

## Significance of international law in legal research: A Third World approach to the transferability of international legal standards to domestic contexts

W. Seneviratne, K. A. A. N. Thilakarathna

*Department of Public and International Law, Faculty of Law, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka*

This paper critically interrogates the fraught and often asymmetrical relationship between international law and domestic legal research through the analytical lens of Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL). It explores how international legal standards and norms are transferred, selectively adapted, or outright contested within the legal systems of postcolonial states, where the legacies of imperialism continue to shape institutional, epistemic, and normative landscapes. By grounding the inquiry in TWAIL's four central critiques, historical, structural, epistemic, and emancipatory, which collectively expose the deep-rooted inequalities and hegemonic biases embedded in the international legal order this study challenges the presumed universality, neutrality, and legitimacy of international legal norms. Through a methodology that combines critical discourse analysis, multi-sited ethnography, and decolonial research strategies, the paper analyzes case studies from Sri Lanka and India to reveal how embedding of international legal standards often fails to resonate with local legal imaginaries and social realities. The findings emphasize that such legal transfers are not merely technical acts of compliance or reform, but politically loaded processes that risk reproducing colonial hierarchies under the guise of universality and modernization. The research argues that meaningful integration of international norms into domestic systems demands hybridization strategies that privilege local jurisdiction, incorporate indigenous legal epistemologies, and embrace community-based participatory mechanisms. Rather than viewing resistance to international law as regressive or parochial, the paper positions it as a necessary and generative act of legal self-determination as a sovereign right that meets up a State's international obligations. It concludes that TWAIL provides a robust conceptual and methodological framework to move beyond tokenistic inclusivity or reformist caricature, toward a pluralistic and emancipatory vision of international legal ordering one that genuinely respects local sovereignty, values epistemic diversity, and addresses the democratic deficits inherent in the global legal regime that respect decolonized identity of former colonies. In doing so, this work contributes to broader debates on the decolonization of legal knowledge, the politics of normativity, and the construction of a more equitable and multipolar international legal order.

**Keywords:** *Third World Approaches to International Law, Legal hybridization, Postcolonial legal systems, International norm transfer*