Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo holding vigil and demanding justice for the crimes committed by the military junta against their sons and daughters, to the more recent high-profile role played by a former Argentine lawyer as the first Chief Prosecutor

of the International Criminal Court. Argentina has become one of the global touchstones for evaluating the promise and limitations of human rights—as a politico-legal mechanism for protection and redress, as a moral grammar with transcultural aspirations, and as a rallying cry for revolutionaries facing down the last authoritarian holdouts within what James Ferguson has called the “neoliberal world order.” Faulk parses these multiple dimensions of human rights and develops a theoretical framework that allows us to both appreciate and critically bracket the legacy of rights-claiming within contemporary Argentina.

Her book focuses on a key dynamic in this broader narrative of human rights in Argentina: the appearance of discursive and political fault lines when the logics of human rights were taken up beyond the political and social processes through which Argentine society struggled to come to terms with the Dirty War and its aftermath. Throughout the 1990s, as in other countries of Latin America, the Argentine political economy was restructured under the careful eye of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which sought a hemispheric “consensus” on a specific economic and political model as a precondition for loan-making and the formation of new regional economies. As Faulk shows us, it was during this consolidation of neoliberalism in Argentina that human rights underwent a consequential shift in both meaning and application. She argues that the role of human rights was transformed when the strategy of right-claiming was broadened beyond the process of holding high-ranking officials to account for crimes against humanity. After civilian rule had been firmly established, Argentines thoroughly infused by a culture of human rights looked beyond torture and disappearance to other symbols of transgression.

They found them in violations not against physical integrity such as those that had accompanied the dictatorship-era political repression, but in those against the nature of the neoliberal subject itself. If the neoliberal subject was meant to be an autonomous agent, accountable for actions under law, and equal in access to opportunities, then “corruption” and “impunity” are markers of a failure by the state to create the conditions in which neoliberal subjectivity-as-citizenship can adequately flourish. Faulk uses an ethnography of two organizations—Memoria Activa and Cooperativa BAUEN—to demonstrate how the struggle to hold the state accountable for its failures led to new understandings of human rights themselves, as activists eventually reframed the implications of corruption and impunity *beyond* the neoliberal subject to encompass a collective account of well-being. The “dialogical analytics” that Faulk develops to understand this

slippage toward an innovative human rights vernacular in Argentina reveals, as she puts it, the “mutually constitutive processes that link the language of rights, neoliberalist policies, and institutions of democracy, both in their philosophical premises and actual lived expression.”

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