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978-0-521-70755-8 - Universal Human Rights in a World of Difference

Brooke A. Ackerly

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Universal Human Rights in a World of Difference

From the diverse work and often competing insights of women's human rights activists, Brooke Ackerly has written a feminist *and* a universal theory of human rights that bridges the relativists' concerns about universalizing from particulars and the activists' commitment to justice. Unlike universal theories that rely on shared commitments to divine authority or to an "enlightened" way of reasoning, Ackerly's theory relies on rigorous methodological attention to difference and disagreement. She sets out human rights as at once a research ethic, a tool for criticism of injustice, and a call to recognize our obligations to promote justice through our actions. This book will be of great interest to political theorists, feminist and gender studies scholars, and researchers of social movements.

BROOKE A. ACKERLY is Associate Professor of Political Science at Vanderbilt University. She is the author of *Political Theory and Feminist Social Criticism* (Cambridge, 2000) and co-editor of *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations* (Cambridge, 2006).

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For Aasha

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Acknowledgments

Writing is a privilege. Writing acknowledgments is a challenging privilege. How do I appreciatively bring to light the collective effort that this project has been *and* take single authorship of the ideas it generated?

My first thanks goes to Marie and her family for asking for help, instilling their trust, and (much later) allowing me to tell their story. Despite our challenges of communication and their accumulation of unbelievable misfortunes, they were continually courageous. I appreciate their renewable faith in the possibility of a better world and better life for the children. I am also grateful to the host of people who helped me understand their life situation and support their case. At times it was unreal to me; by listening to me retell their story and offering constructive advice or direct help, many friends sustained my commitment to Marie's family. These include Catia Confortini, Sarah Park, Klint Alexander, and Bina D'Costa. Holly Tucker and Anne Marie Goetz showed true friendship by helping me understand, fulfill, and find the boundaries of my obligations to Marie and her family.

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Perhaps, despite all of its influences, a piece of feminist scholarship can be understood to be single-authored. (Certainly, I wouldn’t want

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the reader to hold anyone other than me responsible for the mistakes herein.) However, with apologies to Mary Catherine Bateson, the project shows again that a feminist cannot compose her life or her scholarship alone. My particular circumstances and relationships have enabled me to compose *this* feminist life, and *this* feminist work on immanent universal human rights. At the center of this project are all of the contributors who generously gave of their time and reflection in public venues and in private. I hope that each is strengthened in her attempt to make it possible for others to live a feminist life in their not-so-feminist worlds.