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It is a curious phenomenon, how analysts of widely varying education, background and political persuasion almost always seem to arrive at a unanimous consensus, that the mainstream conception of human rights, has western fingerprints smudged all over it. The question is: Is the mainstream conception of human rights shaped by western perspectives? Whereas these standards so innocuously touted as ‘universal’ may escape the notice of a disinterested observer, discerning global thinkers have the nuance to notice the glaring foisting of western ideals onto the rest of the world. As the discussion on this contentious issue rages further onwards, the ultimate question lies in whether advocating for global human rights, is inadvertently perpetuating a framework rooted in western values. From a relative power perspective, those who wield wealth and military might get to make the ‘rights’, and thus the deliberations are influenced by the thought process, values, and idiosyncratic personality variables of the ones who formulate the rights.

The bone of contention in this perpetual dilemma is the fact that the modern campaign for human rights, has been perceived by many as having its origins in western (Euro-North American) culture and political history (Penna, Campbell, 1998). The result of focusing on western human rights discourse is that non-western cultures, customs, norms and practices are misperceived to be anti-democratic, chauvinistic, authoritarian and bigoted in some instances (Davenport, Christian, 1996). The lack of context and nuance for the ‘why’ nonwestern societies operate in their own unique ways contributes to a Eurocentric lens being applied to every society, without regard for their idiosyncrasies and quirks. The push and pull between the universality and relativism of human rights is the crux of this argument.

It does not escape the keen eye, for example, how the modern concept of human rights is rooted in laissez-faire, liberal values of ‘live and let live’, which starkly contrast with the societal attitudes of many nations across the globe. Or the emphasis on ‘individual rights and freedoms’, which is a far cry away from the collectivist mindset common in the Orient, or even the communalist ‘Ubuntu’ style much revered in Africa. The peculiarities of liberal individualism, which is characteristic of the Eurocentric tradition, are not lost on other cultures who do not possess the same ideals, hence why conflating western values as any kind of standardized global ideal is at

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best misleading, and at worst disingenuous, hypocritical and patronizing to the rest of the civilized world (Penna, Campbell, 1998).

In Cindy Holder and David Reidy's 'Human Rights; the Hard Question', the Eurocentric and western biases leak through in an abundant number of instances. Most glaringly, David Reidy's arguments being a corollary extension of John Rawls's theories of justice and public reason, totally confirm that the western intellectual tradition within the field of human rights is a runaway train trying to paint Eurocentric perspective on human rights as the collective global sentiment. This could not be further from the truth. As Reidy advances on the Rawlsian thought school, this not only creates an ideological echo chamber where western viewpoints are regurgitated and amplified, but also leads to the stifling and drowning of sentiments of unlike-minded scholars who do not share the Rawlsian worldview, heritage and influence.

Reidy's addendum to the Rawlsian maxim of public reason is an embedded classical western democratic tradition that emphasizes rational discourse and consensus formation (Rawls, 1971). The significance of this concept, when extended to the global practice of Human Rights, is that it leads to a presumption of political engagement which is commonplace in western democratic contexts but does not necessarily apply or occur in other cultural settings around the globe.

On the other hand, there are very compelling anthropological counterarguments to Reidy and Holder's preference for Rawlsian maxim of public reason being a uniquely Eurocentric tradition. For example, rational discourse is not exclusively a western dialectic construct. Everywhere else in the world, societies have cultivated understanding and achieved innovation through rigorous logical reasoning. Similarly, consensus formation is not a peculiar western practice, as humans have done this throughout time in order to organize their societies and form ingroup associations of shared values and practices. This anthropological angle almost completely dispels the dismissive notion that the Rawlsian thought school adopted by Reidy and Holder is inapplicable for the rest of human society, simply because it was propounded by western scholars.

Another contentious front on which the dilemma of whether western perspectives are shaping the global standards on human rights brings itself up, is the position on intergender dynamics and gender equality. Feminist rhetoric in western-propagated human rights standards shove upon the rest of the world a view on gender dynamics reflective of post-third-wave feminism, which is in itself a culmination of a series of events that occurred almost exclusively in the western world, specifically the EU and US (Kugler, 1998). This makes the conclusions and trajectory of these sentiments irrelevant and inapplicable in other contexts where the western feminist revolution was not experienced. It is thus not just culturally but also politically tone-deaf to share the implications of western women's suffrage with African and South American societies, where women had meaningful political participation even in pre-colonial times.

In some states in Asia, we see the Western-friendly states tend to align their values with the mainstream conception of human rights (such states may include but not limited to :Taiwan, South Korea) Political activities in a good number of Asian states show that common people and governments are now perceiving human rights as a current issue that resonates with their ethics, culture and politics (Donnelly, 2007). It is keen to note whether there are disparities between the West-friendly states and the non-friendly ones in relation to what constitutes human rights, with an aim of drawing conclusions on whether the mainstream conception of human rights is shaped by the Western perspectives.

Feminist critics assert that more equal societies that are devoid of gender hierarchies or pecking orders that relate to race, ethnicity, caste in this case, are expected to be less affected by collective aspects of violence within in comparison to others (Melander, 2005). Despite a handful of first-hand tests indicating that states with more gender equality are less likely to demonstrate aggression and or willingness to fight in their relations with other states, as theoretically predicted. Erik Melander notes the opposite and casts doubt on that finding by asserting that to his understanding, no quantitative study has been published concerning the connection between gender equality and the violent nature of a state within its boundaries.

In contrast, the essentialist argument builds on the presumption that women, due to their reproductive nature and role that is, their ability to reproduce and the modelling they get in the form of skills from their female parents tends to make them abhor violence and lean towards peaceful ways of resolving conflicts (Goldstein, 2001).

The weakness of this western feminist perspective to human rights, is that is grossly discounts intergender dynamics as carried out in other parts of the world, where the ‘tabula rasa’, blank slate egalitarianism attitude is not practiced or even considered, yet the sexes relate in a healthy way (Caprioli, 2001). Critics of global westernized standards of human rights maintain the view that there are other ways to safeguard women’s rights without adopting the western cultural Marxism model.

In a strong reaction to western condescension to how intergender relations are carried out outside of the Eurocentric sphere of influence, rose an alternative, more culturally sensitive version of the feminist movement in the form of intersectionality, where a nuanced approach to the immediate society’s outlook and practices is taken into consideration, instead of blindly applying blanket standards copied and pasted from western nations.

David R Penna and Patricia J Campbell, in their submission gave us a treasure trove of research material into the topic of whether it really is the case that our mainstream conception of human rights is shaped by western perspectives. Campbell and Penna observed how the universalist human rights approach emphasized individual rights, which is a trademark concept of the western political thought school, especially liberalism in particular. This, coupled with the imposition of Eurocentric values on nonwestern peoples had the effect of devaluing and undermining local customs and norms. The resistance to this cultural prejudice led to the perception of the imposition of western values under the pretext of human rights as a form and extension of cultural imperialism.

Penna and Campbell were however careful enough to note the limits of a purely relativist stance on the issue. They analyzed how applying relativism in entirety can undermine the safeguarding of fundamental human protections and open the door to excusing or justifying harmful and retrogressive practices under the guise of relativist cultural practices.

As a crowning cherry to their deductions, Campbell and Penna ultimately seek a middle ground approach that is sensitive to cultural peculiarities and diversity, without sacrificing the core foundational tenets of human rights (Penna, Campbell, 1998). This perspective has the potential and goal to move beyond the traditional binary and tone-deaf dichotomy of universality as opposed to relativism. This is undoubtedly the most based approach in comparison to the other scholarly works we have cited and analyzed in this article. Penna and Campbell’s clarion call for a pluralistic approach and understanding of human rights that factors in diverse cultural perspectives was a total gamechanger to the discourse on this contentious topic of academic, civil, political and social



interest. This inclusive framework is lauded for its comprehensive nature, and forward-looking approach as it also creates provision for dynamic interactions. Dynamic interactions in essence, describe the fluid nature of cultural practices, which are not static ‘in situ’, but are ever more in evolution and flux. This opens the door for a more realistic and truly universal set of human right principles that is not dominated, commandeered over or condescended upon by any single cultural outlook, particularly the western one, which had already been accepted as the ‘vanilla’ norm to conform to by a huge contingent of the world population. The resulting cultural dysmorphia had already eroded some cultures, especially through the formal school system which promoted western cultural practices as refined, and native cultures as savage and uncouth. Lastly, their work also opened the floor for a constructive dialogue between cultures, in developing and implementing human right standards. By onboarding a wide array of cultural inputs, a clearer, more blended reflection of the true human standards of human rights are able to be formulated, through mutual understanding, situational awareness and sensitivity to context.

Still on the topic of Cultural Relativism, Jack Donnelly made several astute observations in his scholarly work titled "The Relative Universality of Human Rights". He gave a historical account of how cultural relativism was used in the 1980's by vicious dictators and autocratic tyrants to justify their depredations, atrocities and infringements upon their own populaces (Donnelly, 2007). By making frantic appeals to culture, they could mystify the true depravity of their actions. It was at this time that an over-emphasis on universalism seemed not merely appropriate, but essential. Today, human rights are backed by the world's most ubiquitous sociopolitical, economic, and cultural powers. International bodies like the United Nations and several non-governmental organizations have set objectives geared towards the universality of human rights. Their impact is visible to such a point that they have now become ideologically hegemonic in the international community at large. This has had a major impact on the globalization of human rights. The direct or indirect push for states to be democratic too is a key factor in analysing the impact of the west on shaping mainstream conception of human rights. As states move to enhance democracy, they borrow heavily from the west's perspectives. Whereas it may seem to only affect election processes, democracy's connection to freedom of expression cannot be understated.

It is important to note that as the world grows smaller, we are either likely to see an increased clash of cultures, where the conservatives wish to remain in their ways and the liberals continue on an upward trajectory to complete free will, or unification of cultures in the context of what constitutes human rights. Civilizations themselves have been argued to be living things that eat, grow, and die. However, we will have failed the actual living organisms specifically humanity by failing to protect their rights in the name of cultural differences, perspectives' clash or ideological differences.

In conclusion, having examined the reflections, deductions and conclusions of Cindy Holder, David Reidy, Erik Melander and the illuminating works of David Penna and Patricia Campbell, it is self-evident that the mainstream conception of human rights is undoubtedly and significantly molded by western ideals and values. Holder and Reidy's postulations, which were grounded in Eurocentric philosophical tenets and traditions, highlight the limitations of applying these frameworks on a universal scale. Melander's arguments further underscored how western-centric approaches such as lobbying for absolute gender equality, may align and conform with liberal and democratic sentiments, but not translate very well when applied to diverse cultural contexts. Penna and Campbell's revolutionary writings carved an important bridge to usher public discourse on this topic from the ignorant dichotomy of a binary lens in viewing matters of universality versus

relativism. Their duple thought machine crafted a balanced resolution which embraces the idiosyncratic quirks and peculiarities of diverse cultures and thus mitigate the domineering of western values and the resentment it attracted through the perception of cultural imperialism by those oppressed by it.

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