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Moral Victories: How Activists Provoke Multilateral Action, by Susan Burgerman, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001, 208 pp., \$29.95 paper.

This book combines four analytical threads: an account of the development of a transnational human rights regime; a detailed discussion of human rights intervention in El Salvador and Guatemala (with comparative references to Cambodia, Argentina, and briefly, Colombia); an analysis of the role of civil society in the form of transnational networks of human rights activists in making human rights intervention possible and successful; and a set of propositions about what makes human rights missions succeed or fail. These four elements are knit together by compelling histories of the meaning of human rights in international law and politics, and of how actions to promote and protect human rights evolved from non-binding statements of principle to “semi confidential investigatory and reporting system(s)” and most recently, to the development of “enforcement capabilities through a new generation of multilateral on-site verification and institution building missions” (p. 124).

The concept of a transnational human rights regime comprises both laws and statements of principle with pacts and agreements and institutions that manage and promote them. In this way, the author retains an indispensable link to the moral basis of human rights advocacy, while linking such advocacy in systematic ways to the constraints and possibilities of the post-World War II international system. Her working definition of human rights centers on “political and civil rights,” often referred to as “first generation” or “priority rights.” These include (most notably) defense of the physical integrity of the person, freedom of association and expression, free elections, and so forth, and do not typically encompass claims to cultural or economic rights. Burgerman details the development of human rights institutions, including offices linked to the United Nations and the U.S. government, but gives particular emphasis to the emergence and consolidation of non-governmental groups and networks. Effective intervention, she argues throughout, is made much more likely by the presence of organized local activists with links to transnational informational and lobbying networks. Such groups and networks, with important ties to the Catholic Church, have played a central role in Latin America over the last two decades.

The author’s account of El Salvador and Guatemala is presented in two stages. Part 1 (“The Mobilization of Shame”) outlines the history of internal warfare and repression through the late 1980s or early 1990s; characterizes the opposing sides; and discusses emerging human rights activism and early links with transnational human rights activism. Part 2 (“Multilateral Response in the 1990s”) carries the analysis forward to the mid-1990s, with a specific focus on the construction and activities of international human rights interventions in each case (ONUSAL in El Salvador and MINUGUA in Guatemala). Burgerman provides a reasonably complete account of how violence evolved in each country, and locates the key actors (military, guerrillas, U.S. Congress, human rights networks). The human rights situation in Guatemala, like the extent of the war, was much less widely publicized, and activists within the country had fewer links to transnational networks.

Human rights missions were put in place in both countries, in connection with negotiations for a cease-fire. Getting human rights on the peacemaking agenda was a major innovation. It committed the United Nations to train and deploy human rights monitors, and incorporated a specific sequence of institutional and

policy reforms into the peace accords. These included notoriously difficult issues such as verification, reform of the judicial system, and demilitarization of the police. ONUSAL (United Nations Observer Mission in Salvador) was actually deployed before the cease-fire, a risky proposition for the monitors. Despite some difficulties in implementation, for Burgerman, “the international human rights regime turned a corner with El Salvador. It represents one of a handful of UN peace operations that had a fully developed human rights component. El Salvador set important precedents for the United Nations. It was the first (and to date the least problematic) example of UN mediation of an internal conflict, and it was the first example of an integrated peacekeeping operation centered on a human rights division” (pp. 98–99).

Guatemala was more problematic, in no small measure because, in contrast to the armed stalemate of El Salvador, the Guatemalan military were clearly victorious. Progress to a settlement came in part from that sense of victory, and from a belief within the military and political elite that economic recovery and development required a settlement acceptable to key international actors. “Sanctioning states and international organizations,” the author argues, “were motivated by moral incentives, and the violator states were largely motivated by such intangibles as concern for international legitimacy and prestige” (p. 122). Transnational activist networks were involved in the process from the beginning, building alliances with local groups and ensuring that human rights would be prominent in the agenda of settlement. Burgerman writes, “After more than a decade of transnational mobilization, the topic of human rights was so fundamental to the Guatemalan peace process that it was placed first on the original eleven topic negotiating agenda” (p. 122). The UN mission was backed by a mandate signed by both sides, and built conditions for limited but significant changes in important areas, such as refugees and the displaced population, indigenous rights, economic and social policy, and civilian control of the military.

The conclusion (“How Do Human Rights Institutions Matter?”) begins with brief comparative references to Cambodia, Argentina, and Colombia. The author then returns to the evolution of the human-rights agenda, from moral principles and hortatory statements to institutions with some, if not always very sharp, teeth. For, of those at ground level, the evolution is from a focus (often desperate) on the immediate task of saving lives and rescuing (or at least recognizing) victims to creating institutions and norms to prevent the massive abuses of the past from returning. To be sure, one does not replace the other; the need to save lives and to rescue and recognize victims and families is permanent. The difference is that violations are harder to hide now, and victims and activists have more allies, resources, and ways to put their case on a larger agenda. Burgerman reviews cases of success and failure to come up with a list of “keys to success” for future missions. The list is long and detailed, but a few points stand out as essential: adequate physical protection for mission staff, monitors, and human rights activists, and citizens (this requires disarming paramilitary groups, demilitarizing the police, and curbing the army—no easy tasks!); realistic and highly specific reform targets and implementation plans, with accompanying incentives and sanctions; and most important, continued mobilization and involvement of the transnational network of human rights activists. In concert with the moral entrepreneurs of each country, they keep the whole process alive and on track.

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