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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Kate Nash. *The Cultural Politics of Human Rights: Comparing the US and UK*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. xiii + 209 pp. $90.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-85352-1; $33.99 (paper), ISBN 978-0-521-61867-0.

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Published on H-Human-Rights (October, 2009)
Commissioned by Rebecca K. Root

Bringing Culture to Bear on the Study of Human Rights

Human rights scholarship often fails to thoroughly interrogate culture's role in human rights debates. Kate Nash's *The Cultural Politics of Human Rights* significantly contributes toward remedying this gap. Her thoughtful, sophisticated, and necessary intervention interrogates the complex ways in which competing human rights discourses are produced, circulated, and contested; their intersections with concepts of nation and citizenship; and their impact on the pursuit of domestic and international human rights.

Nash's intervention is evident in her assertion "that human rights are not simply administered through state procedures, as if they always already existed as clear and distinct aims.... Human rights are defined and redefined as policies are created and administered, legal claims dealt with and so on–both inside and outside state procedures" (pp. 8-9). She also identifies obstacles to achieving human rights, noting that while such rights transcend citizenship, citizenship remains a fundamental category and that the transnational imperative of human rights belies the reality that "it is only through states that human rights can be realised" (p. 2). Nash thus specifies that the "cosmopolitan state," in which policies are answerable internationally, "is a necessary condition of the full realization of human rights" (p. 11). Nash usefully complicates this assertion, however, arguing that cosmopolitan states are themselves produced by pursuing human rights. Her analysis thus relies on the notion of "intermestic human rights" that "are both international and domestic at the same time" (p. 14). Comparing the United States and the United Kingdom seems appropriate, for despite their many similarities, "the UK is unambiguously situated within the European system of human rights," while "US exceptionalism with regard to human rights is well established" (pp. 22-23). These differences facilitate Nash's investigation of the potential for truly cosmopolitan states to emerge.

Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the field guides Nash's analysis. She outlines the contours of and intersections among "the juridical, the governmental, the activist, and the mediated public" subfields, and introduces "justifications," a theoretical approach that examines how stakeholders establish the validity of their approach to human rights, before thoroughly describing her process of constructing and analyzing each subfield's archive (pp. 32, 59). These chapters certainly provide a useful foundation. However, they constitute a full third of the book; Nash might have introduced this material more briefly and then expanded on it with her case studies.

Nash first examines questions of state sovereignty and exemption from human rights agreements in debates over detaining suspected terrorists. In both countries, discourses of "national pride" shaped arguments for and against suspending detainees' rights (p. 75). Nash illustrates that in each country arguments that human rights laws hampered the state's potential to protect citizens ultimately overwhelmed arguments that human rights exemplified national values. Court decisions, however, demonstrate a crucial distinction between the nations. U.S. court decisions relied almost entirely on national law (because, Nash illustrates, international law means little in the United States) and ultimately achieved little. In contrast, British courts limited executive power in decisions that "referred to ... international human rights law" (p. 95). In making this comparison, Nash effectively illustrates both the problematic that nationalism poses and the potential that cosmopolitanism holds for contesting rights violations.

Nash next examines debates over a state's responsibility to address human rights violations occurring abroad by analyzing efforts to try Augusto Pinochet in Europe and to use the Alien Tort Claims Act to try Unocal in U.S. courts for violations in Burma. Three models of citizenship emerged in response to this debate. Activists

and media accounts acted "as if a community of global citizens already existed," presuming obligations under "cosmopolitan law" that "embodies universal moral principles … applicable and enforceable in national and international courts" on the part of governments and the individual in an effort "to imagine [that community] into being" (p. 114). Her discussion of activist and media invocation of the classification "Enemy of all Mankind," typically "used rhetorically to support legal arguments for universal jurisdiction" to encourage action in each case, is a thoughtful and effective explication of such claims (p. 111).

However, opponents argued that this vision threatened national autonomy, and Nash charts the emergence of a discourse of "(inter) national citizenship" that establishes national interest as a precondition for pursuing rights abroad (p. 127). Between these extremes, Nash locates "Cosmopolitan National Citizenship," which acknowledges the nation's centrality while insisting that it support global human rights (p. 127). Nash notes that this discourse risks promoting imperialism but contends that it can nonetheless promote human rights and, eventually, global citizenship if "global citizenship is … seen as emerging from within [states]"; borrowing a term from Fuyuki Kurasawa, she calls this "'cosmopolitanism from below"' (pp. 134-135). Nash effectively demonstrates how the problem of nationalism might be addressed while still acknowledging that "cosmopolitan national citizenship" is an imperfect solution, but the decision to analyze *Unocal*, "because it was roughly contemporaneous with the Pinochet case," warrants more explanation, especially because she notes that "there was not much discussion of the *Unocal* case at all in the US media" and refers to the series of cases as "actually quite marginal events in US political life" (pp. 111, 123). It would be instructive to learn whether the discourse surrounding *Unocal* is representative of other cases brought under Alien Tort Claims Act, which Nash asserts "has become hugely significant in the last twenty-five years" (p. 111).

Nash next examines U.S. and U.K. activism surrounding world poverty and hunger. She argues that global human rights requires the creation of "'thicker' solidarity," which denotes "the sense that we belong together in a 'community of fate,"' and examines whether it emerged through this activism (p. 138). Nash notes that each campaign sought to create a global community by, for example, selling wristbands and holding simulcast concerts and speeches, but she astutely notes that such activities risk "degenerating into an emotionally indulgent admiration of one's own sensitivity, sincerity, and strength of will" (p. 153). Once again, Nash compellingly demonstrates that media coverage, activism, and political rhetoric produced "cosmopolitan nationalism," yet she discerns "a sense of collective responsibility that empowers and validates 'us'; it is up to 'us' to do something for 'them.'… 'We' take pride in our state and our nation because it is exercising moral leadership" rather than "long term reflection and analysis of how … some benefit more than others" (pp. 154-155). This chapter is at once Nash's most nuanced and most clearly argued, and it effectively illuminates how "cosmopolitan nationalism's" continued privileging of the nation inhibits challenges to structural inequality and the promotion of global citizenship.

Nash concludes by calling for a "cosmopolitan ethical framework" that "limit[s] the contestation of human rights to those meanings which abolish the … distinctions between citizens and non-citizens," but she ultimately concedes that this vision "will be extremely difficult to realize in practice" (pp. 183, 189). This conclusion is grim, but following Nash's thorough, insightful analysis, it is also logical.

Nash insightfully illuminates how competing human rights discourses emerge and what their political stakes are. Nonetheless, a few concerns deserve mention. This complex and densely written book is appropriate for advanced students already somewhat familiar with human rights scholarship. This is partly because Nash occasionally presumes her reader's familiarity with topics. She asserts, for example, that "international human rights agreements are comprehensive" without fully reviewing their content (p. 16). Likewise, readers who are not equally familiar with U.S. and U.K. legal systems would benefit from more background on each and on the cases she discusses. Though not necessarily faults, such instances do limit the text's accessibility. Moreover, Nash could have extended her analysis in some places. She writes broadly of human rights activism, and some discussion of the conflicting agendas and interests within the activist subfield would have complemented her argument. Nash also limits her definition of "media" to newspapers. Though she explains this choice and it serves her analysis, surely film, television, literature, and other forms of popular culture also inform the cultural politics of human rights, and acknowledging them would have augmented her argument.

Despite these minor critiques, Nash's thoughtful, complex book makes an important intervention that illuminates complex issues and adds an important consideration to the study of human rights. Perhaps more important, it encourages further investigations of culture's role in shaping human rights discourse.

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Citation: David Kieran. Review of Nash, Kate, *The Cultural Politics of Human Rights: Comparing the US and UK*. H-Human-Rights, H-Net Reviews. October, 2009.
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