book review of Forced to Be Good: Why Trade Agreements Boost Human Rights
2009, by Emilie M. Hafner-Burton
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Recently, various types of conditionalities have become fundamental aspects in the relations between the North and the South. As Emilie Hafner-Burton points out in the aptly titled *Forced to Be Good*, trade relations between rich and poor have not escaped this reality. The two lines of inquiry that underpin this work (i.e., how did this trend occur and has it had an impact) are critical in understanding the ways in which factors such as human rights have worked their way into contemporary international relations. On the whole, Hafner-Burton can be commended for presenting these issues in a fascinating book. But luckily for other scholars, she does leave some room for future work on the subject. *Forced to Be Good* provides an excellent theoretical framework for the emergence of human rights clauses in preferential trade agreements (or PTAs), such as the U.S.–Chile Free Trade Agreement of 2004 or the Africa Caribbean Pacific–European Union (ACP-EU) accords under the Cotonou agreements in 2000. This scaffolding is backed up by some excellent research, especially concerning the United States policy-making process. In doing so, Hafner-Burton provides a compelling account of the reasons why and how human rights norms have become increasingly inserted into PTAs.

*Forced to Be Good* is broken down in four primary sections: preferences, institutions, power, and their effects. First, concerning *preferences*, Hafner-Burton...
argues that key policy makers desire to include human rights language in PTAs because they stand to gain politically from the passage of such legislation (p. 25). It is not the norm entrepreneurs (i.e., human rights activists, trade unionists, etc.), as argued by contemporary constructivist scholars, who link global norms for social justice to international trade regulations but the self-interested politician. In a rather straightforward argument: The rational political actor seeks to advance a personal career rather than defend some abstract norm. If backing human rights pleases a potentially important clientele or constituency, then the likelihood of support from the particular policy maker should logically increase. Furthermore, institutions are referred to as the rules that create patterns of behavior within which policy makers turn preferences into policy outcomes (p. 26). The shape that these institutions take and the number of critical veto players in them affect the ways in which politicians mold these trade agreements. On top of this, power “shapes which countries have influence over policy outcomes” (p. 31). According to Hafner-Burton, the more “powerful” countries have a larger say in how agreements look in the end. However, it is important to mention that the author points out that power, like the behavior of policy makers, is constrained by institutions, specifically legislative processes, that determine how much exercising power matters to the actors involved. Finally, human rights clauses in PTAs appear to have an effect when they come in the form of “hard laws” with incentives and pressures (i.e., those with a coercive apparatus, not just those that use simple persuasion). That is to say, PTAs with enforceable human rights standards can make a difference, those that do not are simply cheap talk.

However, at least three fundamental flaws emerge in Hafner-Burton’s account. To begin with, chapter 6, which focuses on the effects of human rights clauses in PTAs on developing countries, leaves much to be desired. A more systematic approach in regard to the cases would have been helpful. This could have been organized around a simple table showing the impact, or lack thereof, of these human rights norms on the target countries involved in the various PTAs signed with the United States or the European Union. Furthermore, this chapter could have presented a deeper analysis of the impact of human rights clauses in PTAs on the developing world. The author could have gained by exploring in more detail the causal mechanisms functioning behind the coercive apparatuses in these PTAs. Along this line, why was the statistical analysis, which is placed in the appendix, not discussed more thoroughly in chapter 6? From the evidence presented here, it is difficult to answer the critical question about if the clauses inserted into PTAs are having an impact.
More than anything, *Forced to Be Good* provides an insightful account of the regulatory process in the United States regarding human rights norms and PTAs. Hafner-Burton’s examples are clearly documented with historic detail concerning how key policy makers in the U.S. legislative and executive branches have interacted to shape the ways in which human rights issues have worked their way into recent PTAs. However, the discussion of the United States is much more richly developed than that concerning the European Union. This is especially the case in tracing how various key individuals shaped EU policy toward the ACP, for example. In the United States it appears that individuals and institutions matter, whereas in the European Union only institutions seem to play a central role. Given the importance of policy makers in Hafner-Burton’s argument, this leaves the reader with an uncomfortable void in regard to the European Union. It is unclear which critical policy makers in Europe played a role in these processes, not to mention how and why.

On a related point, concerning the European Union and its relations with perhaps the most developed PTA in the world, the ACP-EU agreements, *Forced to Be Good* skips an extremely important evolution in this relationship. Why was the name of the ACP agreement changed from the Lomé accords to the Cotonou accords? Crucial for the book it would seem, the alteration came as a result of the horrible human rights record and lack of democratization in Togo. Benin is somewhat of a shining star in these areas. The European Union sought to underscore its determination to make examples of those countries taking efforts toward better governance and human rights by naming the accords after Benin’s capital. This crucial point is overlooked by Hafner-Burton.

Finally, *Forced to Be Good* presents an interesting argument about why human rights issues are placed on the trade table by politicians. Policy makers, especially those with preferences that really matter in decision-making institutions, desire to include human rights language when it can help them to gain additional influence in the political process. Yet what is potentially equally interesting, and generally ignored in this work, concerns why these issues are so quickly cast aside when realist self-interest emerges for critical policy makers. These rational actors can also move to ignore human rights when it serves their purposes as well. It seems to be obvious that in international affairs, diplomatic, military, and business interests, which frequently blend, can at times trump human rights concerns. In an otherwise excellent work, Hafner-Burton alludes to but still does not underscore enough how frequently PTAs and other agreements are reduced to cheap talk when realist interests or realpolitik intercede. In a world where the human rights records of critical trading partners are regularly ignored by Washington or Brussels in return
for preferential access to resources and markets, it becomes painfully evident that such rhetoric about social justice matters only in marginal cases without economic or strategic value. Togo or Haiti can be penalized because they do not matter in any real business or geostrategic sense. However, China or Pakistan, or even Angola or Equatorial Guinea, on the other hand, do matter and appear to regularly escape the conditionalities placed on less fortunate international actors.