

Hoffmann, Stefan-Ludwig (Hrsg.): *Human Rights in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011. ISBN: 9780521194266; 351 S.

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This collection of fifteen essays attempts to answer one of the fundamental questions confronting modern historians of human rights: How did human rights become widely perceived as self-evident truths over the course of the twentieth century? How did human rights, in other words, become the „doxa of our time,“ in which „anyone who voices doubt [...] apparently moves beyond the accepted bounds of universal morality in a time of humanitarian and military interventions“ (p. 1)? Rejecting teleological narratives that cast human rights as a natural and, ultimately, triumphant evolution over hundreds (or even thousands) of years, the essays emphasize that the formulation of a human rights discourse and the engagement between human rights and state and non-state actors were the „unpredictable results of political contestations“ over the course of the twentieth century (p. 4). Rather than reflecting universal values, writes editor Stefan-Ludwig Hoffman in a thoughtful and well-conceived introduction, the volumes’ contributors define human rights as „a relatively recent invention,“ produced by a „global history of violence and conflict“ (p. 25).

The essays in Part I, „The Emergence of Human Rights Regimes,“ emphasize the relationship between the rise of human rights discourse and the destabilization caused by the Second World War and the onset of the Cold War. In a sweeping essay, Mark Mazower convincingly argues that the new order that emerged after the Second World War created the conditions for rights to be separated from European notions of civilization. Europeans’ emphasis on human rights in the immediate post-war era, Mazower writes, initially reflected an effort to maintain the „Victorian civilizational dichotomy“ that had justified colonization of the non-European world (p. 40). By the late 1940s, however, as Cold War intensified, the standard of civilization,

along with human rights discourse, became subsumed in the superpower confrontation. Similarly, both G. Daniel Cohen and Mikael Rask Madsen’s essays on displaced persons in post-World War II Europe and the development of European human rights law between the 1940s and 1960s, respectively, emphasize the significance of the Cold War in shaping the development of human rights laws and practices in Europe.

In Part II, „Postwar Universalism and Legal Theory,“ Samuel Moyn focuses on the influence of a „spiritual and often explicitly religious approach to the human person“ on human rights consciousness in the 1940s, and argues that human rights were an outgrowth of „an epoch-making reinvention of conservatism“ (pp. 86-87). Rather than reflecting the legacy of Europe’s revolutionary or republican past or a post-Holocaust awareness, Moyn argues that human rights constituted „one element of a European reinvention of its humanism as it tried to put self-imposed disaster behind it“ (p. 87). Striking a similar note, both Glenda Sluga’s and Lora Wildenthal’s essays emphasize that human rights served as „political language“; Sluga’s study of French jurist René Cassin highlights how tension between European empires and non-European national sovereignty shaped the meaning of human rights, while Wildenthal examines how human rights were appropriated during the Allied occupation of Germany, „allowing Germans to cast themselves as victims and to suggest that Germans’ own earlier heinous actions had been balanced out.“ (p. 127).

Part III shifts the focus to human rights in the Soviet Union and its satellite states. In one of the volume’s most important contributions, Jennifer Amos assesses the Soviet Union’s human rights diplomacy following the successful 1948 vote on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Although often dismissed in the existing historiography as a „silence in human rights history,“ Amos argues that the subsequent decade was a „noisy space of debate,“ in which the Soviet government „embraced the Declaration as yet another weapon in the international ideological struggle that was part of the Cold War“ while simultaneously working to block domestic rights debates. (pp. 165, 148). The latter point is picked

by Benjamin Nathans, who analyzes „rights-talk“ in the USSR in the post-Stalin era. Emphasizing the need to move beyond narrow conceptions of human rights as a Western export, Nathans tracks the evolution of rights discourse from the 1930s to the 1970s, and concludes that rights were closely tied to the „Soviet project of building a new kind of society and a new kind of person“ (p. 188). Celia Donert rounds out this section with a thoughtful study of Charter 77 and the Roma in Socialist Czechoslovakia.

In Part IV, „Genocide, Humanitarianism, and the Rule of Law,“ Devin O. Pendas sets the tone in an essay examining the stagnation of the legalist paradigm that emerged after World War II emphasizing that both states and individuals could be culpable for criminal acts of mass violence. While noting that the Cold War confrontation and its influence on the United Nations played a significant role in marginalizing international legalism, Pendas focuses on the importance of national sovereignty arguments, both as a tool to hide domestic abuses and as a means of preventing foreign interventionism. Although human rights claims „have always sought legal validation,“ Pendas concludes, because of the expansiveness and flexibility of human rights rhetoric, „the logic and tactics of human rights activism, on the one hand, and international legalism, on the other, are not always compatible“ (p. 235).

Two well-articulated case studies underscore Pendas' conclusions. Fabian Klose convincingly argues that in the early 1950s Britain and France created an informal alliance seeking to „prevent the creation of a strong human rights regime, not only to protect their common colonial ambitions but also to hide massive use of violence in their wars of decolonization“ (p. 246). The legal tool of declaring a state of emergency, Klose asserts, allowed the colonial powers to circumvent universal rights and justify colonial abuses. Moving to the early 1970s, in a study of the international response to the West Pakistan Army's suppression of East Pakistan, A. Dirk Moses examines why the international community failed to condemn abuses despite extensive attention to the crisis and evidence of genocide. The complexity and, for many nations, threa-

tening nature of secession-issue, the elasticity of human rights rhetoric, and the ability of West Pakistan to use the state-sovereignty argument to its advantage, Moses concludes, precluded a humanitarian intervention to halt the killing or subsequent war crimes trials.

In Part V, the least conceptually cohesive section, Andreas Eckert offers a critical assessment of African nationalists and human rights from the 1940s to the 1970s. „For most African nationalists,“ he argues, „human rights were an issue of minor interest compared to matters which seemed much more pressing for late colonial and early independent states, such as nation building and fighting poverty.“ Human rights rhetoric, Eckert concludes, was „largely restricted to the sphere of international diplomacy“ (p. 285). Daniel Roger Maul's essay on the International Labour Organization (ILO) shifts the focus to non-state human rights organizations during the same time frame. Unlike the United Nations, Maul writes, as the „only international agency that fully involves NGOs in the decision-making process“ and with strong ties to the international trade union movement, the ILO remained active in promoting human rights (p. 303). Although debates over human rights intensified during the decolonization era, Maul contends that the ILO's „integrative concept of human rights“ insulated the organization from the cultural relativist criticism (p. 319).

In the final essay, Jan Eckel examines the international human rights campaign against Chile following the 1973 military coup d'état against socialist President Salvador Allende. In a thoughtful and compelling essay, Eckel argues that the international pressure leveled against the Chilean military dictatorship resulted from an „intricate combination of factors that had no obvious relation to the scale of violence committed.“ In Chile, Eckel continues, four factors contributed to the human rights campaign's success: „an international political constellation that contributed to isolating the regime, the junta's reaction to the human rights discourse, its information politics, and finally, the strength of private activism directed against the military regime“ (p. 327). Although human rights abuses were more extensive elsewhere, notably in Cambodia and Uganda, Eckel concludes, these fac-

tors resulted in Chile's widespread perception as a particularly egregious human rights pariah and fueled international condemnation.

Taken as a whole, this volume makes an important contribution to human rights scholarship. Historians have only recently begun to focus their attention on human rights in the twentieth century, and the essays in this collection reflect multi-archival and multilingual historical research. Rejecting narrowly teleological and triumphalist narratives, the contributors successfully demonstrate that rather than a natural evolution, the development of human rights was (and remains) a fundamentally politicized process at the national, international, and transnational levels. Given its encyclopedic-sounding title, it is worth noting that the overriding focus of this volume is Europe, and, to a lesser extent, its evolving relations with the colonial and, subsequently, decolonized world. The unique contribution of the latter to human rights receives relatively little attention in this volume. More surprisingly, although one section of the book is dedicated to the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc, none of the essays directly focuses on United States actors or the U.S. human rights policy. Finally, with the exception of Moses and Eckel's essays, the book focuses primarily on the mid-twentieth century and the early Cold War era; human rights scholars and practitioners steeped in the surge of human rights activism and policymaking that marked the 1970s will be surprised to find that the final phase of the Cold War and the immediate post-Cold War era is not a focal point of this volume. Nonetheless, this book has much to offer for human rights scholars, graduate students, and upper-division undergraduates.

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