Beyond Legal Design: Law, Social Practice and Everyday Normativity

Alex Batesmith

A review essay of Sperfeldt, Christoph. 2022. *Practices of Reparations in International Criminal Justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, and Lawrence, Ben. 2025. *In the Shadow of the Constitution: The Micropolitics of Constitutional Contestation in Cambodia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Accepted on 29 October 2026 for publication in the *Law and Society Review*, forthcoming 2026/27

* Associate Professor in Legal Professions, School of Law, University of Leeds (a.batesmith@leeds.ac.uk)

1. Introduction

A defining feature of socio-legal scholarship is its insistence that law must be understood as a social phenomenon: practised, experienced, interpreted, and contested beyond the courts, legislatures, and other institutions with which it is commonly associated. This tradition has been enriched by the perspectives of legal anthropologists, political scientists, criminologists, and scholars of legal consciousness and legal pluralism (Ehrlich 1913/1936; Moore, 1978; Sarat & Kearns, 1993; Ewick & Silbey, 1998; Merry, 2006). In this essay, I review the contributions to this debate made by two recently published books that investigate the mutually constitutive relationship between law's formal articulation and its social enactment. Both Christoph Sperfeldt's *Practices of Reparations in International Criminal Justice* (2022) and Ben Lawrence's *In the Shadow of the Constitution: the Micropolitics of Constitutional Contestation in Cambodia* (2025) extol the epistemic importance of considering the law-as-lived in addition to the law-as-written. Read together, they allow us to reflect on a core methodological question within the wider scholarship: how to trace the relationship between formal legal norms, texts, and institutions and the situated practices through which law acquires social meaning.

Sperfeldt examines the emerging norm of reparations for victims of international crimes, drawing on examples from Cambodia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, while Lawrence investigates how the constitutional principles embedded in Cambodia's 1993 Constitution are experienced and enacted in everyday life. Despite divergent subject material, both authors argue that law's meaning – and its meaning-making – emerges through social practice. Their shared focus reflects a longstanding socio-legal concern with law as practice rather than doctrine. From Ehrlich's account of the 'living law' (Ehrlich 1913/1936) to Moore's analysis of semi-autonomous social fields (1978) and Ewick and Silbey's work on legal consciousness (1998), socio-legal scholars have argued that legal norms acquire practical significance through the ways ordinary actors interpret, invoke, accommodate, and contest them in everyday settings. On this view, law is not simply a body of rules but a repertoire of social practices through which authority, obligation, and rights are continually negotiated. Both books explore what happens after legal norms leave the institutions that create them. Rather than treating meaning as fixed at the point of legal design, Sperfeldt and Lawrence examine how reparative and constitutional norms are respectively translated, contested, and reworked through everyday encounters with legality. Their shared concern is with the agency of actors who participate in shaping legal meaning despite occupying marginal positions in processes of formal norm creation.

I consider the central claims shared by both books, particularly their commitment to looking beyond formal legal and political institutions to understand how norms are experienced and constituted in everyday social life. After a brief summary of the central contributions of both books, I first examine how Sperfeldt and Lawrence challenge institutional accounts of norm creation and critique formalist understandings of the law. I then evaluate their case for studying the social life of legal and constitutional norms, and the generalizability of their findings on 'law from below', before turning to examine how they address the analytical tension at the heart of everyday legality – the inevitable limitations of unequal power relations. I conclude by arguing that both books point towards a relational account of normativity, one that treats legal meaning as emerging through interaction between institutions and the social worlds in which legal norms are interpreted and enacted.

2. Sperfeldt: the norms of victim reparation

Reparations are often defined as measures designed to redress harms to individuals, groups and communities resulting from international crimes through diverse processes of restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition (UN General Assembly 2005; Transitional Justice Institute 2012). Although these formulations provide a necessary legal framework, they reveal very little about how reparations are understood, negotiated, and experienced by those involved in their implementation and enjoyment. Recent scholarship has therefore drawn attention to the competing expectations, interests, and understandings brought to reparations processes by victims, judges, lawyers, civil society organizations, donors and states (de Greiff 2006; Rubio-Marín 2009; Sandoval 2010; Moffett 2014). Sperfeldt builds on these insights by developing a practice-oriented account of reparations that seeks to challenge institutional and doctrinal understandings of international criminal justice. Rather than treating reparations as a legal category whose meaning is fixed through formal rules and judicial interpretation, he argues that reparative norms acquire content through practice. He draws on long-term ethnographic fieldwork in two case studies of reparations processes associated with the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (the 'ECCC', operational in Phnom Penh between 2006 and 2022) (Ciorciari and Heindel 2014), and the interventions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo ('DRC') by the International Criminal Court ('ICC', operational since 2002 in The Hague) (Schabas 2020; Moffett 2014).

The ICC and ECCC are the first international or internationalized tribunals to have developed and implemented reparations schemes for victims. However, uncertainty surrounding the scope and operationalization of reparations has meant that their content cannot simply be derived from statutes, rules or judicial decisions. Sperfeldt shows how reparative norms have been shaped through the negotiations, contestations, and practices of a diverse range of actors within and beyond the courtroom, from judges, lawyers, development agency project managers and donors, intermediaries – and the victims themselves as intended beneficiaries of the reparations. For Sperfeldt, reparations are neither universal nor unambiguous concepts whose meaning flows automatically from institutional design. Consistent with Bourdieu's conception of social fields, Sperfeldt shows that reparative norms emerge through interactions among actors occupying different institutional positions and claiming different forms of authority and legitimacy within the field of international criminal justice (Bourdieu 1997; Dixon and Tenove 2013).

Sperfeldt's central claim is that reparations should be understood not as pre-defined legal remedies but as evolving normative projects. Rather than being fixed at the moment of

institutional design, judicial interpretation, or legal codification, reparations develop through and as a result of the interactions between diverse actors. By effectively tracing the 'social life' of reparations across different stages of their development, adjudication, and implementation, Sperfeldt demonstrates how reparative norms are continually reshaped as they move between institutional and everyday settings. His contribution therefore extends beyond reparations themselves and the field of international criminal justice. It offers a broader socio-legal account of how legal norms acquire practical meaning through social practice, challenging the assumption that legal authority flows unproblematically from formal design to institutional implementation.

3. Lawrence: the survival of liberal constitutional norms in an authoritarian state

Much of the scholarship on authoritarian constitutionalism has focused on the role of constitutions in legitimating, structuring, or sustaining authoritarian rule (Ginsburg and Simpser 2014; Scheppele 2018; Chen and Fu 2020; Wang 2024). Lawrence asks a different question: how constitutional norms continue to acquire social and political meaning through activism, cultural production, religious practice, and grassroots mobilization. His starting point is that constitutional meaning cannot be understood solely through the institutions formally charged with making and enforcing constitutional law, even in conditions of entrenched authoritarian rule. He also argues that constitutional scholarship has been overly shaped by a liberal constitutionalist 'ideal type' in which constitutional politics play out principally through courts operating within democratic regimes. As a result, constitutional contestation in authoritarian settings, particularly among everyday actors, has received comparatively little attention.

His analysis focuses on Cambodia's 1993 Constitution, a rights-oriented constitutional settlement established with international support that remains in force despite the country's gradual twenty-first century transformation into a *de facto* single-party state under the Cambodian People's Party ('CPP') (Strangio 2014). Drawing on Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (2001), and through extensive ethnographic fieldwork in Cambodia, he demonstrates how everyday actors employ constitutional language to negotiate and challenge political authority outside formal institutional settings, a process he styles 'micro-political constitutional contestation'. In doing so, Lawrence treats constitutional norms not as fixed commitments embedded in a legal text, but as claims whose meaning remains contingent upon their interpretation and mobilization in the daily lives of ordinary citizens and non-elite actors. Although the CPP claims sole authority to interpret and contest the Constitution's meaning, Lawrence shows that constitutional agency extends beyond official legal, judicial and political settings.

Although the 1993 Cambodian Constitution contains liberal guarantees of equality, expression, assembly and association, limited public consultation and ambiguous drafting have enabled the CPP to consolidate an illiberal state in which opposition voices are systematically silenced. However, as scholars have found in other authoritarian settings (Cheesman 2015; Rajah 2012), even autocrats use the language of liberal legality to justify repression. Although rule of law is transformed into 'rule by law' and folded into official discourses of law and order (Cheesman 2015), constitutional language nevertheless creates spaces for contestation among activist lawyers, monks, artists and civil society actors. The duality that animates *In the Shadow of the Constitution* is that constitutional language simultaneously legitimizes CPP dominance *and* equips citizens with the norms, language, and symbols to contest state power. Where previous scholars have considered constitutional 'consciousness' (Chua 2022), Lawrence presents

constitutionalism as a lived social practice, demonstrating how constitutional norms acquire meaning and political force, even within authoritarian regimes.

Lawrence notes that previous efforts at developing a concept of 'constitutional ethnography' have typically focused on either institutional studies of constitutional courts or on the litigation experiences of everyday actors (Scheppele, 2004; Schonthal 2016; De 2018). His principal contribution is to extend constitutional ethnography beyond courts and legal proceedings to examine how constitutional ideas are invoked, negotiated, and mobilized across everyday social and political life within an authoritarian regime. In so doing, Lawrence shifts attention away from the formal sites of constitutional interpretation toward the social practices through which constitutional norms acquire meaning and relevance. He nevertheless remains attentive to the limits of constitutional agency, raising difficult questions about whether such forms of constitutional engagement 'from below' are in fact capable of generating meaningful political change.

4. Norms beyond institutions

Both Sperfeldt and Lawrence challenge institution-centered accounts of law by demonstrating that reparative and constitutional norms are produced not only by courts, parliaments, and constitutions but also through the social fields in which those norms are interpreted, contested, and enacted. They argue that their respective fields of international criminal justice and constitutionalism remain overly preoccupied with institutional accounts of legal authority and norm creation. While neither author denies the significance of formal legal sources, both challenge the assumption that courts, legislatures, and constitutional elites possess a monopoly over the production of legal meaning. Ehrlich's concept of 'living law' (Ehrlich 1913/1936 tr) offers a useful lens through which to view both books. For Ehrlich, the 'center of gravity' (1913/1936 tr.: 493) of legal development lies not in legislation or adjudication, but in society itself, where norms emerge through recurring social practices, shared expectations, organizational rules and routines, and social relationships. From this perspective, reparative and constitutional norms remain underdetermined until they are given life through social practice. For Sperfeldt, the content of reparations emerges through the myriad interactions of victims' associations, NGOs, donors, and ECCC officials, among others. For Lawrence, constitutional meaning is continually reshaped through the practices of ordinary citizens, Buddhist monks, performers, and activists who continue to invoke constitutional language in their everyday political struggles, notwithstanding the authoritarian context. The relevance of Ehrlich's perspective becomes particularly apparent given the indeterminacy surrounding both reparations regimes and constitutional rights. In each case, broadly framed legal provisions require ongoing interpretation. Although conventional legal accounts would expect such definitional questions to be settled by courts, legislators, or political actors, both authors highlight the capacity of those most affected by legal norms to participate in defining their practical meaning.

Sally Falk Moore offers a vocabulary for analysing where and how that norm-production occurs within identifiable social fields. Her framework of the 'semi-autonomous social field' ('SASF') explains how social arenas generate their own norms, expectations, and mechanisms of compliance while simultaneously remaining vulnerable to intervention by external state structures (Moore 1973). Sperfeldt and Lawrence demonstrate that the contemporary legal landscapes they examine are not singular top-down systems of norm production. Rather, they reveal a plurality of overlapping SASFs within which reparative and constitutional norms are negotiated and contested. For Sperfeldt, the vagueness of the term 'reparations' in the

constituting statutes and rules of the ICC and ECCC creates both a semantic and practical void. Authoritative legal forums cannot fully determine how reparations are understood and experienced in practice. Instead, a range of social spaces such as public outreach forums, lawyer/victim consultations, and meetings involving international donors, local NGOs, victim associations, and other actors become important sites in which the meaning of reparations is negotiated and produced. Lawrence's concept of 'micro-political constitutional contestation' posits that the 1993 Cambodian Constitution is not self-executing. Rather, local actors use the symbolic capital of the constitutional text to resist executive overreach within their own localized social fields. Lawrence's examples reveal a series of SASFs structured around labour rights activism, land rights movements, Buddhist networks, and artistic communities (see also, e.g., Norén-Nilsson 2018). Even when the reality of authoritarian legality prevents social actors from relying on courts and official channels to formally advance their causes, they can nevertheless occupy social, cultural, or religious spaces for constitutional meaning-making. This resonates with Anderson's argument that constitutional norms increasingly emerge from a plural legal landscape not reducible to state institutions (2005) and with Rajagopal's emphasis on the importance of social movements in reshaping legal and political norms from below (2003).

The significance of these social fields, then, lies not simply in their role as sites of norm production, but in the ways they reshape legal meaning. The next section therefore considers in more detail how Sperfeldt and Lawrence trace the translation, adaptation, and transformation of legal norms in practice.

5. The Social Life of Norms

Having situated norm production beyond formal institutions, both authors turn to the processes through which legal norms are translated and transformed in practice. As Cover identifies, the creation of legal meaning (or what he describes as 'jurisgenesis') is a cultural process, continuously mediated through narratives and divergent understandings that challenge the authority of legal texts (1983: 11). Both Sperfeldt and Lawrence demonstrate how ethnographic methods are particularly valuable for tracing these processes of translation and reinterpretation as they unfold in everyday settings. Ethnography reveals forms of legality that often remain invisible in doctrinal and institutional analysis by showing how legal language is used, adapted, and contested in everyday settings. This builds upon what Merry (2006) describes as the process of 'vernacularization', or the way in which universal legal ideas are translated into local legal-cultural idioms. Their shared concern is not simply whether institutional or constitutional norms travel, but how they are interpreted, appropriated, and reconfigured once they enter particular social worlds through routine practices, narratives, and understandings (Ewick and Silbey 1998: 248).

Sperfeldt challenges the assumption that reparations operate as a stable legal concept whose meaning is fixed at the point of institutional creation. He identifies four stages of the 'social life' of reparations: norm-making, engagement with victims, adjudication, and implementation. At each stage, multiple actors engage in a process of normative reconstruction. Hence, during the drafting of statutes and institutional rules, he demonstrates that reparations are a product of political compromise rather than legal precision. Similarly, outreach efforts with victims and their wider communities show how reparative norm dissemination is more than simple transmission but requires a process of cultural transformation into something more locally meaningful. Adjudication as the third stage of the social life of reparations exposes continuing

contestation over the fundamental purpose of reparations, whether tied to strictly retributive aims of the trials or to express more socially responsible interpretations. Implementation as the fourth and final stage of the social life of reparations illustrates how both development actors and victims reshape legal objectives through project-based practice. At every stage, interactions among competing actors continue to shape both the meaning and the experience of reparations.

Lawrence's central contribution to this debate is to decouple constitutionalism from institutions. Rather than treating constitutional meaning as something generated primarily by constitutional or legislative drafters or court judgments, he demonstrates how constitutional norms retain social and political significance even when all formal enforcement mechanisms have been hollowed out by authoritarian rule. Constitutional agency appears less as institutional participation than as an ongoing struggle over the meaning of rights, citizenship, political belonging, and even Cambodian identity. Lawrence cites three main examples of his 'micro-political constitutional contestation'. Firstly, activist lawyers: although Cambodia's justice system lacks any semblance of independence from the CPP regime, such lawyers adopt technical constitutional language as a shield during court cases. Their target is not so much the judges as the public beyond the courtroom: use of constitutional language raises the legal consciousness (Silbey, 2005; Ewick and Silbey 1998) of communities affected by land-grabbing and other social justice causes. As lawyers explain to civil society organizations and ordinary citizens the basis of their legal claims, Lawrence observes how the Constitution's language possessed a 'latent normative power' that had an empowering effect on people notwithstanding *de facto* violation of their rights (Lawrence 2025: 128). Secondly, Buddhist monks: although they cannot stand for office, many monks exercise their Constitutional right to vote as well as to participate in social and environmental justice causes, despite efforts by the CPP-affiliated Supreme Patriarchs to dissuade them. Monks use religious symbolism, blessings and other rituals to support causes such as land rights, blending these practices with what Lawrence describes as a 'newfound, constitutionally grounded vocabulary of citizenship and rights' (2025: 181), reflecting Merry's account of the vernacularization of international norms into local social and cultural forms (2006). Finally, Lawrence uses the example of artists and performers to demonstrate how constitutional politics extends into unexpected domains. He discusses how the State justifies censorship of artistic expression through constitutional provisions concerning cultural protection, national traditions and public order; these are resisted through subtle or symbolic means that do not obviously flout the norms, but continue their 'pragmatic resistance' (Chua 2012). This becomes, Lawrence notes, a 'dynamic site of constitutional contestation' (Lawrence 2025: 207), particularly for younger artists whose view of Cambodian identity is radically different from the CPP 'old guard'.

Across both studies, legal meaning is revealed to be neither institutionally determined nor socially unconstrained. Reparative and constitutional norms do not simply travel from institutions to social peripheries: they are continually reconstructed through interactions among victims, activists, religious actors, artists and other civil society actors. Both authors therefore contribute to a broader socio-legal tradition that treats legality as an ongoing social practice rather than a completed institutional product. However, as Cover has noted, the organization of law as meaning does not eliminate the organization of law as power (1983: 18). The achievements of everyday norm-making remain conditioned by unequal resources, institutional gatekeepers, and the continuing coercive power of the state, and it is to these limits that I now turn.

6. The Limits of Everyday Legality

An emphasis on everyday legality raises questions about the relationship between legal meaning-making and legal power. Sperfeldt and Lawrence convincingly demonstrate that legal norms derive their meaning – in part – from their enactment, interpretation, and contestation in everyday social life. More difficult, however, is assessing whether such practices meaningfully transform underlying structures of power or merely expand opportunities for participation within them. In resisting the romanticization of grassroots legality, both authors invite reflection on a central socio-legal question: whether participation in the production and contestation of legal norms is accompanied by a corresponding capacity to shape the institutional structures through which legal authority is exercised. Legal contestation unfolds within fields structured by unequal distributions of symbolic, professional, and institutional capital, as Bourdieu has noted (1987). The key question becomes, then, not whether ordinary actors contribute to defining reparative or constitutional norms, but whether their contributions in fact alter the terms on which those norms are constituted.

This debate has long informed socio-legal scholarship. In rejecting both pure legal determinism and overly celebratory narratives of resistance to legal power, Ewick and Silbey's more realistic conclusion is that everyday engagements with law are often fragmented, localised, and only partially transformative (1998). Similarly, as Merry has demonstrated, while local actors may reinterpret and reshape legal norms, they rarely do so under conditions of their own choosing (2006). Sperfeldt and Lawrence's contributions simultaneously highlight the significance of legal consciousness and popular norm contestation among everyday actors while reminding us that such agency is exercised within entrenched power relations (Silbey 2005). As others have noted, legal arenas are rarely level playing fields: elite actors and institutions typically enjoy significant advantages over participants from below (Galanter 1974). The challenge presented by both books, therefore, is to recognize the importance of everyday legal agency without conflating participation in legal meaning-making with the redistribution of legal power, authority, or resources.

From the perspective of victims of international crimes, Sperfeldt's primary concern is the gap between the emancipatory promise of reparations and the institutional conditions of their delivery. Although contemporary international criminal justice presents reparations as a victim-centered response to mass atrocity, designed to recognize victims as rights-holders and participants in justice processes (de Grieff 2006; Rubio-Marín 2009; Sandoval 2010), Sperfeldt demonstrates that they frequently remain subordinate to the procedural priorities and institutional imperatives of international criminal tribunals. Victims, civil society organizations, and local communities may participate in shaping understandings of reparations, but they exercise relatively little influence over the authoritative frameworks within which this form of justice is defined and administered. International justice institutions continue largely to determine which harms are legally recognized, who qualifies as a beneficiary, what forms of redress are available, and how participation itself is structured. Participation may therefore influence the content of reparations claims, but only marginally impact the institutional conditions under which those claims are authorized and implemented.

Sperfeldt's analysis therefore demonstrates an important asymmetry between interpretive participation and institutional power. While victims actively contest, reinterpret, and expand official understandings of reparations, these interventions occur within frameworks largely designed by others; they remain disadvantaged actors within a field structured by unequal distributions of legal expertise, symbolic capital, and institutional authority (Dixon and Tenove 2013). The implementation of reparations frequently becomes subject to bureaucratic priorities, donor agendas, and governance through managerialized 'projectification' that can narrow more

expansive local understandings of justice (Sperfeldt 2022: 243). However, Sperfeldt argues that victims are not merely passive recipients of externally defined programmes. Their agency lies in challenging the limitations of institutional understandings of reparative justice and in generating competing normative visions of redress. Through examples from the ECCC trials in Cambodia, he demonstrates how victims participate in the ongoing negotiation of reparative norms rather than simply accepting those imposed by international justice institutions.

Lawrence advances a stronger account of legal agency from below, arguing that marginalized actors appropriate constitutional language as a resource for political mobilization and norm contestation, even if this occurs within a highly authoritarian political structure. His examples of everyday actors appropriating and translating legal ideas and creating local meanings of constitutional norms and principles might also be understood through Scott's notion of 'infrapolitics', whereby subordinate actors engage in forms of political contestation that do not immediately transform formal institutions but nevertheless preserve alternative political imaginaries and challenge dominant narratives in everyday settings (Scott 1990). Constitutional mobilization may therefore be significant not because it redistributes power in the short term, but because it sustains competing understandings of rights, citizenship and political authority, preserving alternative normative visions beneath the surface of authoritarian legality (Chua 2019; Batesmith and Stevens 2019; Batesmith and McEvoy 2025). These alternative visions are particularly important because, as Cheesman argues, authoritarian legality is frequently characterized not by the rejection of democratic legal norms, but through their appropriation and reinterpretation, justifying repression with concepts of stability and law and order (Cheesman 2015). For Lawrence, the 'micro-political constitutional contestations' in Cambodia raise the fundamental issue of whether such practices challenge dominant structures of power or instead operate within parameters that those structures continue to define. From a Gramscian perspective, such constitutional contestation reveals not only resistance to authority but also the continuing power of hegemonic frameworks to shape the terms within which resistance becomes intelligible (Gramsci 1971). Constitutional discourse may therefore function simultaneously as a resource for political mobilization and as a mechanism through which the boundaries of legitimate contestation are reproduced (McCann 1994).

Both books are faced with the obvious tension at the heart of everyday legality: the capacity to (re-)shape legal meaning does not necessarily entail the capacity to redistribute legal authority. Lawrence is more optimistic about the possibilities of constitutional agency from below, whereas Sperfeldt is more focused on institutional limitations that constrain participatory justice. Their shared contribution lies in demonstrating that participation in legal meaning-making is not synonymous with power over the institutional processes through which legal norms are authorized, implemented, and enforced. The central comparative question is not whether everyday actors participate in shaping legal norms, but whether such participation can alter the institutional distribution of legal authority itself. Both works suggest that transforming legal meaning is often more realistic than transforming the institutional structures through which legal authority is exercised.

7. Conclusion: towards a relational account of normativity

Beyond their substantive differences, both books advance a relational account of normativity. Legal meaning emerges neither exclusively from institutions nor entirely from social practice; rather, it is produced through the interaction between authoritative legal forms and the actors who interpret, invoke, adapt, and contest the norms in question. In this respect, both works

echo socio-legal traditions associated with Cover's 'jurisgenerative' communities (1983) and Moore's 'semi-autonomous social fields' (1973), where legal norms acquire meaning through interactions across multiple overlapping fields as sites of normative engagement. Additionally, their ethnographic contribution lies in the extent to which legal meaning-making remains possible even among those who played little or no part in the original design of the norms they invoke, including in contexts of highly constrained authoritarian legality.

Through their extensive qualitative and longitudinal studies, each author explores how individuals and local communities are not merely passive recipients of legal norms 'from above'. Instead, they demonstrate how legal norms are translated, adapted, and contested through interactions between institutional and grassroots actors. Whether this is victims' associations seeking meaningful reparations engaging with the donor agencies tasked with delivering the project through which this would be realized, or Buddhist monks applying spiritual and symbolic practices in the service of environmental or social justice protests, these are clear examples of vernacularization (Merry 2006), localization of rights (Wilson 1997), and legal consciousness (Silbey 2005). Both authors demonstrate the relevance for norm interpretation and translation of these multiple sites of normative engagement, while acknowledging that such participation in legal meaning-making does not inevitably result in any control over legal power or authority. As the previous section has discussed, not only is the capacity to shape legal meaning unevenly distributed, there is a limited sense in which legal authority is in any way distributed.

The joint contribution of both books is to extend the socio-legal traditions of exploring power, agency and the social life of law into fields that have up to now been relatively dominated by institutions. Sperfeldt adds to a growing body of scholarship that seeks to move beyond institutional and doctrinal analyses of reparations in international criminal justice by foregrounding the perspectives, expectations, and practices of affected communities (Rubio-Marín 2009; Sandoval 2010; Moffett 2014). Lawrence's intervention is particularly significant because it challenges a substantial body of scholarship that treats authoritarian constitutions primarily as instruments of control, strategic governance, or political legitimation (Shklar 1964; Moustafa 2007; Ginsburg and Simpser 2014). By foregrounding everyday constitutional agency, he demonstrates that constitutional norms may retain social and political significance even when their institutional guarantees are systematically undermined.

Taken together, the books remind us that law's normative content does not depend solely upon the institutions that promulgate it, but also upon the actors who contest and invoke it, the relationships through which law circulates, and the social lives in which its meaning is continually negotiated. In different ways, both authors show that the life of law lies not only in formal institutions but in the social worlds through which legal norms acquire meaning, authority, and effect.

References:

Anderson, Gavin W. 2005. *Constitutional Rights after Globalization*. Oxford: Hart Publishing.

Batesmith, Alex, and Jake Stevens. 2019. "In the Absence of the Rule of Law: Everyday Lawyering, Dignity and Resistance in Myanmar's 'Disciplined Democracy'." *Social & Legal Studies* 28 (5): 573-599.

Batesmith, Alex, and Kieran McEvoy. 2025. "'Closeted' cause lawyering in authoritarian Cambodia." *Law & Society Review* 59 (3): 463-495.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1987. "The Force of Law: Toward a Sociology of the Juridical Field." *Hastings Law Journal* 38: 805-853.

Cheesman, Nick. 2015. *Opposing the Rule of Law: How Myanmar's Courts Make Law and Order*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chen, Weitseng, and Hualing Fu, eds. 2020. *Authoritarian Legality in Asia: Formation, Development and Transition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chua, Lynette J. 2019. *The Politics of Love in Myanmar: LGBT Mobilization and Human Rights as a Way of Life*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Chua, Lynette J. 2022. "Constitutional Consciousness." In *The Cambridge Companion to Constitutional Theory*, edited by Richard Bellamy and Jeff King. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ciorciari, John D., and Anne Heindel. 2014. *Hybrid Justice: The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Cover, Robert M. 1983. "Nomos and Narrative." *Harvard Law Review* 97 (1): 4-68.

De, Rohit. 2018. *A People's Constitution: The Everyday Life of Law in the Indian Republic*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

De Greiff, Pablo (ed). 2006. *The Handbook of Reparations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dixon, Peter, and Chris Tenove. 2013. "International criminal justice as a transnational field: Rules, authority and victims." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 7 (3): 393-412.

Ehrlich, Eugen. 1936. *Fundamental Principles of the Sociology of Law*. Translated by Walter L. Moll. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Ewick, Patricia, and Susan S. Silbey. 1998. *The Common Place of Law: Stories from Everyday Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Fairclough, Norman. 2001. *Language and Power*. 2nd ed. Harlow: Pearson Education.

Galanter, Marc. 1974. "Why the 'Haves' Come Out Ahead: Speculations on the Limits of Legal Change." *Law and Society Review* 9 (1): 95-160.

Ginsburg, Tom, and Alberto Simpser, eds. 2014. *Constitutions in Authoritarian Regimes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gramsci, Antonio. 1971. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International Publishers.

Lawrence, Ben. 2025. *In the Shadow of the Constitution: The Micropolitics of Constitutional Contestation in Cambodia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McCann, Michael W. 1994. *Rights at Work: Pay Equity Reform and the Politics of Legal Mobilization*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Merry, Sally Engle. 2006. *Human Rights and Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Moffett, Luke. 2014. *Justice for Victims before the International Criminal Court*. London: Routledge.

Moore, Sally Falk. 1978. *Law as Process: An Anthropological Approach*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Moore, Sally Falk.1973. "Law and Social Change: The Semi-Autonomous Social Field as an Appropriate Subject of Study." *Law and Society Review* 7 (4): 719-746.

Moustafa, Tamir. 2007. *The Struggle for Constitutional Power: Law, Politics, and Economic Development in Egypt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Norén-Nilsson, Astrid. 2018. *Cambodia's Second Kingdom: Nation, Imagination, and Democracy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Rajagopal, Balakrishnan. 2003. *International Law from Below: Development, Social Movements and Third World Resistance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rajah, Jothie. 2012. *Authoritarian Rule of Law: Legislation, Discourse and Legitimacy in Singapore*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rubio-Marín, Ruth, ed. 2009. *The Gender of Reparations: Unsettling Sexual Hierarchies while Redressing Human Rights Violations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sandoval, Clara. 2010. *On the Road to Reparations for Victims of Armed Conflict*. Cambridge: Intersentia.

Sarat, Austin, and Thomas R. Kearns, eds. 1993. *Law in Everyday Life*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Schabas, William A. 2020. *An Introduction to the International Criminal Court*. 6th ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Scheppele, Kim Lane. 2004. "Constitutional Ethnography: An Introduction." *Law and Society Review* 38 (3): 389-406.

Scheppele, Kim Lane. 2018. "Autocratic Legalism." *University of Chicago Law Review* 85 (2): 545-584.

Schonthal, Benjamin. 2016. *Buddhism, Politics and the Limits of Law: The Pyrrhic Constitutionalism of Sri Lanka*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Scott, James C. 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Shklar, Judith N. 1964. *Legalism: Law, Morals, and Political Trials*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Silbey, Susan S. 2005. "After Legal Consciousness." *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 1: 323-368.

Sperfeldt, Christoph. 2022. *Practices of Reparations in International Criminal Justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Strangio, Sebastian. 2014. *Hun Sen's Cambodia*. Yale University Press.

Transitional Justice Institute. 2012. *The Belfast Guidelines on Reparations in Post-Conflict Societies*. Belfast: Transitional Justice Institute, University of Ulster.

United Nations General Assembly. 2005. *Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law*. UN Doc A/RES/60/147 (16 December 2005).

Wang, Shucheng. 2024. "Varieties of Authoritarian Legality." *Asia Pacific Law Review* 32 (2): 293-310.

Wilson, Richard Ashby. 2001. *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Legitimizing the Post-Apartheid State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wilson, Richard Ashby, ed. 1997. *Human Rights, Culture and Context: Anthropological Perspectives*. London: Pluto Press.