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International Human Rights, Decolonisation and Globalization: Becoming Human. by Shelley Wright. London: Routledge, 2001. 274 pp.

In recent years, two trends have dominated the study of human rights: the first arises from the work of scholars critically analyzing the nature and basis of the presumed universal nature of human rights; the second consists of scholarly efforts to examine the neglected contributions to the modern United Nations (UN) human rights regime by countries and peoples outside the Western core. Though such issues overlap, these two groups of scholars, have had little to say to each other. Those questioning the universality of rights, whether from a postmodern, relativist, or postcolonial perspective, tend to overlook the fact that Asian, African and Latin American voices actively supported and contributed to a discourse of universal human rights, and that this discourse is not merely a "Western" construct. Similarly, human rights scholars exploring the intellectual, political, and moral contributions of non-western countries and indigenous human rights groups sometimes fail to question how the universality of human rights has been constructed in light of the relative political strength and economic advantages of the United States and Western Europe .

Shelley Wright, the author of International Human Rights, Decolonisation, and Globalization has no inhibitions about attempting to create a fruitful dialogue between scholars representing these two trends. The book focuses on how the discourse of universality both shapes and is shaped by a multiplicity of socio-cultural traditions around the world. Drawing upon a wide variety of relevant disciplines including social and political theory, ethics, international relations, history, and international law, Wright argues that the expansion or adoption of ideas and institutions originating in Europe is not always the result of a unilateral imposition of colonialism. Nevertheless, it remains important to question the appropriateness of specific conceptions of "what it means to be 'human' to be inscribed onto cultures and peoples" (223). Focusing on the processes by which diverse understandings of humanness are posed, imposed and contested, she claims that "indigenous peoples and women played a prominent, though often hidden, role" in contributing to the notion of universal human rights (10).

The central contribution of this book lies in its detailed analysis of how the interactions between Western colonial powers and colonized indigenous peoples led to a significant social and cultural interchange, although the historical role of non-Western peoples in advancing the idea of human rights was subsequently marginalized. Wright argues that this marginalization was enacted through two processes: first, a colonizing process appropriated ideas about human dignity and respect from indigenous societies "while *at the same time* attempting to destroy them" (49); second, increasing the belief that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was the exclusive brainchild of a few Western powers which dominated the United Nations.

Following a general introduction in the first chapter, the next four chapters consider how questions of universality must be situated within the historical context of European expansionism. Wright illustrates her discussion of concepts such as subjectivity, individuality, sovereignty, and citizenship with examples ranging from the political history of the UDHR, economic globalization, the Haudenosaunee or Iroquois Confederacy, the early-modern persecution of witches, and the introduction of the printing press. This last example is employed to demonstrate how the development of the "literate subject" was crucial to the formation of a dual process whereby ideas about democracy and rights were more rapidly and widely

disseminated while, the consolidation of a literate culture contributed to advancing the conception of a "civilized people" which devalued oral cultures as "backwards" and "savage."

The final five chapters take up specialist debates over specific human rights issues including intellectual copyright laws, collective or peoples' rights, and socio-economic rights in relation to HIV/AIDS. Here Wright further develops her argument that the diverse origins of international human rights-and the thus correspondingly diverse conceptions of what a human being is-have been reduced to a conservative model which favors the rational, literate, educated, self-determining subject. Wright draws very closely on postmodern, feminist, and postcolonial thinking all of which emphasize the extent to which international human rights law largely reflects the interests of powerful Western states. Nevertheless, Wright also believes that human rights may be reconstructed by taking advantage of the positive aspects of globalization in order to foster greater democratic participation, encourage cultural revival, reclaim different traditions concerning the meaning of being human, and widen our understanding about for whom these rights are meant.

Wright's book is extremely comprehensive; its greatest strength is the wide range and depth of the literature from which she draws. However, this is also its greatest weakness, as several of its chapters suffer from information overload and a lack of cohesion among the numerous disparate theories. The result is that this is not an introductory text. The discussion is steeped both in legal literature and in contemporary social and political theory, and it also assumes a fair amount of historical knowledge.

At times, Wright's conclusions are too quick and overly general. For instance, while it is true that the political arrangement of the Iroquois Confederacy attracted the interest of a number of North American and European thinkers, it is too much to argue that it was from indigenous peoples that European settlers derived "concepts such as democratic rule, federal forms of government, constitutional checks and balances, freedoms of expression, thought, conscience, association and assembly" (44). Such hasty conclusions are rare, though, in what is overall an illuminating, intelligent, and challenging analysis. This book is an important contribution to the contemporary debates in human rights and will be of great value to scholars seeking a deeper understanding of the global, if not universal, nature of human rights.

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