Critical Impairments to Globalizing the Western Human Rights Discourse

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Abstract
This article focuses on the philosophical implications of Euro-centrism and Eurocentric discourse for the Western human rights narrative. It is argued that there is insufficient theoretical and practical consideration of those implications, particular for advocacy and activity in the so-called “Third World” where such arguments frequently become mere vehicles for the advance of economic and political neocolonialism. In many ways, colonialism with a humanistic, liberal democratic “face”. Finally, a proposition is advanced that if the Western human rights discourse is to be effectively corrected and evolve into a global one, critiques of Euro-centrism from outside the Western discursive world must be taken seriously.

Keywords
eurocentrism, human rights narrative, neocolonialism, African customary law

Our subject of rumination for the moment, the western human rights discourse. It extends the apparently inviting pleasantry “Come, let me hear your voice!” Inherent in the salutation is the fact that the one objectified in the greeting is being invited to a pre-existing discourse. That may in fact be the rub.

The Nature and Problem of Eurocentrism
The global system as we know is largely a function not of natural evolution, but of European colonialism and neocolonialism. More importantly, subsequent to that historical epoch there was the imposition of an intellectual paradigm that colonized knowledge itself as well as the processes for producing knowledge. Within the context of Euro-centrism, the West
both creates the parameters of legitimate discussion concerning global issues and then serves as the de facto “ideal type” and standard for evaluative judgments relative to those issues. Even worse, Western created and sustained international organizations and domestic state institutions and legal entities are appealed to as the judicial authorities, administering admonitions, sanctions, and other punishments as consequences for deviance from the Western forms. Not surprisingly to anyone, except perhaps the West itself, non-Western forms, ideas, and concepts are found wanting and deficient and therefore subject to exclusion from the theater of debate and communicative legitimacy. I wrote in another piece about how the “vampire” was a proper and fit metaphor for Euro-centrism. It is rendered as such in Bob Marley’s song “Babylon Vampire,” in which he lays out its essential consequences.

Like the mythological vampire, Euro-centrism pursues its own interests at the expense of the psychological, sociological, economic, and political well-being of those it victims and does so by enrapturing them with illusions of love or at least mutual interest. Most modern configurations of Dracula describe a tortured creature, which is spiritually disfigured, believing at times that he or she does indeed “love” the one they systematically devour. Worst of all, the great malady of the vampire’s condition is the denial of its own existence as ghoul. The vampire believes himself or herself to be alive and so much wants to be a part of the world, yet inevitably must slink back to the coffin, to the grains of earth of their original burial (the seeds of Platonic epistemology and the Enlightenment), all before the encroachment of the sun, ever representing the force of true illumination from which nothing undead may hide and by whose light they shall surely be judged and found wanting. Next to the sun of external recognition, there is no greater threat than a mirror. For the mirror represents self-criticism, the capacity to reflect on oneself as monster. When gazing out, Eurocentrism sees nothing. Or we might better say, sees nothing beyond itself, believing itself to be the germinal seed of existence, without which being is meaningless.

It seems senseless for those victimized or in the path of this demon to despise the essence of what the creature is, for it is merely responding to its nature. Marimba Ani in Yurugu characterized this as the asili, or the equivalent of “cultural DNA.” 1 Since the predatory nature of the beast is so

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