

Book Review: Justice Globalism: Ideology, Crises, Policy

by Blog Admin

May 25, 2013

*Drawing on dozens of interviews and rich textual analyses involving nearly fifty global justice organizations linked to the World Social Forum, the authors of this book present a compelling case that the global justice movement has fashioned a new political ideology with global reach: 'justice globalism'. Far from being incoherent, justice globalism possesses a rich and nuanced set of core concepts and powerful ideological claims. The book will be of interest to activists and scholars alike, writes **Nele Kortendiek**.*



Justice Globalism: Ideology, Crises, Policy. Manfred B. Steger, James Goodman and Erin K. Wilson. Sage. December 2012.

Find this book:

Global social justice is one of the hottest issues in International Political Theory (IPT). It figures prominently among normative-theoretical questions on international relations and global governance. Since the publishing of seminal books by Charles Beitz (*Political Theory and International Relations*, 1979) and Thomas Pogge (*World Poverty and Human Rights*, 2002) much has been written on what constitutes global justice, its scope, its goods and the principles according to which global redistribution should proceed. Surprisingly though, only few scholars turned to the empirical dimension of global distributive justice. The book *Justice Globalism* by [Manfred B. Steger](#), James Goodman and Erik K. Wilson addresses this gap and presents the findings of a thorough study on the ideological claims and policy proposals of the transnational justice movement. It therefore is a very valuable contribution to the debate on global social justice and attempts to take the discussion out of the ivory tower, engaging both academics and activists.

The authors' research objectives are very clearly formulated. In a first step, the authors intend to single out the core ideology of the global justice movement (GJM). What animates this guiding research question is that the GJM frequently has been characterised as 'anti-globalisation' movement in the public debate. The authors, on the contrary, presume that the GJM does not solely take up a negative or dismissive stance but advances a coherent political ideology of its own which potentially constitutes a cogent alternative to the dominant narratives of market globalism. In chapters two and three, building on Michael Freeden's concept of ideology, Steger et al. consequently map the core concepts of the GJM and analyse how these turn into coherent ideological claims. To do so, they apply a morphological discourse analysis to the central texts and statements of 45 out of the 150 organisations affiliated with the World Social Forum (WSF) as well as to the transcriptions of 24 semi-structured interviews they conducted with members of these organisations. The result of this textual analysis is a list of seven key values: transformative change, participatory democracy, equality of access to resources and opportunities, social justice, universal rights, global solidarity and sustainability. The coherent and unique ideological structure that emerges from these seven central norms and the ensuing five ideological claims is what the authors term 'justice globalism'.

In the second part of the book, the authors shift towards the political, practical dimension of the GJM. In chapter 4 they scrutinise the process of how the core concepts of justice globalism are turned into particular policy proposals. Three different strategies are identified here: reform, autonomy and transformation. The underlying assumption of this step is that for justice globalism to be a successful contender to neoliberal market globalism, it has to be able to produce potent policy alternatives.

Chapters five, six and seven examine in more detail this capability to respond to the urging political challenges of the global age. The authors briefly describe the three major global political crises of our time and depict how the GJM approaches them. In chapter six for instance, they discuss the global food crisis and present the solutions the GJM finds to address it. They note that GJM organisations have articulated three distinct food policy proposals: “i) more effective reregulation of food markets to secure ‘food rights’; ii) models of delinking (and relinking) national food production from global markets in order to achieve ‘food security’; and iii) the transformation of the dominant neoliberal paradigm in the direction of needs-based models of ‘food security’” (p. 105). At the end of the chapters on the current political challenges, they assess and compare the different types of policy alternatives in the three fields and come to the conclusion that they converge in the underlying ideological claims of justice globalism, which makes it a very sound and well integrated political ideology.

The book hence follows a very clear threefold structure: First, the normative claims of the GJM are assessed in terms of its coherence and distinctiveness. Second, the ways of their translation into concrete policies are examined. Third, the authors analyse how they are applied to three different global crises and which particular policy proposals result. This clear organisation of the book is one of its particular strengths. It offers a very stringent depiction of what constitutes the GJM and how its principles and ideas turn into political action.

Further, it is written in a very comprehensible manner, without presupposing a lot of specific knowledge. The authors avoid the rather technical, philosophical tone of normative-theoretical approaches to global justice and include many direct quotes from the interviews they conducted, which makes it an interesting and varied read. Short conclusions at the end of each chapter and visual illustrations of their findings support the very clear and straightforward presentation of their research and enhance its readability, in particular for students and readers from a non-academic environment.

Yet, the book exhibits a slight political bias. It is obvious that the authors support the normative claims of justice globalism. However, since they are making this underlying position explicit right at the beginning of the book, the political character is not to the detriment of the high quality of the book, in particular since the political objectives of the study do not undermine its methodological rigour.

In sum, the book gives an excellent overview of the values, motives and political strategies of the global justice movement. It is a very timely book and a particularly valuable contribution to the academic debate on global justice as it takes it one step further by including the actual, political work on justice beyond the state into academic research on the topic. It will therefore be of interest to activists and scholars alike and an interesting read to graduate students interested in globalisation studies, transnational social movements and IPT.

Nele Kortendiek recently completed a Masters degree in International Relations Theory at the London School of Economics. Her current research interests are international political theory, critical theory, global justice and democracy and the constitutionalisation of international law. [Read more reviews by Nele.](#)