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# Introduction

## *Setting the Stage for Conversations on Justice*

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*Conversations on Justice from National, International, and Global Perspectives* focuses on issues of justice, including political, economic, social, cultural, and legal justice, from the national, international, and global perspectives. At the outset, the title of this book requires three points of clarification. First, bringing together "national," "international," and "global" perspectives is meant to refer to the fact that, today, matters of justice are not by and large self-contained and as such they cannot be addressed only at the national level. Rather, they are to some extent part of interactions that are taking place between the three levels. Second, referring to justice from an "international" perspective alludes to the interstate relations at work in the international system. In this context, the nation-state more than the individual is the primary right-holder, and international justice amounts to first and foremost the moral assessment of interactions among states. Third, referring to justice from a "global" perspective alludes to the way in which in recent years scholars – particularly in philosophy and global political theory – have come to address questions of justice by making the individual the primary right-holder (cosmopolitanism).[1]

This book is the product of a multiyear project that began when I was still working for the United Nations and, more precisely, for the United Nations University. It continued after I became a Professor of Law and Global Affairs at Rutgers School of Law, Rutgers University. This brief introduction addresses five types of issues: the unusual format of the book; the rationale for the book; the methodology used to conceive and build the book; the biographical sketches of the contributors; and the main themes and the organization of the *Conversations*.

[1] For a case study analysis of the convergences and divergences as well as hierarchies that can exist among these three levels as applied to matters of justice, see for instance Jean-Marc Coicaud, *Beyond the National Interest: The Future of UN Peacekeeping and Multilateralism in an Era of U.S. Primacy* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007).

## I THE UNUSUAL FORMAT OF THE BOOK

The format of the book is rather unusual, especially from an academic standpoint, in at least three ways. To begin with, usually when a book brings together a group of contributors around a topic, it tends to do so within the framework of an academic discipline. This book instead assembles contributors from a variety of fields, from philosophy to political science, law, international relations, sociology, and economics. Second, most books mobilizing a group of academics do so in the context of scholarly chapters. Again, this book deviates from a standard approach as it is a collection of conversations or dialogues between myself and various other scholars. Third, from the start a key concept of this book was to ensure that the issues it covers would be accessible to a large audience. In that respect, the goal was to introduce important authors and their views on justice to a broad readership within academia and beyond.

## II THE RATIONALE FOR THE BOOK

A multifold rationale prompted the unusual format of the book. Six reasons in particular led me to believe that there was intellectual and practical value in investing time and effort in this enterprise. These reasons concern (a) the context in which the book project emerged and developed; (b) the importance of targeting an interested but not necessarily specialized audience, and the choice of the conversation format that followed in order to achieve this objective; (c) the need to bring in one venue the various national conversations taking place on the interface between the national, international, and global dimensions; (d) the value of fostering an interdisciplinary approach; (e) contributing to improvement of the academic curriculum on issues of global relevance; and (f) helping the next generation to focus on new research and intellectual perspectives.

### *II.a The Context for the Emergence and Development of the Project*

The project started when I was still directing the United Nations University Office at United Nations Headquarters, in New York.[2] At that time, there were compelling reasons to reflect upon questions of justice and the connections

[2] The United Nations University (UNU), headquartered in Tokyo, Japan (where I also served for a few years in the late 1990s and early 2000s), with thematic research centers around the world, is a think tank for the United Nations. It focuses on issues of global security, development, and the environment. Interestingly, the United Nations University is one of the very few United

between the national, international, and global levels that shape them – reasons that since then have continued to be pressing and, at times, grown even more urgent. Five are worth brief mention.

First, there is the economic context. In the early 2010s, the 2008 financial crisis was still a major topic of public discourse. That was all the more the case considering that its devastating repercussions extended well beyond the financial sector and affected the daily lives of people in many countries, both developed and developing. Today millions are still suffering the aftermath of the crisis and it is far from certain that all of the problems that led to the crisis in the first place have been resolved. As a matter of fact, not only are major sources of the financial crisis still largely unaddressed (such as the relatively light regulation of derivatives trading) but we are witnessing efforts to roll back those protections that were instituted in the Obama era. Moreover, if a few years ago the gap between rich and poor had started to emerge as a serious concern, recently it has become a central issue among the public at large.[3] The rise of populism, in part a product of the growing disparity between rich and poor, and itself part of the side effect of globalization with its winners and losers, shows that the problem is not only economic and social, but also political, and as such undermines the fabric and sense of community.[4]

Second, the problems at work in the early 2010s in the field of security and their implications for justice have by no means receded. Arguably, they are as acute as they were a few years ago. To be sure, with the defeat of ISIL and the arrest and prosecution of their partisans, terrorism is somewhat on the defensive. That said, it certainly cannot be said that the threat has disappeared. This is especially the case considering that its root causes have not really been fully addressed, in particular in the Middle East and in Europe. Moreover, one of the regions where terrorism finds its most fertile ground, the Middle East, is all too often crippled by problems like authoritarian political regimes, failed

Nations organizations that are headquartered outside the West. As one of the few UN institutions not based in a Western country, it could contribute a valuable perspective on global affairs since the United Nations, despite being a global organization, remains by and large a Western-centric institution, a situation rather outdated in light of the international redistribution of power that has been taking place in recent decades. The United Nations University has an office at the United Nations Headquarters in New York whose mission at the time was to function as a bridge between the United Nations, academia, and think tanks around the world, with special emphases on the connections between global politics, global governance, and global policy questions as they are particularly addressed and dealt with in the context of the United Nations Headquarters.

3 Consult, for example, François Bourguignon, *The Globalization of Inequality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

4 In his conversation, Chapter 13, Michael Spence stresses that it is dangerous for a whole society and the international system to let inequalities get out of hand.

states, high youth unemployment, and rather destructive involvement of Western influence, all factors contributing to the perpetuation of regional instability and volatility.

Third, climate change and its implications, with their problems related to justice, already on the map a decade ago, can now less and less be altogether ignored and underestimated. The urgency of the situation is illustrated by the increasing changes in extreme weather and climate events (such as heat waves and droughts) and the strong evidence confirming that some of these phenomena are related to human activities. Consequently, environmental issues are more and more becoming a major focus of the work of international organizations and international law.[5]

Fourth, the unfolding changes in the international redistribution of power, with their possible consequences for the evolution of the international system and various aspects of justice, only emerging a few years ago, are now on full display. With the relative decline of the West (the United States and Europe)[6] and the rise of China, which aspires to become a comprehensive power that is influential worldwide, the transformations looming on the horizon are prone to have a deep impact, including on questions of justice from national, international, and global perspectives.

Fifth, and finally, because of the growing globalization and interdependence of countries around the world, international organizations, especially the United Nations, are now more indispensable than ever. And yet, it is as if nation-states regard international institutions, including the United Nations, progressively less seriously and with commensurately less respect. International institutions appear to be becoming less relevant and adaptable to the problems and demands of the present than ever before, let alone responsive to the demands of the future. Hence the imperative, in part addressed by this book, of exploring how the central role of international organizations in terms of norm production and officialization concerning matters of social, economic, cultural, and environmental justice, can be revitalized.[7]

### *II.b Audience and Choice of the Conversational Format*

A second rationale for the project was the need to extend the discussion of the issues at hand beyond a specialized and limited audience and, in part for this

[5] For instance, see in this volume the conversation with Mireille Delmas-Marty, Chapter 9.
[6] Refer, for example, to the conversation with Charles A. Kupchan, Chapter 12.
[7] David Held, among others, addresses this issue in his conversation, Chapter 14.

reason, to employ interactive conversations that, without being simplistic, are more accessible than scholarly articles or chapters. This rationale is also related to the paradoxical situation in which we find ourselves when it comes to information and knowledge.

On the one hand, contemporary societies, especially Western developed societies, are viewed and certainly present themselves as information and knowledge societies. In them, the production of and access to information and knowledge is very high compared to the past. Institutions of education and research, mass media and social media are among the resources at the public's disposal for information and education. On the other hand, despite the plethora of information and knowledge developed societies produce and disseminate, it is misleading to think that they are ideal or full-fledged information and knowledge societies. This is true for at least three reasons. First, information providers – whether mass media newspapers, magazines, radio, or TV – are all too often more interested in and driven by "infotainment" than by hard news. This state of affairs may not be the worst form of misinformation, spin, and manipulation but when it becomes part of a "fake news" culture, as seems to have been the case in the past few years,[8] this is certainly not helpful to the public.[9] Second, even information that is serious and credible cannot claim the mantle of true knowledge. If knowledge presupposes information, knowledge consists of more than information. It rests upon data constructing and offering a narrative that is meaningful and brings about meaning – that focuses, directly or indirectly, on public and civic interest. Third, access to knowledge is not as straightforward as we might think. Beyond the easy and perverse attractiveness of the brain-emptying mechanism that mass media at times amounts to, knowledge, already challenging to produce, can be ever harder to share and disseminate. If academic and research specialization can be viewed as a methodological tool and an expression of scholarly excellence, it also isolates itself from the layman.

And yet we can hardly afford to stay in the dark, both in terms of information and knowledge. As societies are becoming, all at the same time, more complex, more fluid, and more interdependent, the need for intellectual clarity on the issues that are likely to define our present and future, individually and collectively, becomes much more imperative and urgent. What is at stake is not simply the maximization of opportunities and minimization of the risks

[8] Mike Wendling, "The (Almost) Complete History of 'Fake News'," retrieved on January 22, 2018, www.bbc.com/news/amp/blogs-trending-42724320.

[9] See Oscar Wilde: "The public have an insatiable curiosity to know everything, except what is worth knowing." In *The Soul of Man under Socialism, and Selected Critical Prose* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2001), p. 148.

that these unfolding evolutions entail. Perhaps more basically but more fundamentally, what is at stake is keeping as much of our lives and our environment as possible under our control.

To some extent this requires a commitment on our part – a commitment to curiosity and learning. As human beings, as citizens, as professionals, equipped or not with a specialization, we are asked to extend ourselves beyond our comfort zone. But, of course, the burden does not or should not fall fully upon us. We require support and encouragement in this effort. This is one of the *raisons d'être* and one of the virtues of accessible knowledge – that it is straightforward enough to reach an interested but nonspecialized audience yet sophisticated enough to expand the mind, and the heart, of the audience.

With those thoughts in mind, adopting a conversational format seemed a productive option. A conversation is an informal way to introduce and be introduced to ideas, issues, and authors. Its interactive character, between the person who interviews and the person who is interviewed, is a dynamic way to address issues. A conversation, particularly when it features theoreticians, may also be an appropriate method to summarize and clarify some of the technical yet important points of an author's work and thinking. In addition, in the context of a conversation it is easy to show the relevance of these points by connecting them with concrete examples and situations. The contributors draw these linkages at times in the conversations that follow. Finally, the conversational format is an effective means of highlighting the human dimension of scholarship. Behind books, there is always an author, with his or her history, certainties, and hesitations. A conversational format may be more apt to display their existence and value than a traditional book, in which the author tends to recede behind the systematic exposition of the argument.[10]

### *II.c From National Conversation to a Global Conversation*

A third rationale was to show how national conversations have been taking place and continue to take place on the interactions between the national, international, and global perspectives. I felt that the value of doing so was fivefold.

To begin with, conversations on the relations between the national, international, and global dimensions exist in each national context. But, within the limitations of our specific national frameworks and horizons, we either ignore the existence of those dialogues or we know very little about them. As we tend

[10] In his conversation, Chapter 7, Avishai Margalit stresses the importance of the personal dimension at work in philosophy, especially in moral and political philosophy.

to be oblivious to the "other" beyond our circles of familiarity, we often are by and large ignorant of how other societies and their members think about the increasing internationalization and globalization of the world and their impact on national communities and their citizens. This tendency is all the more unfortunate since, to some degree, the intertwining and even embedment of the national, international, and global dimensions are experiences we all share.

In addition, national conversations present similarities and differences, which are always enlightening to discover and highlight. To be sure, these similarities and differences have much to do with the specific conditions (history, level of development, place in the international distribution of power, etc.) of each country and even, within societies, of people's positions in their societies. But they also relate to whether or not and to what extent the relations between the national, international, and global levels are seen in a positive or negative light. Needless to say, at the heart of these similarities and differences are key issues of justice, and in more ways than one.

Moreover, academics play an important role in these conversations. Like any other actors in society, scholars are part and parcel of the conversations and the concerns associated with the evolving relations between the national, international, and global levels. While not necessarily limited and reducible to the national context in which they operate (for academics are frequently part of international networks of research that tend to contribute to their own internationalization and globalization, including the homogenization of intellectual concerns, ideas, and languages[11]), they certainly echo it. As such, and certainly within the social sciences, their scholarship has been so concerned by the relations between the national, international, and global levels that these relations are now one of the defining aspects of the identity of contemporary societies and of the people who live in them. Furthermore, academics must and indeed do play a particularly important role in the context of these conversations. Because it is their full-time job and responsibility, along with teaching, to think and write about formative issues, to clarify them, put them in perspective, and make sense of them in their positive and even more so in their negative and pathological aspects, their function and contributions are significant and valuable. Their impact is particularly strong when they combine analytical rigor with a commitment to improving the world.

[11] Incidentally, the intellectual community of the hard sciences is more prone to function on the basis of scientific, standardized, and by and large internationally cultural homogenous parameters than that of the social sciences and the humanities.

In addition, I felt that by highlighting, through the work of academics, the various conversations on national, international, and global relations and showing their value, it would be possible to facilitate the establishment of a global conversation per se on these relations. Such conversation is very much needed. As the countries and cultures of the world are becoming more connected, encouraging a meeting point, so to speak, a global conversation on how societies and their members handle the intertwining of the national, international, and global levels, is a must. In light of this interconnectedness, it is a must from the intellectual, ethical, and political points of view.[12] It is an intellectual must in the sense that knowing about the "other" (individual and collective) and how it positions itself in this new landscape is a minimum requirement to analyze and understand the nature and evolution of one's own society. A society that adopts a siloed and self-contained approach, if such an orientation was ever sufficient, is today simply not good enough. It is also a must from an ethical point of view in the sense that we have no choice but to negotiate our relations with others. Getting to know and taking into account the existence of others is both a starting point and a condition of possibility of a global ethics, of an ethics mindful of our rights and duties toward one another beyond our borders and, in fact, also within borders. Here the question of immigration and the various debates surrounding it is a case in point. Furthermore, relating to the "other" is a must from a political point of view as well in the sense that in order for the intellectual and ethical demands vis-à-vis the "other" to be translated into reality, into the DNA of societies and their members, and their relations, politics must play a central role. National, international, and global politics, for example in the context of international organizations, needs to put in place the supporting mechanisms for a global conversation to become an expression and a tool of a more pluralistic form of universalism, as alluded to by Delmas-Marty,[13] Wang,[14] and ONUMA[15] in their respective conversations.

Finally, what I hoped in having these conversations featuring scholars from around the world was to provide a means to contribute to the development of a denationalized approach to issues at play in societies and the relations of these societies, both in terms of research and teaching.[16] Indeed, as societies

[12] For more on this, see for instance Jean-Marc Coicaud, "Ethics and Politics of Global Knowledge" (Keynote Lecture, 3rd JoRISS Lecture Series, East China Normal University, Shanghai, December 6, 2017).

[13] Chapter 9 in this volume.

[14] See the conversation with Wang Hui in this volume, Chapter 3.

[15] Refer to the conversation with ONUMA Yasuaki in this volume, Chapter 10.

[16] The national and nationalized bent has traditionally been at work in most social sciences as they have developed, in the eighteenth and nineteenth century at the national level for the national level. In this regard, it is also very much at work in international relations and

and their fates are now increasingly connected, part of the intellectual agenda is to move beyond "knowledge nationalism"[17] and foster approaches that at the same time are mindful of, first, the local characteristics of social objects (societies) and the national, international, and global relations at work within and among them, and, second, of the growing and global levels that are not reducible to the local/national level. From this perspective, the "de-nationalization" approach points in two directions, once again both in research and teaching. It points toward not limiting the production and dissemination of knowledge to that of one society or country, as if this country was the only one to exist and could exist on its own (as such it is about internationalizing knowledge in its research and teaching dimensions, so that students and readers know more about the world beyond their own societies). And it points toward identifying and analyzing the level of social activities taking place and having relevance at the international/global levels (globalization of knowledge).[18]

### *II.d Interdisciplinarity*

A fourth rationale for bringing to life the book in its present form was an attempt to practice and encourage interdisciplinarity.[19] After all, if specialization and working within the frame of one discipline are a focused way to develop sound expertise and achieve results in research and thinking – a reality

international law. This is not surprising considering that both modern international relations and international law are built around and to serve the nation-state. There are additional noteworthy features to the national and nationalized bent of international relations and international law. For example, in the United States, where it is the most developed and often provides paradigms of knowledge, the field of international relations is anything but international in the sense that it by and large amounts to a US-centric vision and analysis of international relations – hence more often than not its character of "intellectual ideology" rather than knowledge per se. As for international law, echoing Yasuaki Onuma's thinking, international law cannot be seen as very international if by "international" we refer to diversity of cultures, including legal traditions. Modern international law is essentially a Western construct that only makes room for others on its own terms and in the margins. As such, when, as part of its progressive dimension, it recognizes rights to other cultures or legal traditions, it is still somewhat alienating. On this latter question, Jean-Marc Coicaud, "Le droit international et la question de la justice," in *Annuaire Français des Relations Internationales* (Paris: Université Panthéon-Assas, Centre Thucydide, volume XVIII, 2017).

[17] See Ulrich Beck and his call for "methodological cosmopolitanism" in *Cosmopolitan Vision*, translated by Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), pp. 17–18.

[18] We go back to this issue and others alluded to here later in this introduction when we discuss the research and curriculum agenda.

[19] Interdisciplinarity involves the combining of two or more academic disciplines into research and teaching.

that to some extent accounts for the organization of research and teaching institutions along divisions of labor and disciplines – it is a theory and practice of knowledge that is more a methodological, if not an epistemological, commodity (even if it is an essential one) than a reflection of the reality of reality. Indeed, the reality of reality is not to be segmented, as the categories of knowledge are, but integrated and all-encompassing (in a way all aspects of [social] reality are in one piece of [social] reality, really or potentially). Hence the virtue of adding, on top of monodisciplinarity, interdisciplinarity in order to have a more comprehensive picture of reality, of the different layers of which reality is composed and of the different aspects through which we can view it.[20] To be sure, *Conversations on Justice from National, International, and Global Perspectives* is a rather modest exercise of interdisciplinarity, and this in two ways.

A first aspect of this modest interdisciplinarity is the fact that only a few disciplines are featured and represented, essentially in the social sciences. This is the case for three reasons. Very prosaically, there is, first, a matter of space limitation. A book can only cover so much. Second, there are my own intellectual limitations. Beyond the social sciences and the humanities I am not intellectually equipped to engage in conversations with scientists in the fields of physics, mathematics, biology, etc.[21] A third and more positive rationale, given the book's focus on justice, was the need to highlight disciplines engaged, at least in part, and each in their way, with questions of justice and societies, such as economic justice, social justice, political justice, cultural justice, etc. Moreover, the social sciences are on the front line when it

[20] When studying at Harvard University, I attended a seminar on justice co-taught by John Rawls and Amartya Sen, Rawls being a philosopher interested in economics, and Sen an economist interested in philosophy. It was enlightening to see how the combination of philosophy and economics can help develop an analytical understanding of questions of justice that philosophy and economics alone would perhaps have difficulty delivering. The combination of law and philosophy or of philosophy and history is probably likely to generate similarly fruitful insights on justice.

[21] As a matter of fact, if there is a domain of interdisciplinarity that is absolutely essential and destined to become even more so in the future, it is the one bringing together the hard sciences and the social sciences. Relatively few people are trained in these two areas and are able to function and speak at the intersection of the two. Yet the relations and the interface between hard sciences (fundamental and applied sciences, be it in the areas of natural or medical sciences) and social sciences are decisive. Without some sort of expertise in them and their relationships and impacts, it is difficult to tackle some of the defining issues of our time, including in terms of ethics, politics, and justice, such as the environment, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, etc. This type of interface is one of the areas in which much progress has to be made in training the next generation of professionals, scholars, and civil servants.