African, American and European trajectories of modernity: past oppression, future justice?

edited by Peter Wagner

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Introduction (CT)

Peter Wagner

This second volume of the *Annual of European and Global Studies* addresses two central concerns of the field: *First*, it contributes to the recent efforts of linking the history of Europe more firmly to world-history, or in a different terminology, of situating European modernity in global context (for examples of the former, see Baily 2004; Osterhammel 2008; for the latter, Delanty 2013). It does so by detailed studies of the linkages between Africa, America and Europe showing that what is often referred to as 'the rise of Europe' is better understood as the creation of an Atlantic world-region with increasingly dense but highly asymmetric commercial and communicative ties. Economically speaking, the result was the systematic employment, underpinned by violence, of African labour and American soil for bringing about what has become known as the Industrial Revolution in Europe. In cultural-intellectual terms, elites in Africa and America came to increasingly look up and ahead to Europe as the source for viable directions in which to develop their own societies, all the while considering the particularities of their situation in relation to the apparent European 'model.' Thus, one of the key concerns of this volume is a better understanding of why, from some moment onwards, 'Europe' and 'the rest of the world' entered into a particular relation, not merely one of domination by the former over the latter, but one that was conceived as a kind of superiority, often more specifically as an 'advance' in historical time.

This alleged particular position of Europe has underpinned the historical and sociological debate over modernity for the last 150 years, often conflating a particular history with the – analytical and normative – theorisation of society and politics. Reviewing the history of the relations between Africa, America and Europe, thus, *secondly*, invites one to reflect anew on the concept of modernity.[1] Starting out from the asymmetric economic relations and the orientation of cultural-intellectual life towards a Europe that seemed to be 'ahead,' our reflections here centre on the temporality of modernity, on the question of how far the supposed arrival of modernity in one place, Europe, alters the ways in which human beings situate themselves in time and history worldwide. Analytically speaking, this is the question about a direction of history, which was central to philosophies of history up to the nineteenth century. This genre has largely been abandoned since, at

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[1]   With its emphasis on varieties of interpretations of modernity (on which more detail below), this volume intends to contribute to what has become known as the 'multiple modernities' debate. This intention notwithstanding, it does not have worldwide coverage and, in particular, does not contain any analysis of Asian societies, and this for two reasons. First, the theorem of multiple modernities has been developed with a focus on Asia suggesting that the multiplicity of modern self-understandings emerged from the encounter of established cultural programmes in the East with European modernity. As we have argued elsewhere (Wagner 2011), such conceptualisation, as fruitful as it has been in opening a debate, tends to overestimate the internal homogeneity and temporal continuity of 'cultures of modernity.' Second, the standard views of modernity give undue emphasis to endogenous developments in Europe leading allegedly to the first historical emergence of a modern socio-political configuration. We have taken issue with this view in a parallel analysis (Wagner 2014a) and continue the discussion in this volume, shifting the emphasis to the novel connectedness of the Atlantic region. Rather than moving the focus of 'modernity studies' away from Asia, however, our suggestion is that in future research Asia is to be re-included with a similar emphasis on the connectedness of world-regions (see Gupta, Hofmeyr and Pearson 2010, for studies of Indian Ocean connections between Africa and Asia, for instance) and overcoming the idea of coherent cultural programmes reproducing themselves in isolation from each other.

least in academia, leaving the question not only without an answer but even without a fruitful way of posing it – although it does not go away either. In normative terms, this is the question about progress in human history, about modernity as a progressive project that endows itself with the means for its own realisation, as expressed in some of the hopes and promises of the Enlightenment.

The relation between the history and the theory of modernity

In recent debate about modernity, the entangling of history and theory has often taken the form of, on the one hand, claiming the historical existence of a normative project of modernity that held out promises for humankind and, on the other hand, stating that these promises have not – or: not yet – been fulfilled. This theme has been discussed in numerous ways. In interpretations that focus – implicitly or explicitly – on the European experience, two perspectives have been dominant. On the one side, scholars have suggested that modernity's promises have indeed been translated into modern institutions, but that the process is incomplete and that further claims for freedom and justice keep arising and need to be addressed (Jürgen Habermas, Axel Honneth among others). On the other side, authors have emphasised that new forms of domination and oppression have arisen with modernity and that, thus, the rise of modernity should be seen as a transformation in the form of domination and oppression rather than the advent of emancipation and liberation (Michel Foucault, Zygmunt Bauman among others).

Although this latter reasoning had originally been developed with the European situation in mind, it is most compelling when associating colonial domination with the history of modernity. Investigating the history of Africa and America, the era that in Europe is considered to mark the rise of modernity is clearly one of new forms of oppression originating with the European colonisers. In parts of the globe, this period does not signal the overcoming of the oppression in an un-Enlightened past, as a traditional European view suggested. Rather, modernity itself, so it seems, inaugurated a history of oppression.

At the same time, the observation that modernity held out the prospect of liberation and emancipation is not refuted by this change of perspective. Movements for liberation in the colonised world often, though not always, appealed to the normative claims made in modern European reasoning and led their struggles against European domination in the name of these claims, from the Haitian Revolution to the African National Congress. Thus, the horizon of future freedom and justice, as opened in a novel way during the European Enlightenment, was and remains a point of orientation in the history and present of modernity.

This insight into the deep ambivalence of modernity – inaugurating a history of oppression while at the same time serving as a reference-point for resistance to oppression and struggle for justice – translates into a need for revising the standard temporality of modernity. It is no longer straightforwardly possible to assume that the onset of modernity means the exit (not even; the first step of an exit) from oppression and injustice on the long, but linear way to reaching freedom and justice. If the reference to modernity, depending on the context, can lead to either increase of freedom and justice or increase of oppression and injustice, or even both, but for different groups or in different places, then modernity needs to be understood in a radically different way than the one maintained by standard historiography, sociology and philosophy.

We may well preserve the historical reference to the Enlightenment and the subsequent revolutionary transformations; it would be difficult to write world-history or theorise modernity without it. However, these events should no longer be seen as having an indissoluble double meaning, with which free intellectual and political play is permitted, as being, namely, a breakthrough in normative philosophy, on the higher plane of reason, and at the same time leading

the way for a progressive transformation of society and politics, in the this-worldly realm of power and interest.[2] Instead, the philosophical proposals should be seen contextually as responses to socio-political problems generated earlier, such as, most importantly, the lack of certainty because of the co-existence of monotheistic religions with claims to exclusivity and the lack of justification for power in the absence of a common cosmology and in the presence of multiple states with claims to sovereignty (see Wagner 2001: ch. 1; 2008, ch. 9). And the socio-political transformations, which, true, occurred in the wake of the new philosophy, should not be seen as the straightforward implementation of philosophical maxims but as interpretations of such philosophy that were open to contestation on conceptual grounds, as well as partial mobilisation on grounds of power and interest.

In other words, and as a *first* step of reconsideration, rather than accepting the claims of the European philosophy of modernity to supra-historical validity, we should see its propositions as the outcome of the human faculty of imagination applied to the particular problems of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, as perceived by Europeans. Saying this is not to deny specificity to European thought from Descartes and Hobbes to Kant and Hegel. To the contrary, reading these authors in context suggests that the problems they were addressing – lack of epistemic certainty, lack of ultimate sources for justification – were seen to be of such a kind that they required the *radical criticism* of prevailing views on certainty and justification that were found wanting. And, subsequently, the response to the shortcomings of earlier thinking was the *explicit construction* of alternative routes to certainty and justification that were less reliant on unsustainable presuppositions, thus showed less need for external support while requiring greater internal coherence. Radicality and explicitness are key features of at least the 'canonical' authors of the European philosophy of modernity.

One may suggest that such radicality and explicitness are constitutive features of all modernity; that they are what makes modernity *one* (see for some such argument recently Skirrbek 2012). This would be consonant with the denial of external and stable sources for certainty, such as in Immanuel Kant's *sapere aude* but also already in Socrates, and also with the commitment of modernity to autonomy, to self-determination and self-alteration, as emphasised by Cornelius Castoriadis (1990 and elsewhere). But none of these features make the substantive results that such a questioning philosophy arrives at 'correct,' neither in the sense of providing adequate solutions to the existing problems nor in the sense of obtaining universal validity. To give a key example: the European philosophy of modernity created the concept of the rational subject as an atomistic individual. It did so in response to the quest for certainty under conditions of high uncertainty. But while it is making universal claims, an atomist social ontology is not very compelling, and the individualist political theory that is derived from it has shown to carry deep normative ambiguities. Accordingly, this philosophy has never been as widely accepted in European intellectual and political history as both its followers and its postcolonial critics have later often claimed. Every single proposition of Enlightenment thought has been criticised at its time, and not merely in ways that can be denounced as rejecting the 'modernity' that was upcoming with this new thinking, but also by showing flaws – inconsistencies, ambivalences, paradoxes – in the reasoning.

The *second* step of our reconsideration concerns the idea of applying or implementing the new commitments of the philosophy of modernity. The above-mentioned flaws are one reason why the philosophy of modernity has not been – could not be – straightforwardly implemented in the further

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       For the emergence of such a distinction of two realms and its significance for socio-cultural transformations, see the so-called Axial age debate, in particular as recently re-assessed by Arnason et al. 2005.

course of European and world history, not even slowly or incompletely. The other reason is resistance by those who were likely to lose in the ensuing socio-political transformations, such as those who made unquestioned claims to certainty or unjustifiable claims to power. The critical debate about modernity has suffered from the common assumption that, once such resistance was overcome, an unambiguously modern socio-political order could and would be created. This assumption underestimates the openness of the commitments of modernity to interpretation.

There is widespread agreement that the key commitments of modernity – its 'imaginary signification' (Cornelius Castoriadis) – are to freedom and reason, in philosophical terminology, or to subjectivation and rationalisation (Touraine 1992), or to autonomy and mastery, in more sociological terminology (Arnason 1989; Wagner 1994). There is still too little recognition, though, of the degree to which the conceptual elements of this signification entertain tensions with each other, or, to phrase the issue more widely: too little reflection about the relation between these conceptual elements. Autonomy means giving oneself one's own law. Arguably, therefore, the idea of autonomy already contains a reference to mastery, namely to establish the law that henceforth is to guide one's own action. In the same move, a tension is created: once there is a law to be followed, there is a limit to autonomy, to freedom. The temporality of human action is at the core of the matter; we may have freely established the law to follow at one moment, but at the next moment this law turns into a constraint. Cornelius Castoriadis referred to this tension as the relation between the instituting moment of social life, giving the law, and the instituted moment, facing the law that already exists. At that later moment, though, the self may no longer be the same as the one that gave the law. That is why every institution needs to be open to re-instituting – under conditions of modernity, that is, of autonomy.

Furthermore, the commitment of modernity to autonomy is insufficiently specific to suggest any institutional model of modernity. The concept of autonomy contains within itself the tension between individual and collective autonomy; the concept of mastery begs the questions about the object of mastery – oneself, others, or nature – and about the mode of mastery – instrumental control or hermeneutic understanding, to suggest only two such modes. These tensions and the lack of specificity cannot be overcome by conceptual reasoning alone, as much as social and political philosophy have tried over the past two centuries and more. The ways in which these tensions are being addressed in practice, in turn, lead to a great variety of different interpretations of modernity, as specifications of the basic imaginary signification. Rather than implementing unambiguous principles, therefore, the history of modernity should be seen as the work of interpreting the imaginary signification of modernity with a view to sedimenting them in institutions, and to re-interpret modernity in the light of experiences made with modern institutions and of the critique of their falling short of expectations.[3] These reflections guide the re-reading of modernity as proposed in this volume through a look at the entangled trajectories of modernity in Africa, America and Europe, starting out from the suggestion to reconsider the supposed onset of modernity in Europe as the creation of an Atlantic socio-political constellation.

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In the ambitious research programme pursued by the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, Axel Honneth and his colleagues focus on 'normative paradoxes of the present' (Honneth and Sutterlüty 2011), which are conceptualised as promises of modernity being counteracted in the process of historical realisation. This suggests that the paradox emerges in the encounter between (a clear-cut?) theory and (a messy?) history. Our reasoning, in contrast, suggests that there are unavoidable ambivalences – rather than paradoxes – in the theory of modernity that are open to interpretation in historical contexts. No interpretation will relate to the theory as the only adequate one; and each interpretation may generate unintended outcomes, also in normative terms.

Atlantic modernity

J.G.A. Pocock's celebrated book *The Machiavellian moment* (1975) quite rightly extended the discussion of political modernity in time, moving the focus from the late eighteenth century and the French Revolution to the early sixteenth century, and in space, from an exclusively European concern towards the identification of an "Atlantic republican tradition" culminating in the Declaration of Independence of the Thirteen Colonies, the so-called American Revolution. It is surprising to see, however, that despite the label "Atlantic" the analysis finds its limits with the Northern Atlantic, whereas republicanism was the dominant ideology of the Southern American independence movements and the dominant political form of the independent states, with the only exception of Brazil, thus was much more successful than in Europe after the restoration of the Old Regime with the Vienna Congress of 1815.[4]

Inadvertently, thus, the intellectual historian Pocock employs an idea of "the West", which geographically designates only the Northern shores of the Atlantic and which politically comes into widespread use only after the Second World War. By this sleight-of-hand, he integrates the United States of America fully into a history of modernity, for which there are good reasons, but at the same time shrinks the Atlantic, which across the very same period became politically, economically and intellectually closely connected. This is much more than a geographically inappropriate description; it is a conceptual decision that, despite the originality of Pocock's proposal in other respects, follows a preceding "paradigmatisation of history" that erroneously equates the Northern Atlantic West with the origins of modernity. Aurea Mota, in chapter 1, provides a reconstruction of the conceptual, rather than geographical, separation of "the Americas" into a North America and a South America with clearly distinct socio-political connotations.

'In the beginning all the world was America,' John Locke famously remarked. This claim permitted the elaboration of two similarly unfounded but highly consequential assumptions: in temporal terms, it moved the contemporaneous native populations of America into an earlier time from which they descended without any change; in conceptual terms, it supported the hypothesis of a 'state of nature' from which human beings could exit to reach higher echelons of civilisation in the progressive course of history. Less than one-and-a-half centuries after the Salamanca-Valladolid debates between Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, Locke forgot about the actual encounter between the European seafarers and settlers and the native people of America and the reflections this provoked about the nature of humanity, the recognition of the other, and the actual rights of human beings in encounters under conditions of asymmetrically distributed resources (see Pagden 2000). As Angela Lorena Fuster Peiró and Gerard Rosich show in chapter 2, however, the meeting of absolutely unknown people raises questions about the ways in which someone can be recognised – as human, as equal, as free – who is not already part of the intellectual horizon of those who might consider recognition, an assumption that theories of recognition tend to make.

The ways in which the colonised recognised, or not, the coloniser has been even less in the focus of attention than the problems of recognition for the coloniser. For too long it has been assumed, by mainstream historiography and postcolonial studies alike, that the colonisers overwhelmed the indigenous population with such military, political, economic and theologico-philosophical force

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Suggesting a widening of the temporal perspective similar to Pocock, Enrique Dussel's history of political philosophy in *Politics of liberation* (2007) systematically considers Iberian and Southern American debates as crucial for the forming discourse of political modernity.

that the question about indigenous world-views can hardly be posed any longer soon after the first encounters.[5] This assumption, however, neglects the creative agency of those subjected to colonisation and underestimates their resilience in the face of the powerful colonisers. Jacob Dlamini, in chapter 3, investigates the ways in which African elites define their relation to the Europe with which they were confronted by the settlers in both appreciative and combative terms. Starting out from the obvious contemporaneousness with the dominating settlers, significantly, the reflections work through the suggestion that the settlers are two millennia ahead of the native population but, while accepting the chronology of Christianity, challenge the idea of an unbridgeable gap. The analysis demonstrates that the 'entanglement' of forms of modernity should be seen less as occurring between constituted societies than, rather, through the interpretative agency of human beings.

In the wake of Pocock's *Machiavellian moment*, to which we alluded earlier, a whole current of historiographical and politico-philosophical work emerged that revived republicanism as a more fruitful underpinning to political modernity than individualist liberalism (Pettit 1997; Skinner 1998), on the one hand, and claimed the European origins of putting freedom in and of states at the centre of political thought, on the other (see, for instance, Skinner and van Gelderen 2005; 2013). Acknowledging the reconstructive merits of this endeavour, one nevertheless needs to note that, while eliminating blind spots in political theory and history, new biases have been created.

Republicanism has been hailed as providing a more sound concept of liberty than liberalism, but a nuanced retrieval of the long-term tradition of republican thinking since ancient Rome, as offered by Andreas Kalyvas in chapter 4, shows that "neo-Roman" (Quentin Skinner) political thought also appropriated a concern for the non-ambivalent establishment of political authority if need be, known throughout as dictatorship. This insight suggests that the political history of the past two centuries, far from witnessing the decline of republicanism, cannot be written as one of the linear rise of liberal democracy, neither in thought nor in practice. The frequent establishment of – often military – dictatorships in Europe and Latin America across the twentieth century can be understood against this background. More particularly, the fact that anti-colonial liberation movements, once successful, often turned into one-party regimes as well as explicit dictatorships is not an aberration of modern political practice that typically happens outside of Europe, but occurs by recourse to the will of the people as assumed to be embodied by the liberation movement (Chipkin 2014).

The status of dictatorship in the framework of republican political thought can be understood, in the terminology used here, as a particular interpretation of modernity that privileges – at least within temporal limits – the mastery of political crises over the expression of collective autonomy. Unlike what the more harmony-oriented thinkers within the Enlightenment tradition thought, the tension between these two commitments is constitutive of political modernity. In political practice, we witness both the increase in liberties across the European seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the rationalisation of the state apparatus, towards greater efficiency and control. Both of these changes are inspired by, broadly understood, Enlightenment thought. This insight opens the eyes for recognising varieties of Enlightenment there where they had hardly been identified before.[6] Alice Soares Guimarães, in chapter 5, demonstrates how transformations of state-society relations in

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        To give two examples: In his comparative study of 'settler societies,' Louis Hartz (1962) gives due and nuanced attention to the issue, but rules it out for his own approach. Enrique Dussel (2007) makes a sincere attempt, but runs up against the scarcity of sources.

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        The Skinner/van Gelderen (2013) two-volume collection contains no discussion at all of events in the Iberian peninsula.

eighteenth-century Portugal, not least focusing on the rationalisation of the state, can be analysed in relation to Enlightened political debates of the time. Those transformations, in turn, had an impact on the shaping of the relations between Portugal and Brazil in the nineteenth century and on the debate about the political form of independent Brazil, as well as on the intra-Brazilian struggles over this form before and after independence.[7]

Varieties of modern trajectories

The chapters in the first part of this volume underline, without claim to exhaustiveness, some of the historical and conceptual issues that had been neglected or misrepresented in most of the established history, sociology and philosophy of modernity. Taken together, they provide key elements for a novel view of what is often referred to as the rise of modernity as an Atlantic socio-political constellation rather than events in European history that bring forth the dynamics of further evolutionary progress. Within this Atlantic constellation, one can then observe, in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the sedimentation of a variety of specific interpretations of modernity, each dealing with some of the central problems of modern socio-political organisation in specific ways. In all due brevity, and thus in a rather schematic way, these interpretative-institutional varieties of modernity can be characterised as follows.

Within Europe, the political form of empire remains significant at least until the end of the First World War, but in the political imaginary and increasingly in institution-building, it gradually gives way to the form of the nation-state – never without ambiguities and neither in any coherent way,[8] but enhanced by a combination of normative and functional aspects. In normative terms, the nation-state is seen as the institutional embodiment of collective self-determination, equating the 'nation' with the 'people' that embarks on collective autonomy. In functional terms, the economic elites of rising capitalism enlisted major parts of the population in the productive process, the emerging working class, requiring socialising institutions towards that end (for education, training, discipline). As a consequence, European polities came to set strong boundaries towards the outside and build relatively high levels of inclusion inside, two issues historically known as the national and the social question respectively.

At the same time, imperial domination was hardly questioned at all in European debates over the relation between Europe, Africa and parts of Asia. Thus, collective self-determination was denied to Africans and Asians under colonial rule, and no autonomous interpretation of modernity could emerge until the success of anti-colonial liberation struggles. In Africa, the rather few cases in which significant numbers of settlers of European descent lived together with a majoritarian indigenous population – Algeria and its war of independence from France; Rhodesia/Zimbabwe and the Unilateral Declaration of Independence; and in particular South Africa with segregationist policies and apartheid and the resistance against those – have generated intense and explicit debates

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More ample discussion of the transformations of political modernity and its current state can be found in the forthcoming volume *Political modernity in the 21st century* (Rosich and Wagner 2014)

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In various ways, imperial situations persisted in the cases, among others, of Northern Ireland, the Basque Country and Catalonia, the complex situation of Yugoslavia and its predecessor and successor states, and Soviet socialism after the Second World War, which probably is more adequately seen as an imperial constellation rather than as an alliance of nation-states.

about the interpretation of modernity. These debates, though, were constrained and given shape by the persistence of colonial domination until way into the second half of the twentieth century.

In America, what we may call 'settler interpretations of modernity' were created that were based on varieties of relations between the descendants of the settlers and native and slave populations, all of which sustained the dominance of the settler group. At the extremes, we find, on the one hand, a modern self-understanding that presented itself as liberal and republican while annihilating the indigenous population and oppressing the slave population until long after the formal abolition of slavery, with the USA as the exemplary case (Henningsen 2009), and on the other, the idea of mixing and fusion of the three population groups in the creation of a new civilisation and polity, with Brazil's discourse about 'racial democracy' as the exemplary case.

In comparison with the intra-European interpretation of modernity, both the American and the imposed African interpretations are distinct in two key respects: both give historically much less significance to the implication of the whole population into any 'project of modernity,' and, at the same time, they are much less concerned with the definition and closure of the boundaries. To speak in European terms, neither the national nor the social question acquire constitutive significance for the interpretation of modernity, even though in Latin America more so than in North America and Africa. In turn, migration and social inequality become key features of the socio-political settings of American and African varieties of modernity.

Novel interpretations of modernity in Africa and Latin America

This picture begins to change from the 1960s onwards, with the success of the anti-colonial movements in Africa and the strengthening of political contestation of oligarchic rule in Latin America. Even though these movements face strong elite opposition, going as far as military coups d'état in Brazil and Chile and elsewhere and the violent oppression of anti-apartheid protest in South Africa, by the end of the 1980s their success is on the horizon. The Brazilian military dictatorship ends in 1985, and a new Constitution is passed in 1988; Chile's dictator, general Augusto Pinochet, suffers a defeat in a referendum and leaves the presidency in 1990, trying, nevertheless, to eternalise the authoritarian constitution, which remains unchanged to the present day; negotiations about the end of apartheid start in the late 1980s, culminating in the first inclusive democratic elections in 1994, with the victory of the African National Congress and the passing of a new Constitution in 1996 – to mention only the key events in the three societies for which this volume provides detailed analyses. We can thus suggest that a novel interpretation of modernity is being elaborated in these American and African societies, featuring inclusive-egalitarian democracy, often with a high intensity of participation, and facing the legacy of high social inequality and, more generally, a hiatus between the elite perception of societal self-understanding and the living conditions of the majority of the population.

Three comparative case studies deal with specific aspects of the new interpretation of modernity in the course of being elaborated in Brazil, Chile and South Africa. At the current moment, more than twenty years after the demise of oppressive regimes, a question that tends to impose itself is the one about the degree of continuity or discontinuity with the earlier situation. This question will not find the same answer everywhere; it will differ between societies, problem areas, and fields of political action. One area in which expectations for change could reasonably be high, given the democratic impetus, has been the relation between economic policy and social solidarity. The post-authoritarian political majorities in Chile and South Africa, the *Concertación* and the African National Congress respectively, for instance, have emphasised new policies of social inclusion and have succeeded in reducing poverty. But neither of them took strong measures to reduce social inequality, and both have been careful not to lose credibility in a world-economic context dominated by globally

operating finance capitalism.[9] Against this background, Rommy Morales Olivares, in chapter 6, searches to identify the mechanisms that explain the relatively high degree of continuity in economic-policy making in both countries.

Another area of high expectation has been health policy, in which the challenge is to extend high-quality medical care as a public service or at affordable cost to the whole of society instead of a small minority.[10] At the moment of transformation, in addition, the HIV/AIDS epidemic emerged as a health issue for which no adequate approaches were at hand anywhere and which was added to an already overloaded agenda of socio-political reform. From a rather similar starting situation in the mid-1980s, a striking divergence in ways of dealing with the epidemic occurred between Brazil and South Africa for some time, with Brazil becoming a model country for combating HIV/AIDS and South Africa showing a deteriorating situation, even, for an extended period. Beyond differences in institutional structures and state-society relations, José Katito, in chapter 7, accounts for the difference in policy response also in terms of historical legacies of societal self-understanding. In Brazil, HIV/AIDS was seen rather quickly as a society-wide problem for which a society-wide solution at the highest level of medical and policy competence needed to be found. Against the background of formal exclusion under apartheid, in contrast, the early ANC governments in South Africa were suspicious of 'neutral' expert advice by a medical science tainted by colonial experience and, in turn, were inclined to emphasise socio-historical rather than medical sources for a problem that affected black South Africans more than white ones, thus causing a delay in the widespread use of anti-retroviral drugs.

Both the 1988 Brazilian Constitution and the 1996 South African Constitution provide more than the basic institutional architecture of the new democracies, combining individual rights, collective self-determination, and the rule of law. They furthermore acknowledge that the new polities emerge from a long-lasting history of injustice reaching up to the very immediate past and contain clauses to address such injustice. Among such clauses, in both cases, the one that provides for land restitution is a most significant one, both in economic terms and in terms of collective self-understanding. South Africa adopted a liberal-legal perspective on the matter and clearly defined possible claimants as those having been deprived by unjust means of a right to land. Brazil, in contrast, favoured a historico-cultural perspective, giving the right to restitution to communities of descendants of slaves with common practices and ties to the land, enlisting anthropological expertise to verify claims. Joyce Gotlib, in chapter 8, offers a detailed comparative analysis of two cases of claims for land restitution, in Brazil and South Africa respectively, in this light.

Claims for justice in the history of modernity and in its present

The fact that situations of entrenched injustice in formal institutions have been overcome only relatively recently in a large number of societies turns the dealing with historical injustice into a core topic on the political agenda of the present – with South Africa and its unprecedented Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a key example. If one takes a closer look, it indeed becomes evident that numerous polities define themselves against the background of past injustice. Historically, this constitutive reference takes the form of an account of 'success' as the liberation

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For more ample discussion on the politico-economic constellation of our time, see the volume *Economic modernity in the 21st century* (Casassas and Wagner, in preparation).

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Hall and Lamont (2009) have taken health policy as an exemplary area for identifying 'successful societies.'

from oppression and injustice, from the national liberation from empires in Europe (Greece, Finland, Ireland, among others) to the liberation from colonial domination up to the recent past. More frequently nowadays, however, the reference – sometimes officially acknowledged, often not – is to injustice committed within the polity among its current members (or their descendents). This reference, too, is constitutive; it underpins the transformation of a dictatorship into a democracy, of racial oppression into equal freedom. But the constitution of a new polity does not do away with the past injustice among its members, which remains present. Formal equal freedom in the present is unequal in the light of past injustice that remains of present significance. In this sense, the past is in general a constitutive feature of a modern self-understanding that submits itself to the need for justification, against the tendency for abstracting from history in liberal thought (Mills 2014).

Along those lines, Svjetlana Nedimović, in chapter 9, surveys the recent debates about 'transitional justice' and argues against attempts at 'overcoming the past,' or 'settling the past.' Their socio-historical existence, rather, is the source from which societies can create their own self-understandings and can embark upon processes of self-alteration as autonomous societies. One could say that Riaan Oppelt, in chapter 10, applies this very perspective to a historical reading of injustices in the history of what is now South Africa. Reading fictional accounts as pieces of evidence for societal self-understandings, he maps the injustice of the socio-historical constellation after the South African War onto the one during apartheid. While the Afrikaners defeated in the war became the oppressors of the native population once in power, Riaan Oppelt tries to show that African humanism can be the resource in the present for history not to repeat itself.

While chapters 9 and 10 focus on the relation between the past and the present, the subsequent chapters 11 and 12 turn their attention towards the relation between the present and a possible future, by looking at current movements of contestation. Beatriz Silva Pinochet, in chapter 11, reads Chilean history since the coup d'état in 1973 as the imposition of an interpretation of modernity based on understanding merit and individual economic rationality as the principal elements for resolving every social problem, that is, efficiency, social injustice and development, as a model for society that goes a long way beyond the mere free-market principle of economic organisation apparently featured in neo-liberalism. Appearing without alternatives to the main political forces after the end of the dictatorship, this model temporarily emptied out the space for critique in society (see Boltanski 2009). With the student contestations of the past few years, however, one witnesses how the protest against a particular understanding of education and the educational system can enlarge into a power of criticism that touches the underlying ideas of society and aims to elaborate a novel interpretation of modernity through contestation.

The collectively authored chapter 12 aims to identify a similar force in the new wave of protest movements in Europe and Latin America that critically address the current form of capitalism and its consequences. The present situation is characterised by the termination of a kind of contract between the economic elites and the population, which was 'signed' in Europe and North America at mid-century (as reflected, for instance, in the US term 'New Deal') and was partly prepared and expected in South America. Evidence for the cancellation are the rising inequality and increasing insecurity in labour markets; and the protest movements consider such cancellation as one-sided and derive from it the right to return to claims that go beyond the earlier contract.

The contributions to the second part – chapters 6, 7 and 8 – demonstrate the processes at work in transforming institutionally entrenched interpretations of modernity based on inequality and oppression into novel forms that are shaped by the drive to inclusive-egalitarian collective self-determination, whereas those to the third part – chapters 9 to 12 – underline the historicity of any form of modernity. Rather than entirely stepping out of a past marked by oppression and immaturity into a new era of equality and freedom, any modern form of socio-political organisation will always be a re-interpretation of the normatively loaded, but institutionally underdetermined commitments

of modernity to autonomy and mastery. In our time, such re-interpretation will never be able to situate itself at the beginning of modern times, as some Enlightenment scholars imagined. It will be created against the background of the experiences with and struggles over earlier interpretations of modernity, none of which has been entirely free of oppression and injustice.

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