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Christian Reus-Smit

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## *Individual Rights and the Making of the International System*

We live today in the first global system of sovereign states in history, encompassing all of the world's polities, peoples, religions and civilizations. Christian Reus-Smit presents a new account of how this system came to be, one in which struggles for individual rights play a central role. The international system expanded from its original European core in five great waves, each involving the fragmentation of one or more empires into a host of successor sovereign states. In the most important, associated with the Westphalian settlement, the independence of Latin America, and post-1945 decolonization, the mobilization of new ideas about individual rights challenged imperial legitimacy, and when empires failed to recognize these new rights, subject peoples sought sovereign independence. Combining theoretical innovation with detailed historical case-studies, this book advances a new understanding of human rights and world politics, with individual rights deeply implicated in the making of the global sovereign order.

CHRISTIAN REUS-SMIT is a Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia and Professor of International Relations at the University of Queensland. Among his previous books, he is author of *American Power and World Order* (2004) and *The Moral Purpose of the State* (1999); co-author of *Special Responsibilities: Global Problems and American Power* (2012); and editor of *The Politics of International Law* (2004).

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*For*

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*Lili*

*Beautiful and bright by name, beautiful and bright by nature*

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## *Contents*

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i>	ix
Introduction		1
1 The expansion of the international system		15
2 Struggles for individual rights		35
3 The Westphalian settlement		68
4 The independence of Spanish America		106
5 Post-1945 decolonization		151
Conclusion		193
<i>Bibliography</i>		212
<i>Index</i>		227

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## *Preface*

This book is the product of two converging interests. The first is my longstanding interest in the nature and development of international systems, particularly our present global system. Indeed, it is the *global* nature of this system that I have recently found especially intriguing. How did such an utterly unique political order come to be? The second is my interest in the politics of human rights and my frustration with how this politics is conventionally narrated. The overwhelming tendency is to tell a twentieth-century story, as though the rights of individuals had little impact on world politics prior to this. At the very least, events such as the American and French revolutions render these narrations curious. Either the revolutions had nothing to do with world politics, or they had nothing to do with individual rights, both of which seem odd propositions. It was in pursuit of these interests that I happened upon the historical convergences that occupy center stage in the following chapters; namely, the relationship between struggles over individual rights, the fragmentation of empires, and the expansion of the international system.

Understanding these convergences has not been an easy task, and it may well be that this book is but another step in my own reflections on the subject. But to the extent that it is *a* culmination of my struggles, however temporary it might be, I must declare my thanks to the many individuals and institutions who have helped me along the way. My first debt is to my friends and intellectual companions who through our many conversations have helped me wrestle with the issue and fine-tune the argument. I am especially indebted here to Emanuel Adler, Mlada Bukovansky, Peter Christoff, Ian Clark, Tim Dunne, Richard Devetak, Robyn Eckersley, Greg Fry, Paul Keal, Jacinta O'Hagan, Andrew Phillips, Richard Price, Heather Rae, Henry Shue, and Nicholas Wheeler.

From its earliest incarnations I have taken this project on the road, airing its evolving arguments and gathering feedback from all

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who would listen. I thus wish to thank audiences at the following institutions where I presented seminars and lectures: University of Aberystwyth; Australian National University; University of California, Berkeley; Bielefeld University; University of Bremen; Danish Institute of International Studies, Copenhagen; European University Institute; Goethe University of Frankfurt; Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva; London School of Economics; University of Oxford; University of Queensland; School of Oriental and African Studies; Sciences Po, Paris; and University of Sydney.

The research and writing of this book would not have been possible without the generous financial support provided by a variety of institutions. Early work was supported by a three-year Discovery Grant from the Australian Research Council, and by funds provided by the Department of International Relations at the Australian National University. The broad contours of the argument were hammered out in the peace and quiet afforded by the award of a Fernand Braudel Senior Fellowship at the European University Institute (EUI) in the academic year 2008–9. The final preparation of the manuscript took place during my tenure in the Chair in International Relations at the EUI, and I thank the Department of Social and Political Sciences for both its financial support and for providing such a collegial environment in which to discuss and reflect. I am particularly grateful to the late Professor Peter Mair who appointed me to both the Braudel Fellowship and the Chair in IR. He never wavered in his support for my work, and I, like all of those who knew him, mourn his passing deeply.

While at the EUI I was fortunate to teach a doctoral seminar on rights in world politics, and later with Rainer Baubock one on rights in political theory and international relations. These were immensely stimulating classes, and I thank Rainer and participating graduate students for discussions that have greatly influenced my thinking on these issues. These classes were testimony to the fact that research and the teaching of smart, engaged students can be more than complementary; they can be mutually enriching.

During the course of the project, I benefited from the hard work of a number of research assistants, all of whom put their shoulders to the wheel with enthusiasm and skill. My thanks go to Lacy Davey, Gilberto Estrada Harris, Nicole George, Patrick Herron, Lynn Savery, and Andrea Warnecke. Gilberto needs special thanks for translating a number of key documents on Spanish-American independence.

Earlier rehearsals of parts of the argument were published in a number of journals and edited collections, and I thank their publishers for permission to draw on these works. See ‘Human rights and the social construction of sovereignty’, *Review of International Studies*, 27.4 (2001), 519–38; ‘Reading history through constructivist eyes’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 37.2 (2008), 395–414; ‘On rights and institutions’, in Charles R. Beitz and Robert E. Goodin (eds.), *Global Basic Rights* (Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 25–48; ‘Struggles for individual rights and the expansion of the international system’, *International Organization*, 65.2 (2001), 207–42; and ‘Human rights in a global ecumene’, *International Affairs*, 87.5 (2011), 1205–18. Feedback from the editors and referees of these journals and books played an invaluable role in helping me to sharpen and refine my ideas and central claims, and I thank all of them for their engagement with the project.

Finally, my biggest thanks go to Heather, Lili and Sam, my fellow adventurers in life. In both Canberra and Florence my study has been open to the hustle and bustle of family life; in fact, Lili and Sam have just parried past my desk sword-fighting, followed by our young but horse-like dog, Manuel the giant Weimaraner. They have thus been ‘around’ this project for its entire gestation, and I would not have had it any other way. Heather’s and my conversations about this and other aspects of world politics have been a major influence on my thinking, and without her love and support I might have dropped the whole thing somewhere in the middle of the Reformation. Sam and Lili have also given me lots of love and encouragement, but they have worked their influence through a combination of delightful distraction and surprising engagement with ‘Dad’s book about human rights’.

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