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THE APARTNESS OF IDEAL AND REALITY

Anticolonialism, Eurocentrism and Ubuntu Philosophy in the South African Freedom Charter

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ABSTRACT: This article contributes to scholarly debate concerning universalist discourse, as either advantageous or detrimental to addressing inequalities between the West and the Global South. First, I explore the theoretical backdrop of the dispute, positing that differing notions of how multiple modernities interrelate informs divergent conceptualizations of universalist discourse, as either rigidly Eurocentric or contextually adaptable. Secondly, I analyze the South African Freedom Charter from both perspectives, arguing that we should recognize universalist discourse as a powerful tool in formulating political visions of decolonization; and conversely, that we should be cautious when utilizing such discourse due to its inherent Eurocentric capabilities.

KEYWORDS: Decolonization, Universalism, Cultural Relativism, Eurocentrism, Ubuntu.

Introduction

Historically, political visions of alternative futures have been a powerful driving force behind social change. The Enlightenment's confrontation with absolute monarchy has since then conditioned numerous political visions of new social structures and global power relations. However, these visions possess a certain Eurocentrism on account of their origin within the Enlightenment. The question is then, what possibilities and limitations present themselves when Enlightenment thought is implemented in political visions of decolonization in the Global South?

This deliberation is reflective of a scholarly debate within the field of postcolonialism pertaining to *universalism*. In this context, universalism is defined as "discourses that are simultaneously categorical—they posit 'universal' categories such as 'humanity' or 'Man'—as well as conceptual—they elaborate universalizing notions such as 'equality' or 'freedom' on the basis of these categories" (Mangharam 2017: 2). Universalism is thus pluralized in this context. The ongoing debate surrounding this concept can be condensed to the following two propositions:

1. Universalisms are inherently Eurocentric, and therefore problematic when applied to non-Western political contexts.

2. Universalisms are contextually adaptable, and therefore indispensable in tackling global inequality despite its role in colonialism.

This article attempts to navigate and supplement this discussion by drawing upon two analytic approaches that exemplify each of these propositions, and subsequently applying them, in alternation, throughout an analytic discussion of the South African Freedom Charter. Upon its declaration in 1955, the Freedom Charter shook the foundations of South African society by outlining a set of political goals for the anti-apartheid movement. The Freedom Charter is a prime example of a political vision of decolonization. Furthermore, it utilizes universalist discourse whilst addressing issues specific to South African society—such as demanding freedom of movement in

response to the 'Pass Laws' of apartheid.[1] Importantly, this paradoxical presence of universal and culturally relative discourse each present an analytic entry-point, which accommodates two distinct methods of approach to universalism that condition each side of the debate. As an object of study, the Freedom Charter thus allows us to navigate this field of contestation whilst facilitating an analytical discussion where both contentions collide constructively.

In this article, I first explore Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2000) critique of the teleological view of history, and Shmuel Eisenstadt's (2000) corresponding notion of multiple modernities, positing these theorizations as the watershed moment out of which the contestation surrounding universalisms emerged. I argue that differing notions of how multiple modernities interrelate, informs divergent conceptualizations of universalisms as either obstinately Eurocentric or contextually adaptable. Secondly, I extrapolate two distinct analytic frameworks from Ann Laura Stoler's (2016) and Adom Getachew's (2016; 2019) broader theories and repurpose them as analytic approaches that exemplify each side of the debate. Finally, I juxtapose these approaches as counterpoints in an analytical discussion of the Freedom Charter's discourse, arguing that universalisms' contextual adaptability makes them powerful tools in the formulation of political visions of decolonization. At the same time, however, we should utilize universalist discourse cautiously due to its immanent Eurocentric capabilities.

From a Singular History to Multiple Modernities

This article is situated within the inter-disciplinary field of postcolonialism. More specifically, in the field of contention surrounding universalism that emerged in the wake of Dipesh Chakrabarty's canonical work *Provincializing Europe* (2000), Shmuel Eisenstadt's article *Multiple Modernities* (2000), and their respective critiques of the teleological view of history, which came to prominence during the Enlightenment (Carr 2020: 313).

In short, this view of history is grounded in the fundamental Enlightenment principle that Man can master both himself and nature by virtue of his reason (ibid.: 311). Accordingly, this perspective

[1] 'Pass Laws' refers to the restrictions imposed on black South Africans' freedom of movement with the implementation of the Natives Act of 1923.

views history as a process of human perfectibility leading inexorably towards the emancipation of Man (ibid.). Moreover, this process is seen as a reasonable affair, as reason not only sets the goal, but also governs its realization (ibid.: 311-312). Crucially, however, 'political modernity'—characterized by state institutions, bureaucracy, and capitalism—is understood as the prerequisite to this historical progression, which, during the Enlightenment, was something exclusive to European polities (Chakrabarty 2000: 4). As such, Europe is implicated as the sole proprietor of reason and the measuring rod of social progress (ibid.: 9).

Thus, this theory puts forth an evolutionary scale in its interpretation of history, where 'the West' occupies the forefront, and 'the rest' occupy what once was. Furthermore, the historical prognosis of humanity's emancipation thereby depends upon the expansion of Enlightenment thought and political modernity, from the European centre towards its distant peripheries (Eisenstadt 2000: 1). Consequently, this view can lead to phenomena such as European hegemonism (by idealizing Europe), colonialism (by legitimizing the expansion of this ideal), and anachronistic exclusion (by justifying the subsequent subjugation of colonized peoples on account of their 'pre-modern' status) (Carr 2020: 316; Chakrabarty 2000: 8). As such, the teleological view of history and its singular conception of 'modernity' has inherent Eurocentric capabilities, insofar as it encapsulates the notion of Europe as a paragon of progress.

This theory of historical progression may appear as a self-fulfilling prophecy, as political modernity is a truly global phenomenon today (Chakrabarty 2000: 4). However, the historical development of how modernity spread throughout the world was not foreseeable: a process wherein political modernity, and the political discourse that corresponds with it, takes different forms in different contexts (Eisenstadt 2000: 1-2). This pluralization of modernity is what is encapsulated in the notion of *multiple modernities*, which understands the history of modernity as a process of "continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs" (ibid.). According to Eisenstadt, this process is carried forward by various actors within the political sphere—from institutions to activists—who continuously co-constitute unique manifestations of modernity (ibid.: 2). Even though Western modernity might act as a frame of reference in non-Western contexts, modernization and Westernization are not synonymous. However, although modernities vary from

context to context they should not be understood in isolation, as they interrelate and affect each other considerably (ibid.). This dynamic constitutes the watershed out of which the disputation of universalism emerges, as different perspectives on how multiple modernities interrelate, informs differing perceptions of what universalisms communicate.

Discursive Divergence

In order to theorize the interaction between differing and co-existing modernities, I draw upon the work of Ann Laura Stoler and Adom Getachew and showcase how it determines their divergent conceptualizations of universalisms—as rigidly Eurocentric and contextually adaptable, respectively.

Alternative Universalisms

In Getachew's perspective, universalisms are first and foremost understood in relation to their *specificity* (Getachew 2016: 823): "Specificity entails attention to the particular political problems from which [discourses] emerged and highlights how [they] themselves inaugurate ideals rather than merely realizing existing ideals" (ibid.). When we, according to Getachew, decipher universalisms as an innovative response to specific political challenges, a different conceptualization of universalisms emerges, that of *alternative universalisms* (ibid.: 839). In this view the Freedom Charter is thus primarily understood in relation to particular political issues (ibid.: 823). On the basis of this relational understanding, it is highlighted how Enlightenment thought is reinvented in diverse ways in different contexts (ibid.: 839). However, Getachew does not deny the influence of the Enlightenment on alternative universalisms, she simply sees it as subordinate in relation to discourses' specific circumstances (ibid.). Thus, Getachew's conceptualization of universalisms corresponds with a decentering of Europe: a reinterpretation of the power relation between multiple modernities, where the periphery's political specificity overshadows the metropole's political modernity.

However, despite the marginalization of Enlightenment discourse it is not completely voided in Getachew's perspective, because the globalization of European modernity, and its distinct manifestations in colonial societies is precisely what she believes created a corresponding global

counterpoint—an "anticolonial nationalism" (Getachew 2019: 2). Instead of regarding this nationalism as foreclosing internationalism, Getachew rather views it as an international anticolonial modernity (ibid.). According to Getachew, this anticolonial nationalism rethought state sovereignty, idealized global redistribution, and formulated a vision of a reconstitution of the post-war world order (ibid.: 2-3). Hence, Getachew terms this modernity as *worldmaking* (ibid.).

When applied upon the Freedom Charter, this worldmaking modernity overshadows that of the Enlightenment, because it primarily included anglophone colonial societies, such as South Africa, in the post-war era. In addition to understanding the Freedom Charter in relation to specificity, it is thus also understood in reference to worldmaking. For example, the response to particular domestic issues can entail significant implications internationally, such as self-determination which directly confronts the power relation between colony and metropole (ibid.: 4-5). This dialectic between the specific and the universal is exactly that, which constitutes the conceptualization of the Freedom Charter as worldmaking: it not only transforms the Enlightenment's universal language in regard to its specific circumstance, it also formulates a transnational vision by virtue of its relation to worldmaking. Thus, the most significant interrelationship between modernities is one shared between a distinct South African modernity and worldmaking when the Freedom Charter is approached as an alternative universalism.

Postcolonial Universalisms

Stoler's approach to universalism stems from a postcolonial perspective: the convincing prognosis that colonialism is not simply a bygone era, but something which implicitly conditions the demands, priorities, and constraints of contemporary politics (Stoler 2016: 3). According to Stoler, this temporality can be captured in the analytical concept of *duress* (ibid.: 7). Duress designates the manifestation of colonial power relations, which can take numerous forms: "How one chooses to address (…) duress depends (…) on where and among whom it is sought, how it is imagined to manifest [and] the temporalities in which it is lodged" (ibid.). In drawing upon Stoler, I conceptualize duress as Enlightenment thought manifested through concepts and categorizations in the Freedom Charter's discourse. Concepts are not mere tools in Stoler's view, but rather "seductive and powerful agents" that invite appropriation and should be treated as access points to imperial

logics that implicitly impose a relationship of power (ibid.: 8). Thus, concepts are actors in their own right, and accordingly "The challenge is both to discern the work we do with concepts and the work that concepts may explicitly or inadvertently exert on us" (ibid.: 9). This approach is encapsulated in the term *concept-work* (ibid.: 17), which first and foremost entails retaining concepts "both as mobile and as located as they are in the world" (ibid.: 19). As mentioned, the concepts I am concerned with are located in the European Enlightenment, and their presence in the Freedom Charter is testament to their mobility. Simultaneously, it is important to recognize the power relations they are embedded in—such as Eurocentrism (ibid.: 17). In drawing upon Stoler, I thus treat concepts as: "productive touchstones of political contest (…) as occasions rather than obstacles to ask how conceptual claims assert themselves; as entry points of inquiry (…) into the historiography of reason, colony (…) and imperial sovereignty" (ibid.: 21). Accordingly, this approach calls attention to the genealogy of universalisms, which stretches back into the Age of Enlightenment, thereby foregrounding the interrelationship between European and South African modernity. As such, this relational approach and the power relation that thereby is emphasized "opens to what concepts implicitly and often quietly foreclose, as well as what they encourage and condone" (ibid.: 18-19).

In summary, my first approach draws upon Getachew's perspective, and initially examines which particular political challenges are addressed in the Freedom Charter's discourse. Thereafter, I analyze how Enlightenment concepts are reimagined in relation to the document's cultural and political specificity. Finally, I highlight how these innovations constitute worldmaking by rethinking national self-governance, global redistribution, or the world order.

My second approach employs Stoler's terminology, and initially identifies duress in the Freedom Charter's discourse, manifested as universal concepts and categorizations. Subsequently, I trace these concepts' genealogy back to the Enlightenment to emphasize inherent power relations, such as Eurocentrism. Lastly, I analyze how this immanent power relation limits possibilities, disregards alternatives, or overshadows the culturally particular via the Freedom Charter's discourse.

In the following sections I apply these theoretical approaches upon the Freedom Charter's discourse. Three of the central points of the document are examined sequentially, allowing each point to be analyzed from both perspectives in turn.

Counterpointing Counterparts

Elitist Eurocentrism or Cultural Recognition?

> The people shall govern! (ANC 1955).
>
> Every man and woman shall have the right to vote for and to stand as a candidate for all bodies which make laws; All people shall be entitled to take part in the administration of the country; The rights of the people shall be the same, regardless of race, colour or sex; All bodies of minority rule, advisory boards, councils and authorities shall be replaced by democratic organs of self-government (ibid.).

The first main point in the Freedom Charter presents concepts such as democratic self-governance, universal voting rights as well as the right to stand for election and partake in administrative boards (ibid.). These concepts are closely connected to the Enlightenment, as they refer to an institutional framework that first emerged during this time in Europe. For instance, 'parliament' or 'administration' are institutional concepts that constitute the state. In addition to the fact that these concepts implicate a vision of a democratic state, they are also formulated on the basis of 'the people' (ANC 1955). This indicates an idealization of the nation-state in the document's discourse, as the nation-state and the people are interdependent, as stated in the definition of the former: "a territorially bounded sovereign polity (…) ruled in the name of a community of citizens that identify themselves as a nation" (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). The categorization 'people' is especially significant because it pervades the case's discourse, and continuously acts as the reference-point for the entitlements it expresses. The concept 'people' signifies "the citizens of a given state (…) a linguistic, historical and cultural entity" (Den Store Danske 2020). The notion of a South African 'people' thereby implicates the population as a homogeneity. Additionally, 'the people's' interconnection with 'the nation-state' demands a specific geographical demarcation of South Africa and its peoples.

All of these concepts and categorizations can be interpreted as a manifestation of duress. According to this interpretation, the Freedom Charter puts forth the tacit assumption that a European institutional framework and its associated worldview should be reproduced in South Africa. However, this institutional framework is not simply reproduced in the exact same fashion, because the Freedom Charter expands modernity from something exclusive to the white settler-colonial population to the whole 'people' (Chakrabarty 2000: 5).

Nevertheless, the Freedom Charter's use of Enlightenment terminology can lead to several problematic implications. When South Africa is defined as one nation inhabited by one people, the colonial border demarcation of South Africa is reproduced, thus relegating cultural and ethnic differences to the margins. The problem with this is that the demographics of South Africa are far from homogenous. Rather, 'the people' constitute a composite of numerous ethno-cultural groups that were encapsulated with the establishment of the settler-colonial society. In addition to this homogenization, European modernity is still allocated a hegemonic role when the nation-state is idealized as the basis of equal rights. This supposition also delimits these rights' universality, as they are implicitly limited to those who lie within the demarcation of South Africa. As such, the Freedom Charter does not manage to free itself from the Eurocentrism inherent in its discourse when appropriating the language of the Enlightenment. Rather, a European worldview and state apparatus is reproduced through it.

The passage "The people shall govern!" (ANC 1955) points to an appropriation of the Enlightenment principle of popular sovereignty: "that legitimate rule of a state requires (…) consent by the people" (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). This begs the question of whether the Freedom Charter actually possesses popular sovereignty. In other words, to what extent does this universalism manage to speak on behalf of the broader population it claims to represent? Like many other social movements, the anti-apartheid movement was led by an intellectual vanguard. In most colonial societies knowledge of a European intellectual tradition was usually limited to a Western-educated elite. Considering this, the appropriation of a Western vocabulary in the document's vision for all South Africans can be problematized as elitist. Although the document was created through considerable public participation, the people's demands for freedom are translated into a political

language they themselves do not possess (Mangharam 2017: 220). However, the point here is not to criticize the anti-apartheid movement. Rather, my aim is to show how Enlightenment discourse invites appropriation, excludes non-Western worldviews, and reproduces linguistic hegemony. Thus, although the Freedom Charter possesses an anticolonial discourse it inadvertently reproduces a colonial mindset: it hegemonizes a Western worldview and ascribes it to the uneducated, or rather 'non-Western educated', population.

On the other hand, if we examine the first point of the Charter in relation to specificity, it is first and foremost understood as a response to particular political challenges. Through this lens the abolishment of minority rule can be seen as a direct confrontation with South African apartheid: the right to vote, stand for election, or occupy public office regardless of race and colour explicitly confronts the form of government at the time, where this was exclusive to white South Africans. Although the discourse draws upon racial categorizations, they are radically reinvented in the sense that they no longer act as the basis of non-whites' disempowerment. Additionally, the racial foundation of all apartheid laws is completely dissolved with 'the people's' emancipation (Apartheid Museum, n.d.).

The Freedom Charter's consistent formulation of entitlements in relation to 'the people' is especially notable when considered contextually; as an attempt to create national cohesion in a racially divided society. As mentioned, 'people' signifies a large group of individuals who share a common language, history, and culture. This categorization thus constitutes a collective entity composed of individuals. Despite the concept's collective character, its inherently individualist conceptualization of human beings is reflective of its European origin. However, 'the people' in the Freedom Charter is not simply a reinscribed concept from the Enlightenment when understood in relation to its particular context. Rather, the consistent use of 'people' can be seen as an attempt to translate a distinct South African concept, namely 'ubuntu': "A person is a person through other people" (Eze 2010: 190). In short, ubuntu constitutes an intersubjective conceptualization of 'self', in the sense that 'the other' mirrors 'one's own' subjectivity (ibid.: 190-191). In stark contrast to the concept of 'Man' from the Enlightenment, humanity is not inherent in human beings on an individual basis (ibid.). Humanity is rather conditioned by a mutual dependence between human beings as "Humanity is a quality we

owe each other" (ibid.: 191). To be human depends upon intersubjective mutuality because 'humans' only exist through co-constitution (ibid.). The maintenance of this interpersonal dynamic is therefore essential; if one—so to speak—opts out of this dynamic, one is theoretically no longer a 'human being'. Additionally, this definition of 'the people' is not based on national affiliation, because ubuntu is not contingent upon citizenship or nationality, but rather by continuous intersubjective recognition and social engagement. In this sense anyone can, in principle, become a South African.

The ascription of entitlement on the basis of 'the people' can thus be interpreted as worldmaking, as the document sets forth a transnational vision of self-governance in light of ubuntu. As such, the incorporation of ubuntu elicits an interpretation of the Freedom Charter as an alternative universalism.

Nature and Culture – Synergy or Dichotomy?

> The land shall be shared among those who work it! (ANC 1955).
>
> Restrictions of land ownership on a racial basis shall be ended, and all the land redivided amongst those who work it, to banish famine and land hunger; The state shall help the peasants with implements, seed, tractors and dams to save the soil and assist the tillers; Freedom of movement shall be guaranteed to all who work on the land; All shall have the right to occupy land wherever they choose; People shall not be robbed of their cattle, and forced labour and farm prisons shall be abolished (ibid.).

This central point emphasizes the concepts of private ownership, land reform and freedom of movement. The word 'ownership' can be traced back to 13th century Europe but is only seldomly used before the Enlightenment, where the word got its contemporary meaning: "Possessions, land or owned goods, things under ownership" (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). John Locke (1632-1704) was one of the first proponents of private ownership. In the spirit of the Enlightenment, Locke criticized the monarchy's monopoly on property rights (West 2018: 21). Instead, Locke believed that humanity possessed a 'natural right' to ownership bestowed by God: "God… has given the Earth to the Children of Men, given it to mankind in common" (ibid.: 22). This mirrors the Enlightenment thought that Man could master nature (Carr 2020: 311). Furthermore, it reflects a

dualistic perception of nature and culture which constitutes a distinctively European view of Man's position in nature (Haila 2000: 1). Other than distinguishing Man from nature, this understanding also places the former on top of the latter in a hierarchical relationship (Byrne, Brockwell, and O'Connor 2013: 1). Despite doing away with apartheid's exclusion of non-whites from property rights, the Freedom Charter thus reproduces a distinctly European dualism between culture and nature. Ideals such as 'ownership' and 'land reform' thereby implicitly exclude culturally specific understandings of nature, where nature and culture are not perceived as diametrical opposites. Additionally, when the document demands "the right to occupy land wherever [one] choose[s]" (ANC 1955), it facilitates a justification of settlement akin to that of colonialism. While it is not reproduced in identical fashion, it still implicitly sets aside various cultural groups that inhabit 'natural areas' and thereby do not share this dichotomous perception of culture and nature.

With Getachew's notion of specificity in mind, the demand of land reform can also be understood as a direct response to South Africa's specific history of settler-colonialism. Moreover, this demand can be perceived as a direct response to the Black Land Act of 1913 which excluded black people from land rights (South African History Online, n.d.). However, this is not simply a demand of inclusion in the right to land, but rather a reinvention of this ideal as something entitled to the peasants who work it. In this case it is the actual physical interaction with the land that forms the basis of 'ownership'. This is in stark contrast to this concept's European origin, where Man's separation from nature legitimizes the right to land and its exploitation for profit (West 2018: 21). Here, land rights are not based on separation, but rather legitimized through unification; by physically inhabiting and working the land. Furthermore, the interrelationship between Man and nature can be interpreted as more symbiotic; one cultivates the land to nourish oneself. This is a radical alternative to the Enlightenment's nature-culture dichotomy and its immanent power relation, where Man exploits nature for his own gain (ibid.).

In addition to this interpretation of land rights, a vision of global redistribution is simultaneously formulated through the call for domestic land reform (Getachew 2019: 3). This demand undermines the metropole's power position and its entitlement to exploit its satellite states' landholdings for

profit. Thereby, land reform in South Africa also has significant external implications, which indicates Getachew's concept of worldmaking as it entails global redistribution of land (ibid.: 4-5).

Acknowledging Autonomy or Disregarding Distinctiveness?

> There shall be peace and friendship! (ANC 1955).
>
> South Africa shall strive to maintain world peace and the settlement of all international disputes by negotiation—not war; Peace and friendship amongst all our people shall be secured by upholding the equal rights, opportunities and status of all; The people of the protectorates—Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland—shall be free to decide for themselves their own future; The rights of all the peoples of Africa to independence and self-government shall be recognised, and shall be the basis of close cooperation (ibid.).

The Freedom Charter's final paragraph puts forth a vision of world peace via transnational negotiation and recognizes individual states' right to self-government (ibid.). With Stoler's notion of duress in mind, one of these points is especially notable: "[that] Peace and friendship amongst all our people shall be secured by upholding (…) equal rights" (ibid.). That peace and friendship depends upon equal rights for 'all our people' implies that the Freedom Charter is universally applicable. The rights which were formulated domestically—on the basis of 'the people'—hereby also constitutes the conditions of the ideals externally—for 'all our peoples'. The implication of the discourse's universal applicability is thereby paradoxical, considering its vision of self-determination for "all the peoples of Africa" (ibid.). Although it is claimed that self-government "shall be the basis of close cooperation", South Africa is implicitly assigned a leading role—as the centre from which the ideal should spread (ibid.). In accordance with the teleological view of history, the Freedom Charter's discourse hegemonizes its own vision as a paragon of progress—albeit in an anticolonial sense. Thus, we can see how universalist discourse, despite other intentions, staunchly stands by its inherent teleology. Although the Freedom Charter presents a vision of self-determination, it simultaneously invites appropriation as a 'plan' that should be followed to achieve the ideal.

As mentioned in the first section of this analysis, the Freedom Charter can be seen as an elitist discourse, as it draws upon Enlightenment thought, which was only accessible to a Western-

educated minority. Due to South Africa's settler-colonial history, the country is arguably the most Westernized population in Africa. Consequently, the Freedom Charter can be problematized because its universalist discourse—albeit inadvertently—reproduces a colonial practice: it implies further expansion of a hegemonic Western worldview to parts of Africa, that are not nearly as Westernized as South Africa.

When the notion of specificity is considered, the demand for South Africa's protectorates' self-government is conspicuous, as it exemplifies a direct confrontation with South Africa's history of settler-colonialism and the colonial border demarcation of Africa. This demarcation neglected the areas' ethno-cultural diversity by encapsulating it under one nation. The Freedom Charter thereby confronts a specific South African problem, by demanding the recognition of the protectorates' cultural distinctiveness and self-determination. Although the Freedom Charter attempts to avoid confrontational foreign policy, its confrontation with South Africa's domestic demarcation also has implications externally, as the document demands self-government for "all the peoples of Africa" (ANC 1955). Thus, the document's final point puts forth a transnational vision, which confronts the colonial border demarcation and the encapsulation of numerous African peoples within nation-states. This is testament to Getachew's idea of worldmaking, as the Freedom Charter's vision demands a radical reinvention of national self-government and a sea change in the constellation of African nations.

Conclusion

Considering the first truly global wave of globalization—colonialism—it is evident that universalisms have played a significant role in the justification of imperialism and establishment of Western hegemony in the Global South (Eisenstadt 2000: 14). Universal humanism was propagated, but all the while a demarcation of modernity based on a teleological view of history excluded colonized peoples from it.

Despite this, one cannot ignore universalisms' significant role in overcoming this boundary, as the expansion of modernity towards the metropole's satellite states established multiple modernities; distinct modern institutional frameworks and political conceptualizations, such as anticolonialism.

The discursive tool discussed in this article is exactly that, which has been the premise of anticolonial movements' cohesion—domestically as well as internationally. With the Freedom Charter as a case in point, the critique of colonialism itself inevitably draws upon some form of universalism. It can thus be ascertained that universalisms—despite their role in colonialism—are essential tools in the fight against social injustice in the Global South.

That being said, it is nevertheless important to act cautiously when drawing upon universalist discourse as the traces of colonialism are far from erased, and one can easily end up reproducing Western hegemony when categorizing people and formulating concepts on the basis of Enlightenment thought. Such discourse thereby risks drowning out culturally specific ways of life and homogenizing different worldviews further than they already have been through colonialism. The notion of 'returning' to the precolonial is probably wishful thinking, but this article has shown that universalisms do not necessarily stand in sharp contrast to the non-Western. On the contrary, they can be utilized as effective tools in the dissemination of alternative worldviews, such as ubuntu. As restricted as universalisms are by their entanglement with the Enlightenment, they continue to be powerful tools in the formulation of new visions of a decolonized world.

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