Review forum

Vernacular rights cultures

Vernacular rights cultures: the politics of origins, human rights and gendered struggles for justice. By Sumi Madhok. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2022. 224pp. £75.00. ISBN 978 1 10883 262 5. Available as e-book.

Introduction

Vernacular rights cultures tells a different story of human rights. The book moves away from the dominant narrative of universal human rights, based on western history and epistemology, pointing readers towards 'vernacular rights cultures'. Sumi Madhok complicates the unidirectional account instead, narrating a subaltern story of rights that is foregrounded in 'struggles and contestations over rights' in the south Asian context. This attentiveness to the 'vernacular' refers to the ways marginalized groups articulate rights claims, and to the political imaginaries and subjectivities that their articulations engender.

In the first three chapters, Madhok critically engages with the multiple literatures on human rights and presents her conceptual framework. The author takes on board the robust and growing critique of the racialized basis underpinning the prevailing human rights law and discourse. Then, Madhok goes further and presents an alternative genealogy, embedded in the local notions of *haq*. According to the author, the word *haq* translates to 'right', but 'in the course of its travels, it has gathered complex meanings and iterations that inform political imaginaries, subjectivities and political cultures of rights and rights claim-making' (p. 1). This transregional term appears in multiple languages across the subcontinent, and the book conveys its historical roots and contemporary usage not only in south Asia, but also in the Middle East and North Africa. The fact that *haq* is transregional allows the author to traverse borders and trace power struggles over rights across states and institutions in India and Pakistan. This is particularly important in a postcolonial context of contestation over state borders and associated citizenship rights.

Empirically, Madhok sketches how subaltern groups, especially women, have mobilized *haq* to make rights claims. In (re)covering this story of *haq*, however, Madhok does not present a triumphalist account. Instead, she traces the complicated and often contradictory ways that *haq* is evoked, paying particular attention

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to how gender rights tend to fall outside *haq*. The book does not offer a simplistic turn to the 'local', telling instead a much more complicated story. Madhok successfully accounts for the realities of contemporary social struggles, often working at the intersection of international human rights frameworks and local appeals to justice. Methodologically, the book draws and advances the work of philosopher Ian Hacking on historical ontology (*Historical ontology*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), which Madhok couples with a critical feminist lens. The resulting feminist historical ontology allows the author to focus on how concepts emerge and how certain subaltern struggles produce political cultures and subjectivities in different locations.

While the first three chapters lay the conceptual and methodological groundwork, chapters four and five rely on the author's rich ethnographic work and her long-term engagement with the social movements in the subcontinent. The book tracks the deployment of *haq* ethnographically, in the context of struggles over gender and caste equality, employment rights and access to lands and food. Madhok starts with the right to food movement in Rajasthan, which includes mobilizations around citizenship rights, the right to information, employment rights, forest rights and Dalit rights. The chapters also explore how *sathins*, predominantly Dalit and rural women, rose to prominence as part of the Women's Development Programme in Rajasthan (WDP). Here, Madhok astutely illustrates the complications of the term *haq*: *sathins* encountered it as 'the language of entitlement and of rights that they [sathis] knew was attached to privileged upper caste subjects' (p. 132). Building on this, the author narrates the struggle to organize a vote of no confidence against a state development project by the Indigenous Adivasi villagers of Medi Panchavat. The book moves to track *haq* further north-west into Pakistan following the mobilizations of the Anjuman Mazarain (AMP—Tenants Association Punjab) in rural Punjab, demanding the restoration of ownership and sharecropping rights to the lands that the Pakistan military had taken over. In these detailed ethnographies, Madhok illustrates how gender, caste and indigeneity shape the intersection of violence and political imaginaries.

The various contributors to this review forum agree on the importance and urgency of Madhok's book and the challenge it presents to dominant narratives of human rights. They see the focus on *haq* as a productive space to decolonize human rights and to reflect on how political imaginaries and subjectivities are (re)produced through contestation. While emphasizing the radical potential of examining *haq*, they also caution against the co-optation or 'hollowing out' of vernacularized concepts. Ghazala Jamil, for example, warns against using the term 'vernacular' altogether, asking if it may position claims to *haq* in opposition to more 'classical' or 'standard' human rights, creating a binary that reinforces the distinction between western and non-western claims to rights. Despite its south Asian focus, the book's insights open multiple avenues for research around rights and in different global South contexts. What I find most inspiring about the book's approach is that it does not treat subaltern mobilizations as 'case-studies', but rather as key sites of knowledge production. Thus, the book brings ordinary

people to the forefront and makes epistemic space for their efforts to (re)make terminology through contestation.

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Overcoming state-centric rights

Vernacular rights cultures is an exciting and important contribution to debates on human rights, gender rights and vernacular approaches to both. Sumi Madhok, a truly interdisciplinary scholar, has written a timely challenge to the dominant literatures and frameworks for studying (gender) justice. Her work combines immersive ethnographic fieldwork with detailed theoretical and philosophical thinking—a rare and labour-intensive endeavour, which Madhok undertakes with great care for the research subject and the participants. Madhok tries to develop a global South episteme, asking different and original questions of both scholarship and politics throughout the book. Instead of questioning whether human rights are 'western' or 'originate' in the 'West', and whether they are 'universal' or 'culturally particularist', Madhok focuses on the stakes and struggles that animate rights movements in south Asia. Thus, her work not only challenges but also shifts the conversation with important implications for political philosophy. Additionally, the book makes a clearly original contribution to the global literature on human rights.

Madhok outlines a range of issues in different chapters—from land ownership to environmental degradation, private capital and food security—and underlines the participation of women in struggles to address such issues. The book demonstrates that these struggles for rights are born out of politically and historically specific contexts of dispossession and marginalization. According to Madhok, these context-specific or vernacular rights articulations have the power to hold nation-states accountable for their politics and policies of dispossession. In doing so, the book decolonizes global human rights literature and opens up the study of the contemporary politics of human rights around the globe in three specific ways. First, it disrupts the dominant 'politics of origins', informing the singular history of human rights as originating in the West. Madhok's critique of the 'politics of origins' illustrates how this standard narrative eclipses the struggles for rights and human rights in the global South and delegitimizes subaltern movements. Second, it provides empirical examples from India and Pakistan to demonstrate how this politics of origins appears in popular politics in the two countries, and how it is used to silence and describe feminist struggles as 'alien', 'foreign' and 'western'. This is something that the Black legal scholar Patricia J. Williams also argued for in her classic book entitled *The alchemy of race and rights* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991). Specifically, Madhok tracks the use of the Arabic/Urdu word *haq* to signify rights within subaltern mobilizations in India and Pakistan. Third, the book brings in a politics of location to develop a framework to study the politics of (human) rights in the global South. Madhok's politics of location persuasively pay attention to how concepts come into being: in partic-

ular sites; acquiring specific meanings; 'making up' particular subjects of rights; and producing new possibilities for politics and also for relating to oneself.

Overall, Madhok provides not only questions but also a methodology steeped in 'feminist historical ontology' to answer them. Take, for example, how *haq* is deployed in India and Pakistan: the term is largely referred to as belonging to the male vocabulary and thus gender equality typically falls outside its discursive and political scope. In the book, Madhok speculates whether there is something about the normative structure of the word *haq*, which only allows certain demands for rights to be envisioned and articulated or whether it is something about gender, which invites so much resistance.

According to Madhok, the use of *haq* to claim rights shows that the term has a moral authority extending beyond that of the state. This way, vernacular modes of politics can successfully mobilize the power/authority to overthrow or challenge the state, if it fails to deliver on peoples' rights. Theoretically and politically, this is an important intervention in the global conversation on human rights. With this book, Madhok joins the ranks of an emergent literature advanced by Partha Chatterjee, Nivedita Menon, Gurminder K. Bhambra, John Holmwood and Robbie Shilliam. The works of these scholars steer a careful path between essentialist framings of both dominant western epistemologies and the global South alternatives. In Madhok's case, the book develops new ways of seeing a complex, historically unequal world through subaltern struggles of women on the ground.

Scholars and activists working with concepts or developing strategies that challenge the mainstream understanding of human rights will undoubtedly benefit from reading this book. Reflecting on the book's wide range of insights, I wonder whether and how we might use this work to study power and dominance as the flip side of marginalization, dispossession and positionality. Can vernacularized concepts be mobilized to hollow out the radical potential that Madhok sees in the word *haq*? Future research can certainly explore this and build on the book's important insights.

Shirin M. Rai, SOAS University of London, UK

Shifting epistemes of rights cultures

Vernacular rights cultures opens up with a rather erudite review of the literature on the idea of rights, especially focusing on the evolution of human rights scholarship. Sumi Madhok explains how, as with other disciplines, the standard narrative espouses an invented history about the singular origins of global human rights. Essentially, the process involves a fair amount of myth-making, and here Madhok makes an astute observation: the universalist framing of human rights reduces all other rights cultures as 'culturally particularist' preferences. Thus, this framing seals and isolates south Asian cultural values from western human rights. The author convincingly shows that contemporary human rights frameworks are inherently tied to modern political inventions and western imaginaries. Nevertheless, Madhok remains aware of the legitimacy of global human rights: it is

the enthusiasm for international law among nation-states, alongside the lavishly adorned human rights discourse, that continues to catalyse social movements in 'most of the world'. At the same time, these movements attempt to go beyond internationally recognized rights to justify their actions and to help their causes resonate culturally with their audiences. As the need to decolonize political theory is felt more keenly, the book demonstrates that critiquing contentious histories of framings like human rights can strengthen and improve the conditions that these ideas govern in the contemporary world.

The book traces the deployment of *haq* in India and Pakistan's Punjab province. The first three chapters lay down the conceptional framework and subject-matter of the book. Madhok is concerned with the 'political imaginaries' that regional rights cultures deploy to justify their claims to *haq* (p. 25). The author identifies three justificatory premises that underpin the conceptions of *haq* explored in the subsequent empirical chapters: legal constitutionalism (drawing on ideas of citizenship); cosmological and historical roots (moving away from the dichotomy between individuals and the public good); and a gendered normative order (conceiving of rights as morally credible) (p. 27). In chapter four, the author turns to her fieldwork interactions in Rajasthan, north-west India, to demonstrate how people claim natural or cosmological roots for their rights, that they call *haq*. In the following chapter, Madhok did not need to travel across the national border from India to Pakistan to find the Islamic roots of the justification of *haq*. This is largely due to the regional history of carving national borders. Crucially, the deployment of *haq* in the so-called 'Hindi heartland' or even in the languages of non-Hindi-speaking states, such as Marathi, Gujarati, Bangala and Telugu, is also rooted in the Islamic influences of pre-colonial and colonial India. From its Islamic roots, *haq* includes a notion of undeniable truth and justice.

There is also conceptual danger with terming a culture as 'vernacular'. Often, this move works to define a particular culture as opposite to the 'classical', 'cosmopolitan' or 'standard' versions—hinting at the inferiority of the smaller size of territories or the shorter lengths of time during which said cultures held sway. 'Vernacular' is also a temporal–historical construction, rather than primordial or eternal. As Sheldon I. Pollock highlights, new vernaculars emerge replacing a range of old vernaculars (see 'Cosmopolitan and vernacular in history', *Public Culture* 12: 3, 2000). Madhok discusses very lucidly how the ascendancy of universalist claims of global human rights, over south Asian rights cultures, is not simply a story of western dominance, but one that includes other historical complexities. Madhok demonstrates that the notion of *haq* is not tied to any one political order and avoids a state-centric conception.

Universalist and cosmological claims are made in different rights epistemes, whether western or Asian. However, the force of these claims goes through ebbs and flows following historical and geopolitical trajectories of the cultures. However, the book neglects the process of transformation in the case of *haq* and elides over the complicated and shared history of the region. Once a Muslim cosmopolitanism, *haq* has been reduced to a vernacular in the work of colonial

historians. Madhok's cosmological meanings of '*haq* as rights' are rooted in the region's cultural encounters with Muslim intellectual traditions. Unfortunately, these diverse traditions have been subjected to selective amnesia, within the complex histories of Islam and Muslims in south Asia and the historical process of state formation.

The author reports an extremely interesting finding in her fieldwork: *haq* was hardly ever used to claim gender rights and equality (p. 151). In the context of India's caste patriarchy, women have no prior entitlements, although Indian feminist historians have tried to provide a justificatory framing for women to participate in the project of nationalist development. Here, the (re)writing of feminist history has largely focused on recovering women's agency in precolonial, especially ancient, India. It is therefore unsurprising that these efforts have been ineffective: those who benefit from an unequal and unjust social order are unwilling to support the state's intent to 'reform'. And as Madhok's fieldwork shows, even institutional corrective measures that are meant to ensure representation of women in local governance fail in terms of a deeper absorption of the logic of gender representation.

For academics trained in and speaking from the global South, the framing of *haq* is familiar. But the advocates of rights of refugees, minorities and the stateless within south Asia need to draw resources from different rights cultures to be persuasive and to be able to help materially. I hope this book will provide readers with a fresh way of thinking about rights cultures that goes beyond a universal framing and is more plural.

Ghazala Jamil, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India

On vernacularization

Sumi Madhok's *Vernacular rights cultures* is a beautiful and powerful book that speaks to how to do the work of decolonizing human rights. Madhok's book shifts the epistemic centre of human rights to account for the vernacular of *haq*, as practices of rights-claiming and world-making. Possibly the most appealing feature of the book is that rather than having a prescribed 'end', it is full of questions: What does it mean to decolonize human rights? How do scholars study vernacular rights cultures? How can we tell different stories of human rights? What does an attention to *haq* tell us about the forms of rights politics and subjectivities? And, my own favourite: how to not tell stories of 'different' human rights, where difference is enacted through categorizing difference as 'cultural', 'custom', 'local' or as 'case-studies' of global human rights talk? (p. 173). The book explores ways to refuse the politics of origins that infuse rights with the coloniality of power (p. 34). Empirically, Madhok traces 'counter-development' efforts in India and Pakistan, looking at struggles for rights to food, land and livelihood. I will highlight three themes, and three questions that these have prompted.

First, the book's emphasis on 'how to think in terms of vernacular rights cultures', rather than vernacularization, is integral to Madhok's project. Vernacu-

larization reinforces the work of doing rights on others and for those others to have the work of rights done on them. This dynamic closes the possibility of rights being written from different and other epistemic sites. Thinking in terms of vernacular rights cultures means the starting-point is the historical and political site of the actual struggle happening in different locations in 'most of the world'. This methodological positioning is a real challenge and lesson in an age of 'decolonizing' everything, where the verb becomes a fad, a tick-box exercise or just too comfortable a term. In the book, Madhok draws on feminist historical ontology in order to supplement the western philosophical scaffolding that typically holds up our intellectual positions. In a refreshing and instructive move, she supplements Foucault's tools of governmentality and counter-conduct with a feminist historical ontology that sees Dalit and Advasi women, and thereby 're-tools' rights struggles as struggles for justice. Second, the book is about stories. I thought of Donna Haraway's 'it matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories', which Madhok alludes to (*Staying with the trouble*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016). It is striking that the two empirical chapters are not referred to as 'case-studies'; they are written with an 'ethical vigilance' and are the live struggles of Bhanwari Devi, the *sathins* in rural parts of India and the Anjuman Mazarain of rural Punjab (pp. 130 and 183). Third and last, the book positions itself within a politics of human rights. The emphasis is on the kind of subject being produced and on the practices of rights-claiming and world-making; that is, of struggles that employ the vernacular of *haq*.

My three questions are related to the terms obligation, cosmology and counter-conduct. First, I would question the place of obligation within Madhok's critique and experience. Does *haq*, as entitlement for the debilitated subject of the state, need supplementing with obligation? Or what about a notion like *farz* or *hukam*, which I use as a political–spiritual (as opposed to only a religious) notion? Prevalent in Sikhi, *hukam* embodies an obligation towards the 'stranger'and so it bridges a gap between legal rights and relational rights. It responds to the failed obligation of legal rights, and it creates new rights based in relational bonds and in a cosmological sense of mutual flourishing. But the book does not use obligation at all: so the question is, what role might it play? Second, speaking of the cosmological, the chapter on *haq* as a cosmological idea and Islamic ideal is very intriguing. Does *haq* need to be so firmly tied to rights? Or might it be, to take Madhok's Islamic reading of '*haq* as right conduct', a way of life? Finally, on counter-conduct and Madhok's term 'counter-development', I was left wondering about the practices of refusal that this engenders and how translatable these might be to other postcolonial spaces of abandonment. Counter-conduct is not, as Madhok says, a reversal of power but a refusal of it. Interestingly, this refusal does not necessarily transform anything; the practices of refusal performed by the *sathins* did not change anything in terms of state practices of neglect and laws. However, they did produce a gendered, intersectional subjectivity that has a story to tell. Is counter-conduct the right frame for world-making? Or is resistance more appropriate?

On a personal level, as a brown woman of Sikh heritage and as a legal academic, the book is very moving in how it makes a call to intersect these identities when doing a critique of rights. There is so much I have learned from this book, most importantly how to tell a story of rights differently, by unmuting the sound of subaltern struggles.

Bal Sokhi-Bulley, University of Sussex, UK

'Vernacular rights culture' in a small font?

Professor Sumi Madhok offers us an abundance of provocative insights into legal pluralism through the categories of the vernacular: particular conceptions of justice that do not necessarily coincide with modern law, nor with its administration of justice. Madhok shows, with detail and deftness, that all human rights discourse must begin with dismantling the existing narrative monopolies. In a way, telling one's stories, or setting up an alternative narrative, can be seen as a core human right. It is also an emancipatory enterprise that disturbs the authority of the canon and destabilizes the privileged voice of the authorship. However, narrative pluralism can often mask the repressive intent and dominating influence of the powerful. Indeed, pluralism may produce human rights romanticism and evangelism (see Upendra Baxi's *The future of human rights*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Like so many of us, Madhok remains understandably anxious about the term 'culture' ever since Raymond Williams outlined about a thousand meanings and convincingly showed that none are sufficiently satisfactory or superior to the others (see *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Nonetheless, the author rehabilitates the term in a twofold move, showing how 'culture' serves both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses, and how vernacular justice goes beyond the hegemonic normative infrastructures (or cultural software). Madhok explores the role of countercultures in shaping the social meanings of *haq*, which can in turn have an impact on the state's governance and legal powers. Thus, *haq* is not simply a right: it encodes the powers of co-governance, which succeed even in authoritarian legal regimes, as the author shows with her ethnographic work in Pakistan. To decolonize human rights, Madhok draws our attention to the important work of 'feminist historical ontology' and the need to overcome the Eurocentric notion that privileges the West as the 'place of origin' of all human rights. In doing so, Madhok deploys the notion of vernacular rights cultures to demonstrate the importance of the local, and especially of women, solidarity amidst suffering to transforming human rights. In other words, Madhok displaces the centrality of the nation-state and histories of sovereignty in global human rights discourses, focusing instead on the valiant struggle taking place in 'most of the world' that shape new subjectivities of human rights.

Madhok shows how *haq* can take us across cultural boundaries and beyond patriarchies, illustrating its role as more than a method of communication: in the book, *haq* becomes a mechanism of power. Throughout, Madhok reminds us that

an excessively legalistic rendering of *haq* detracts attention from the human experience and the challenge that social movements face in articulating their struggles for rights. First, the author turns to Rajasthan to explore the mobilizations of a group of women workers, known as *sathins*, in the context of the state's Women's Development Programme. Second, Madhok documents Napi Bai's bravery and her struggle to win an electoral race for a *sarpanch* 'general seat', a position typically held by men. Third and last, she ventures into north-west Pakistan to look at the struggle for land and the Anjuman Mazarain (AMP—Tenants Association Punjab) who demand the 'restoration of their ownership and sharecropping rights' (p. 27). Crucially, it was in relation to the Mazarain's right to food movement that the Pakistan military acknowledged, for the first time, that the land in question belonged to India's East Punjab state before Pakistan incorporated it in 1966.

At various points, the book invokes Hannah Arendt's stunning phrase 'the right to have rights' to underscore this point (pp. 64–5). The author could have complemented this analysis with the work of radical democratic theorist Jacques Rancière, who speaks of human rights that we do not have, rather than focusing on the ones we can already count on. This emphasizes the struggle for the right to be and to remain human, to which Madhok does allude in the detailed narrative of the three struggles for *haq* mentioned above. This rich narrative must be read carefully and with an ethics of care and justice. Thinking about the centrality of 'vernaculars' should not occlude the fact that they can also offer a notorious site of hegemony, often deeply shaped by the discourses of the empowered: 'those who control, design, and create the public space' (see Kent A. Ono and John M. Sloop, 'The critique of vernacular discourse', *Communication Monographs* 62: 1, 1995). Although vernacular cultures can also problematize certain aspects of emancipation, Madhok under-explores this dark side of vernacular justice, of which she is certainly aware.

Madhok's book reminds readers that the politics of human rights have not disappeared from the map with the advent of neo-liberalism. In 'most of the world', including south Asia, the focus is not on enacting or translating global human rights, but rather on a political 'struggle for justice that is materially, intersectionally, geopolitically located, and arises from historically specific encounters with rights and human rights' (p. 169). May I say 'Amen'. And may I reiterate Jean-Luc Nancy's commitment to context-specific worlding: 'to create the world means: immediately, without delay, reopen each possible struggle … for what must form the contrary of global' (*The creation of the world or globalization*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007).

Upendra Baxi, University of Warwick, UK

Author's response

I am honoured and grateful for the generous and thoughtful engagements with the book. I am most grateful to Rafeef Ziadah for introducing the forum. In different ways, the contributors raise four separate, yet interconnected questions. These fall under the following themes: methodological nationalism; global epistemic

justice; the imperative of conceptual work; and the existence of rights politics in 'most of the world'.

Vernacular rights cultures signify an epistemic position. Crucially, they signal the lack of epistemic power of rights politics in most of the world, which is kept in place by the lack of global epistemic injustice. The absence of global epistemic justice locks global human rights scholarship into an originary impasse; and thereby, into producing 'critique upon critique' of global human rights without a concomitant attentiveness to the stakes and struggles of rights politics in most of the world. In this context, a key requisite of global epistemic justice is for rights politics in most of the world to appear as an epistemic presence and to matter epistemically. But how are we to do this work of foregrounding the epistemic presence of rights politics in most of the world so that these do not appear as 'cultural', 'custom', 'local' or as 'case-studies' and as always in translation? But how can this be achieved? Quite simply, in order to achieve this, we need more conceptual accounts of this rights politics, which are situated and entangled within particular histories and politics of world-making. These accounts must shed light on the specific critical vocabularies of rights in most of the world. Scholars must also be attentive to how these rights generate accompanying claims, political imaginaries, justificatory premises and forms of subjectification.

In the book, I trace the epistemic presence of the Urdu/Arabic word *haq* within subaltern social movements in India and Pakistan. The word *haq* appears as the principal word for 'having a right' across two continents and exists within eight present-day languages. Ghazala Jamil notes incisively that the Islamic idea of *haq* as 'right conduct' is not only to be found in Pakistan, but extends across the subcontinent. This important observation has often been obscured by the wilful erasure of the Islamic influence on south Asian intellectual traditions, and especially that of south Asian Muslim cosmopolitanisms and the complex histories of Islam and of state formation in south Asia.

The world-making potential of *haq* to (re)shape rights is hardly limited to Hannah Arendt's 'the right to have rights' or the 'umbilical link' between citizenship and rights. The subaltern mobilizations for *haq* that I have been tracking reveal the expansive conceptual framework of *haq*, which exceeds the juridical order of the nation-state. Upendra Baxi's work has inspired me over the years, and I fully agree with him that it is not Arendt's framework of methodological nationalism and formal citizenship that captures the rights politics in most of the world. Rather, the book draws on Jacques Rancière's imperative to produce conceptual accounts of collective action that go beyond the binaries of democracy/anti-democracy and justice/injustice to conceptually capture rights politics in most of the world.

But does *haq*'s expansive framework go beyond legal rights? As Bal Sokhi-Bulley asks, does it contain relational ideas of obligation towards the 'stranger'? Sokhi-Bulley's writing on the Sikhi concept of *hukam* is fascinating and one from which I am looking to learn. *Haq* is not limited to the legal positive order of the state, and its justificatory premises include a strong sense of obligation. My own

preference is also to pair rights to obligations, rather than only to duties, not least because the latter has been used historically and in contemporary times to exclude peoples from rights. Both Shirin Rai and Baxi caution against the danger of the powerful appropriating the vernacular. This is a serious challenge, evident in the frequent deployment of the originary calls to 'authenticity', 'tradition' or 'culture' in the 'discourses of the empowered' of rights, and also in the recent appropriation of the decolonial by the so-called 'Hindu Right' in India. This is precisely why a careful epistemic accounting of the specific politics and intellectual genealogies that inform the conceptual production of rights in different parts of the globe, including within social movements, is so crucial.

The rights politics of *haq* shows neither a yearning for ossified cultures and exoticized concepts nor an abstract yearning for a return to a mythical past. Rather, those who articulate their rights as *haq* within subaltern struggles for freedom and justice are concerned with overturning structural injustice, coloniality and dispossession. Significantly, an epistemic accounting of the rights politics in most of the world opens the door to new imaginaries of rights, citizenship and justice. In doing so, these accounts of vernacular rights cultures foreground the urgent need for global epistemic justice.

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