





Among the examples of civil wars, armed secessionist movements and minority uprisings in the world today, many involve conflict between a minority group's aim for political self-determination, and the nation state's resistance to any diminution of sovereignty. With the expansion of the international regime of human rights, minority groups have reconceptualised their struggle with the understanding that a minority which is linguistically, religiously or ethnically distinctive is entitled to self-determination if their aspirations cannot be met. This book explores the relationship between minority rights, self-determination and secession within international law, by contextualising these issues in a detailed case study of the rise of Tamil separatism in Sri Lanka. Welhengama and Pillay show how Tamil communalism hardened into secession and assess whether the Sri Lankan government has met its obligations with respect to the right to self-determination short of secession. Focusing on the legal and human rights arguments for secession by the Tamil community of the North and East of Sri Lanka, the book demonstrates how the language of international law and international human rights played a major role in the development of the arguments for secession. Through a close examination of the case of the Tamil's secessionist movement the book presents valuable insights into why modern nation states find themselves threatened by separatist claims and bids for independence based on ethnicity.

'Human rights and conflict' is divided into three parts, each capturing the role played by human rights at a different stage in the conflict cycle.

In her innovative study of human rights discourse, Lena Khor takes up the prevailing concern by scholars who charge that the globalization of human rights discourse is becoming yet another form of cultural, legal, and political imperialism imposed from above by an international human rights regime based in the Global North. To counter these charges, she argues for a paradigmatic shift away from human rights as a hegemonic, immutable, and ill-defined entity toward one that recognizes human rights as a social construct comprised of language and of language use. She proposes a new theoretical framework based on a global discourse network of human rights, supporting her model with case studies that examine the words and actions of witnesses to genocide (Paul Rusesabagina) and humanitarian organizations (Doctors Without Borders). She also analyzes the language of texts such as Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*. Khor's idea of a globally networked structure of human rights discourse enables actors (textual and human) who tap into or are linked into this rapidly globalizing system of networks to increase their power as speaking subjects and, in so doing, to influence the range of acceptable meanings and practices of human rights in the cultural sphere. Khor's book is a unique and important contribution to the study of human rights in the humanities that revitalizes viable notions of agency and liberatory network power in fields that have been dominated by negative visions of human capacity and moral action.

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