

Chapter 8

Institutional Justice and the Ethical Dimension of the Norm of Modern Development at the Bretton Woods Institutions

ABSTRACT

The present chapter reconstructs historically how the notion of institutional justice was embedded within the normative construction of modern development. The chapter draws on contributions on critical constructivism, to tease out how in the evolution of late modern social system, the idea of justice was gradually legitimated within contractual governance architectures, that further normalized relations aroused on highly asymmetric agent environments, such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund. By depicting the concept of institutional justice, the goal of the chapter is to shed lights on the ideological dimension of the norm of modern development at the Bretton Woods Institutions, and the transposition of rather conflicting arrangements in the normative landscape of the conventional ethical dimension of the international system.

INTRODUCTION

In the course of defining how political asymmetries affect global structures of governance, little value has been given to its role in shaping socially constructed norms. From an historical perspective, this phenomenon has molded social principles and procedures that just upon the inclusion of otherwise disregarded views, appear as problematic or conflictive. A glimpse into the background of this antagonistic character of socialization, reveals that, over time, social practices become norms, and upon the legitimation of this symbolic constructions on structures of authority, they tend to acquire a somehow mandatory institutional category. From an international Relations perspective, such cases can be seen on organizations that regulate political relations by guidelines and discourses that acquire meaning

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when put into practice, despite been highly contested in terms of procedures, foundational settings and normative outcomes.

In the task of steering framed spheres of international relations, the Bretton Woods Institutions reveal themselves as strategic nodes of normative meaning. Their ongoing allusion to an idea of development by the regulation of framed realms of political and economic relations, has further created a narrative of “global justice” hardly refuted over time. As such, the idea of “global justice” has transposed its semantic value into an institutional arrangement. In this scenario, it’s role as a virtuous principle for the mediation of interests on an international sphere, acquire a sense of legitimacy scarcely antagonized in today politics, but problematic when grasped from a more democratic or ethical perspective. In sum, in the global process of modern development, the idea of justice as a functional governance category has meticulously been transferred from the social to the contractual sphere. This shift has been triggered by the increasing levels of sophistication of societies, which upon the necessity of regulate relations, have posit on institutions the burdens derived from tensions of complex contemporary social systems.

Taking into account the role of historic contingencies in the birth process, formation, maturation and legitimation of institutions, as well as contributions of communicative action theory and critical constructivism, the present chapter presents a theoretical approach upon which at the Bretton Woods institutions, this concept of *modern contractual justice* can be grasped coherently. The working hypothesis of this argument, is that in contemporary structures of asymmetric governance, fundamental social norms evolve conflictively, acquiring institutional meaning that replace functionally and systemically the deontological attributes and claims for legitimacy of institutional practices.

In the present chapter, I reconstruct the idea of global justice and its institutional category at the Bretton Woods Institutions upon two features of the institutions. First an historical one, in which the contributions of historic institutionalism and critical constructivism, explain how the development of social systems, is gradually joined by the creation and implementation of steering structures. In such circumstance, the construction of norms is reached by making customary use in societies of constitutive traditions, some of them that further acquire a semantic content upon language and the sharing of fundamental symbolic expressions such as the idea of *justice*. The concept of *justice*, rather than having a de facto meaning, is made upon context and socialization. Both represent circumstances that on a governance level, attribute legitimacy to the institutional practice, while at the same time, suggest the inclusion of world perspectives otherwise disadvantaged or underrepresented on scenarios of unbalanced or asymmetric governance.

Secondly, In the case of the Bretton Woods institutions, my assumption is that such process acquires an institutional, rather than a democratic or dialogical content. This situation is explained by the existence of consistent asymmetries at the operational level of the institutions, further entrenched on executive committees, overall regulation, and the uneven distribution of burdens and benefits of political relations. I argue that such state of affairs is exemplified upon contractual approaches to international relations and politics, some of them increasingly contested in the recent years. Although the scope of this debate covers numerous theoretical positions, in accordance with the present research it fundamentally holds an origin on the contributions of contractual political science, carried out specially during the recent decades in the philosophical work of John Rawls and his “theory of justice”. This construction, however, set loose and detached from other contributions supported on philosophy of law, communicative action theory (Habermas) or political economy (Amartya Sen). In short, this is because the increasing reconstruction of justice from an entirely institutional framework, neglects the role that context and communication hold as functional assemblies upon which such symbolic construction arise. On the case of the Bretton woods institutions, these phenomena carry a problematic consequence in view of the normative outcome

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