

Testing the Atlantic Charter: linking anticolonialism, self-determination and universal human rights

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The historical link between anticolonialism and human rights has recently become a subject of wide-ranging scholarly debates. A growing number of human rights scholars argue that anticolonialism was not a human rights movement because it was concerned with popular liberation rather than curtailing state power over the individual. This article interrogates these and similar arguments by exploring how anticolonial activists in Africa invoked the Atlantic Charter in struggles for self-determination and deployed an emergent human rights lexicon to strengthen longstanding demands for independence. It queries the logic and historicity of delinking the discourse of self-determination within anticolonialism from the discourse of human rights in post-World War II internationalism. It argues that constructing anticolonialism and human rights as intersecting social and intellectual movements allows for a more nuanced and holistic history of human rights in the twentieth century.

Keywords: self-determination; anticolonialism; Atlantic Charter; Africa

Introduction

Two years after President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill signed the Atlantic Charter in August 1941, a delegation of West African journalists travelled to London partly with the intent of clarifying the application of the Charter to European colonies in Africa.¹ The journalists considered this document, which expressed the American and British vision of the post-World War II world, crucial to the fate of those living under colonial rule in Africa. Their key interest was the third clause of the Charter which affirmed ‘the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live’.² In a statement to the House of Commons shortly after the agreement was signed, Prime Minister Churchill stated that the right to self-determination outlined in the Charter would apply to those living under Nazi occupation but not to Britain’s colonial subjects still in need of ‘progressive evolution’ towards self-government.³ Churchill would later add that the existence of the Atlantic Charter did not compel him ‘to preside over the liquidation of the British empire’.⁴

The leader of the delegation of West African journalists, Nnamdi Azikiwe, submitted to the British Secretary of State for the Colonies a memorandum entitled, ‘The Atlantic Charter and British West Africa’. The document sought clarification of the British policy on self-determination in the colonies and proposed, based on the Atlantic Charter, the

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abrogation of the crown colony system; immediate 'Africanisation' of the colonial government; and the institution of representative government in the colonies with the goal of 'full responsible government'.⁵ Invoking the third clause of Atlantic Charter, the delegation envisaged that by 1958 all West African territories would be independent and sovereign political entities.⁶

The memorandum submitted by the West African delegation evoked no immediate response from the Colonial Office. Disappointed, members of the delegation returned to West Africa where they expressed their frustrations at the hypocrisy and indifference of British officials.⁷ Even after the delegation of journalists left London, concerns over the immediate political implications of the Atlantic Charter to European colonies in Asia and Africa lingered in the global public domain. The West African Students Union (WASU), a politically active organisation of West African students in London, kept the issue alive by working with sympathetic groups such as the Colonial Bureau of the Fabian Society and members of the British Parliament interested in Africa.⁸ The organisation was eventually able to extract a public statement from Britain's Deputy Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, that the Atlantic Charter applied to everyone.⁹ Pushing back against Churchill's restrictive interpretation of the Atlantic Charter, President Roosevelt would also later assert that the ideals of the Charter applied not only to Europe but to all people. His insistence echoed his 'Four Freedoms' speech of January 1941, and reflected his belief that the future of global security depended on the universal applicability of the principles of self-determination.¹⁰

Discussions over the interpretation of the Atlantic Charter became central to post-World War II international anticolonial politics.¹¹ Africa was at the centre of these debates. Writing in 1943, the American historian, Lawrence Reddick, stated that Africa, given its colonial situation, would be the 'test of the Atlantic Charter' and the ultimate vindication of United States involvement in World War II.¹² 'What happens in Africa', he wrote, 'will reveal to the submerged masses everywhere, and to ourselves, whether our stirring declarations have meaning or whether this is just one more indecent war.'¹³ Discussions about the Atlantic Charter became linked to the legitimacy of colonialism and the shape of post-war internationalism. Most significantly, the Atlantic Charter would become a cornerstone of the post-World War II universal human rights movement. The Charter, which has been described as the first major document of global significance to affirm the right to self-determination in both humanistic and universalist terms, was subsequently incorporated (by reference) into the United Nations (UN) Charter in 1945 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948.¹⁴

Focussing on discourses of self-determination within the context of the Atlantic Charter and post-World War II internationalism, this article explores the links between anticolonialism, decolonisation and human rights from two perspectives. The first interrogates the argument, now well-established in human rights scholarship, that anticolonialism was not a human rights movement. It reassesses this viewpoint by exploring how anticolonial activists in Africa invoked the Atlantic Charter in struggles for self-determination and deployed post-war human rights lexicon to strengthen longstanding demands for independence. It queries and problematises the logic and historicity of delinking the discourse of self-determination within anticolonialism from the discourse of human rights in post-World War II political agitations. The second perspective to linking anticolonialism and human rights adopted in this article focuses on how anticolonialism engaged with two distinct strands of the post-war human rights movement. The first movement was the anticolonial struggle for self-determination aimed at achieving national independence from *external* rule. The second movements were contemporaneous sub-national struggles by minority

groups within the colonial state for internal autonomy and self-rule. Both movements drew on the language of human rights and self-determination, although one often prevailed over the other. Discussions of decolonisation and human rights have, for the most part, centred on the *externalist* human rights impulse focused on how anticolonial activists appropriated and invoked post-war human rights lexicon in their struggles.¹⁵ Missing from these accounts, however, is an examination of how these anticolonial activists addressed internal struggles for self-determination by minority groups. The internal struggles are crucial to understanding the links between anticolonialism and human rights in the age of decolonisation. They are also key to understanding why human rights language was abandoned by some anticolonial activists once independence was achieved. The broad goal here is not only to trouble conventional notions of human rights, but to also contribute to scholarly debates about the role of human rights in the context of decolonisation struggles and the reciprocal place of anticolonialism in shaping the global human rights movement.

Anticolonialism as ‘non-human rights’

Anticolonial struggles for self-determination had a significant impact on the development of the idea of universal human rights. Colonised people all over the world drew on an emergent international human rights language in their ideological struggles against imperial powers and their demands for independence. Anticolonial movements in Asia and Africa were among the first mass movements to draw on the language of universal and inalienable human rights that gained prominence after World War II. Yet, the notion persists in some quarters that anticolonialism was not a human rights movement because its primary aim was collective liberation rather than the reduction of state power over the individual.¹⁶

The argument against reading anticolonial movements as human rights movements hinges on three main premises. The first is the supposition that anticolonialism was already fully formed before post-World War II human rights rhetoric had a chance to have a serious impact on it. Proponents of this argument point to the fact that there were only minor and occasional invocations of ‘human rights’ in anticolonialism. Jan Eckel has argued for instance that although the Atlantic Charter was a central reference point for anticolonialism, this was not due to the idea of human rights. His argument hinges partly on the fact that the Charter did not mention ‘human rights’ and many anticolonial activists did not mention the term ‘human rights’ in their writings.¹⁷ Rather, what sparked the enthusiastic reception in the colonies was the fact that the Charter explicitly stated the principle of self-determination. At the time, Eckel argues, ‘self-determination had not yet been formulated as a human right and not even the Universal Declaration included it explicitly’.¹⁸ Like other scholars in the ‘anticolonialism as non-human rights’ school, Eckel insists on a hard distinction between the principle of self-determination and the human rights idea at that historical moment.

The second premise of the ‘anticolonialism as non-human rights’ argument is the supposition that anticolonialism privileged popular liberation over ‘human rights’ (narrowly defined as individual rights). In his comprehensive study, *Human Rights and the End of Empire*, Brian Simpson argues that the primary aim of anticolonial activists was to liberate collective national entities from the grip of imperial arms and not to reduce the power of the state over the individual, which is ‘the defining character of all human rights activism’.¹⁹ According to Simpson, the real connection between the human rights movement and anticolonialism lies in a common commitment to the notion of human dignity.²⁰ Within this conceptual framework, then, human rights are essentially about curtailing *state* power, not the quest for the collective freedom of colonised people. In other words, for colonial states at

the threshold of independence, self-determination took precedence over a notion of universal human rights.

The final premise for excluding anticolonialism from the human rights narrative is what can be termed the ‘human-rights-as-political-strategy’ argument, suggesting that where anticolonial activists invoked human rights at all, they did so only as a discursive political strategy to achieve national sovereignty.²¹ The broader implication here is that their invocation of human rights was borne out of sheer political expediency rather than deep ideological commitment. This is perhaps the weakest of all three premises. The history of human rights in the twentieth century, from the adoption of the UDHR to Cold War era invocations of human rights, is essentially the story of how nations and regional blocs have used human rights language to further their strategic geopolitical agendas. The politics of human rights rhetoric was not unique to anticolonialism; it is integral to the history of human rights.

The analytical pitfalls of the blanket inclusion or rejection of human rights in regard to decolonisation have already been well articulated elsewhere.²² The place of human rights in decolonisation was more complex and more ambiguous. One recent study has demonstrated the links between international human rights and the radicalisation of colonial violence in the wars of decolonisation in Africa after 1945.²³ These wars of decolonisation became the first major challenge and the testing ground for newly established international human rights norms. ‘While the colonial powers tried to deny the universal character of human rights in the colonies in general and in times of colonial emergency, the anticolonial movement intentionally exploited reports about massive violations of basic rights such as forced resettlement, torture and summary killings to win the support of international public opinion.’²⁴

The distinction that has been made between the principle of self-determination and the idea of human rights has been described as substantive, rather than simply semantic. Human rights historians have been urged to be careful not to project backwards the ample understanding of human rights with which they have become familiar.²⁵ This is good advice. But historians should also be careful not to freeze the definition of human rights at convenient moments in international history or take for granted the deep political and ideological imperatives that supposedly delink self-determination from human rights in the first place.

The human rights idea evolved very quickly in the first two decades after World War II. The precise point at which the idea crystallised is open to debate. However, we can point to at least two distinct phases in the evolution of the modern human rights idea in the 1940s. The first was a decidedly Euro-American phase beginning with the Atlantic Charter in 1941, the establishment of the UN in 1945 and ending with the adoption of the UDHR in 1948. International human rights discourses during this early phase tended to focus on atomised individualism as well as political and civil liberties centred on personalised entitlements and state obligations. These attributes were largely shaped by the atrocities in wartime Europe and the imperatives of constraining state power over in post-war Europe. In this early iteration of ‘universal human rights’, there was a prominent place for individual rights but not the collective rights of peoples; there was a place for civil and political liberties but not for economic, social or cultural rights. This would change significantly with the emergence of the ‘global United Nations’ as formerly colonised nations became independent and gained voices at international forums.²⁶ This marked the second phase of the evolution of the human rights idea.

European powers that championed the establishment of the UN and drafted the UDHR had an entrenched interest in not only defending their sovereignty, but also in evading

glaring contradiction in the practice of colonisation on the one hand, and the human rights idea on the other. For these European powers, delinking self-determination struggles in the colonies from human rights idealism at the UN was a matter of political and ideological expedience. They viewed the principle of sovereignty and the concept of human rights as being fundamentally opposed to each other – one having to do with the rights of states and the other with the rights of individuals. The *anticolonialism as non-human rights* argument echoes this distinction of political convenience. The work of the Human Rights Commission in those early days consisted of underlying struggles over which rights to include and which ones to leave out.²⁷ It was partly because all the major powers had anxieties about their own human rights records, both at home and abroad, that in the UDHR they enunciated rights without explaining why people have them and agreed on high principles while leaving the matter of enforcement unresolved.²⁸

The main concern for European statesmen in discussions at the UN was post-war European geopolitics.²⁹ British officials were primarily interested in protecting European civilisation from the ‘barbarians of the East’ and Prime Minister Churchill had little enthusiasm for President Roosevelt’s vision of a world organisation to promote the ‘Four Freedoms’.³⁰ What he thought was needed was a Western European regional organisation to serve as an ideological response and weapon to the threat posed by Russian communism.³¹ The future of the colonised world was not a factor in this vision. When the UN was eventually established, the question of human rights in the colonies remained tangential to its deliberations. Discussions about ‘Non-Self Governing Territories’ (colonies, in UN jargon) occasionally became a source of embarrassment for imperial powers, but that did not deter resolute rejection of all human rights proposals that were considered political interference into colonial affairs.³² For example, in 1953 Britain threatened to withdraw cooperation from the UN Trusteeship Committee if it considered a petition from the chiefs of Nyasaland over the creation of the Central African Federation.³³ The chiefs had protested that the lack of consultation in the process of creating the federation amounted to a violation of their right to political participation. Similarly, proposals to establish petition mechanisms for colonised peoples was strongly opposed by Britain, France and Belgium, forcing the United States to take a ‘middle of the road approach’ that accommodated imperial interests.³⁴ There was consensus on a human rights regime, but only as long as there were no provisions that would give it teeth and shake the foundations of the imperial order.

Low-key discussions took place within the context of information from non-self-governing territories, but there could be no serious debate on issues such as the liberation war in Algeria. In spite of compelling evidence of gross human rights violations, Western powers supported the French position that the North African conflict fell under France’s domestic jurisdiction. South Africa’s racism would be debated only in terms of the treatment of people of Indian origin because apartheid was viewed as an internal problem. Conscious of its own racial problems at home, the United States feared that a precedent might be set that would place American segregation on the UN agenda.³⁵ In 1953, for instance, there was a ‘bitter struggle’ at the UN General Assembly over a UN Human Rights Commission Report which condemned apartheid policies in South Africa as human rights violations. The UN General Assembly was divided between, on the one hand, those who argued that the UN Charter pledged members states to respect fundamental freedoms for all irrespective of race, sex, language or religion; and on the other hand, those who rejected the report on the grounds that the UN had no authority to intervene in the domestic jurisdiction of any state.³⁶

Anticolonial activists were keenly aware of the politics of imperial self-interest at the UN. Nevertheless, they drew on the emergent human rights lexicon in their struggles for

civil liberties and self-determination. Anticolonial voices were amplified at the UN as formerly colonised Afro-Asian countries gained independence in the 1950s and 1960s changing the tenor of the human rights debate. The Afro-Asian-Arab bloc at the UN became the driving force behind asserting self-determination as human rights – a theme obscured in earlier discussions. ‘Third World’ articulations of self-determination as human rights may have gained validation at the UN in the 1950s and 1960s, but they began much earlier. By recognising these political and ideological impulses that underscore the evolution of human rights, we are able to rethink the connection between anticolonialism and human rights. We no longer see the links simply as a one-directional story of how anticolonial activists drew on human rights discourse but also a story of how these activists shaped an emergent human rights movement. For the historian of empire, the tendency to see the link between anticolonialism and human rights as a one-directional flow of ideas evinces familiar narratives of ascendant metropolises and subordinate peripheries. The history of human rights in the age of decolonisation is more than just the story of how anticolonial movements in the global south drew on metropolitan rights discourses. It is also a story of how anticolonialism normatively shaped an evolving human rights idea. Anticolonialism marked the expansion of post-war human rights ideology rather than its subversion. In some ways, it also marked the inauguration of the more holistic human rights ideology we recognise today – one that is concerned not only with an egalitarian and insular individualism but also the collective rights of peoples.

Beyond political alienations and dispossessions

A key assumption of the ‘anticolonialism as non-human rights’ school is that anticolonialism was essentially a struggle for political self-determination. This is largely true. But just as colonialism was more than simply the denial of the right to self-government, so too was anticolonialism more than a struggle for popular liberation. The alienations and dispossessions that colonial rule inflicted on colonised subjects cannot solely be measured in political or collective terms. Quite apart from the denial of the right to collective political self-determination, colonial states were implicated in the violation of individual liberties through arbitrary arrests and imprisonments, forced labour policies, restrictions on expression and movement, torture and killings, all underpinned by institutionalised racism.

Anticolonial movements were therefore not limited to struggles for political self-determination, even though this was a key demand. At the Pan-African Congresses which became the main transnational platform for anticolonialism, African and Afro-diasporan leaders drew the world’s attention to a wide range of individual and collective human rights violations by colonial regimes.³⁷ Recent studies have shown how Africans and their metropolitan anticolonial allies used the status of UN Trust Territories to address everyday human rights abuses under colonial rule.³⁸ Working through non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as the New York-based International League of the Rights of Man, the American Committee on Africa, and the Movement for Colonial Freedom based in London, colonial subjects drew on human rights ideology to further their anticolonial agenda at the UN and other international forums. Cameroonian petitioners to the UN, for example, invoked human rights not only for collective liberation, but also for the protection of individual rights canonised in international law. They sent a list with the names of persons French and British administrators had deported, arrested and killed, appealing to the international community to protect specific individuals.³⁹ In Zanzibar, anticolonial activists formed the Human Rights League whose objective was to protect

the rights and liberties of Africans. The organisation was labelled an extremist group by British colonial authorities seeking to suppress its activities.⁴⁰

To be sure, self-determination was the rallying call of anticolonial movements. The dominant theme in nationalist discourse was the right to national self-determination, which was seen as the starting point and indispensable condition for all other rights and freedoms. Responding to critics who questioned his emphasis on political independence over economic and social development, Kwame Nkrumah, the prominent anticolonial advocate who became prime minister of independent Ghana, famously urged his countrymen: 'Seek ye first the political kingdom and all other things shall be added unto you.'⁴¹ Nkrumah's quest for the political kingdom represented not only a normative statement but also symbolised a propensity to view the political struggle as the paramount human rights question in the colonial context.⁴² In his own words, 'self-determination is a means of further realisation of our social, economic and cultural potentialities. It is political freedom that dictates the pace of economic and social progress.'⁴³ The clear emphasis in anticolonial nationalist rights discourse was on the collective right to self-government which was considered a prerequisite to fulfilling other rights aspirations.

This strategic prioritising of national liberation framed as the collective rights of the people would ultimately turn out to be self-serving. In many post-colonial states, including Nkrumah's Ghana, the language of sovereignty, collective rights and 'solidarity rights' became grounds for suppressing individual liberties.⁴⁴ By articulating self-determination exclusively in terms of national liberation from colonial rule, leading anticolonial nationalists could dismiss or suppress equally legitimate aspirations for self-determination by minority groups within the state. Like post-war European statesmen who, for political expediency, narrowly defined universal human rights to exclude self-determination in the colonies, leading anticolonial activists restricted 'self-determination' to national independence from colonial rule. Internal struggles for sub-national self-determination within the context of decolonisation were portrayed as distractions from the paramount cause of national liberation. I will return later to this point about the opportunism of nationalist anticolonial human rights discourse.

Hanna Arendt famously argued that the 'rights of man' are indistinguishable from the rights of peoples.⁴⁵ True to this understanding, most anticolonial activists did not see a fundamental distinction between their struggles for self-determination and the emergent post-war human rights idea. Self-determination was always integral to their vision of universal human rights since they perceived human rights both as individual and collective entitlements. Emancipation meant the freedom of both individuals and peoples to determine their own fate. The question of human rights, therefore, quickly and inextricably blended with the question of national emancipation as only the emancipated sovereignty of peoples seemed to be able to ensure full human rights. This identification of the 'rights of man' with the 'rights of peoples' came to light only in international discourse with the rise of disenfranchised peoples, comprising those who were deprived *en masse* of human rights.⁴⁶ At the UN, delegates of newly independent states such as India, Pakistan and the Philippines advocated for the inclusion of self-determination into human rights covenants amidst stiff opposition from Western states insistent on limiting them to individual civil and political rights.⁴⁷

Still, the history of the post-World War II human rights movement cannot be based entirely on textual analyses of writings by a narrow group of political actors. There is deeper historical knowledge to be gleaned from analysing text and language not only at their face value, but on the basis of the ideas and practices which produced and sustained such discourses. Leaders and followers in the anticolonial movement drew not only on the

language of human rights but also on the ideas behind the language. The human rights idea was essentially the promise of an immutable universal humanity upheld through international consensus. In West Africa, anticolonial activists captured this idea when they spoke about their fundamental freedoms in terms of 'global citizenship'. 'We do not want to be subjects of Empire; we want to be citizens of the world', proclaimed a Nigerian newspaper contributor in 1942.⁴⁸ In East Africa, nationalists invoked *Uhuru* (freedom) in their Kiswahili mother tongue, linking it to the promise of the Atlantic Charter, the equality of men and races and the debates about fundamental freedoms taking place at the UN.⁴⁹ Even if these activists did not speak or write in the metropolitan languages of their colonial overlords, or invoke the vogueish term 'human rights', their engagement with the human rights idea is evident. The unrelenting fixation with metropolitan lexicon risks silencing other articulations of the human rights idea.⁵⁰

Although anticolonial activists drew on an emergent lexicon of universal human rights in their struggles for self-determination, they were also deeply sceptical of its transformative potential.⁵¹ They were not alone in their scepticism. Mark Mazower has shown that the acceptance of human rights at this moment was significantly conditioned by pessimism among the great powers that it would have little practical effect.⁵² Divisions among member states in the 1950s over human rights reflected the re-emergence of competing national interests after a brief period of consensus at the end of World War II.⁵³ The South African statesman, Jan Smut, who introduced the concept of human rights into the UN Charter remained a firm believer in the supremacy of the British Empire and could not countenance extending the human rights principles he so vigorously championed at the UN to his country. In the colonies, doubt and cynicism also arose from the sense that it took the suffering of 'whites' to jolt the powers that be into action whereas the atrocities of colonialism had left the world indifferent.⁵⁴ It did not escape anticolonial activists that colonial massacres of indigenous people did not garner enough global outrage and indignation to trigger a rights revolution.⁵⁵ Wilsonian rhetoric of self-determination and the promising human rights impulses of post-World War I internationalism did not coalesce in a rights revolution.⁵⁶ That would wait until Europe encountered its own age of tyranny and atrocities. When human rights talk was eventually embraced by the United States and European powers after World War II, anticolonial activists joined the bandwagon with caution.⁵⁷ Many remained ambivalent and even suspicious of a UDHR purportedly affirming the rights of all human beings, drawn up by the same imperialist powers actively implicated in denying them their right to self-determination.⁵⁸

Liberation and universal human rights

Nnamdi Azikiwe, the anticolonial activist who became the first president of independent Nigeria, epitomises the connections between anticolonialism and human rights. After his primary education in European missionary schools in Nigeria, Azikiwe studied at the historically black Howard University and Lincoln University (where he also taught) in the 1920s and 1930s.⁵⁹ His experiences of colonial rule in Africa and racial segregation in the United States shaped his political ideology and understanding of the human rights idea. Azikiwe drew on an eclectic tradition of rights discourse and was deeply aware of contradictions in imperial rights discourse. His human rights ideas were influenced by traditional African thought, Christian theology, Enlightenment liberalism, American republican idealism and the post-war universal human rights idea. Azikiwe was among the first in a steady stream of African students in the United States who went on to become leading figures in post-war nationalism in the continent. For many of these

students, the United States represented both the promises and failures of rights idealism. On the one hand, their experiences of racial discrimination intensified racial consciousness and uncompromising determination to achieve equality at home. On the other hand, they 'shared a loyalty to the American ideal, the confident expectation of improved status, and the admiration for a dynamic society'.⁶⁰

Perhaps more than any other African anticolonial activist of his era, Azikiwe came to represent a 'militant' intellectual nationalism that challenged the legitimacy of colonial rule both domestically and internationally.⁶¹ Upon returning to Nigeria after his studies in 1937, Azikiwe established two newspapers – *West African Pilot* and the *Daily Comet* which became platforms for his anticolonial activism. *West African Pilot* became one of the most famous and widely circulated newspapers in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1940s and 1950s.⁶² His connections with intellectuals and institutions in the United States also provided an international forum for Azikiwe's anticolonial activism. At Howard University, he was exposed to the Black Nationalist movement of Marcus Garvey and encountered the African-American intellectual and activist George Padmore.⁶³ Azikiwe and Padmore cooperated later on several projects, including founding the Pan-African Federation and organising the Pan-African Congress in Manchester in 1945, which called for 'the implementation of the principles of the Four Freedoms and self-determination in the Atlantic Charter everywhere'.⁶⁴

In a speech delivered to the graduates of Storer College on the occasion of his conferment with an honorary doctorate degree in 1947, Azikiwe linked the struggles for self-determination in the colonies with President Roosevelt's 'Four Freedoms', the Atlantic Charter and the emergent idea of universal rights, stating:

According to the leaders of the Allied Nations, we fought the last war in order to 'revive the stature of man' and to make the Four Freedoms a living reality. I interpret those war and peace aims to mean the enjoyment of political freedom, social equality, economic security, and religious freedom, everywhere in the world ... [but] when we demand to exercise elementary *human rights* not only are we silenced by our self-appointed rulers, but the outside world seems to close its eyes, stuff its ears, and seal its mouth on the subject of what is to us a righteous cause.⁶⁵

After the adoption of the UDHR in 1948, Azikiwe increasingly invoked the declaration and the idea of universal human rights in his speeches and writings. Speaking to his fellow fraternity members of the Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity in Washington DC in 1949, he asked: 'What forces have been at work to intensify this struggle of the African for self-determination?' In answering the question, he referenced Eleanor Roosevelt's vision of a post-war world where individuals all over the world would have freedom. 'World peace', he stated, could only be assured if this vision of universal rights was 'true for men all over the world ... regardless of race and religion'.⁶⁶

Azikiwe's invocations of human rights were not limited to references to the UDHR. In 1943 he published his *Political Blueprint of Nigeria* in which he outlined a rights-based vision for Nigeria's independence. He referred to the Atlantic Charter and Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, using both to support his uniquely anticolonial human rights agenda. At a time when colonial powers sought to drive a wedge between self-determination in the colonies and discussions about universal human rights at the UN, Azikiwe insisted on the fundamental interrelatedness of both ideas. He countered British attempts to delink anticolonial movements from universal human rights. The Memorandum on 'The Atlantic Charter and British West Africa' which he submitted to the British Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1943 was part of a strategy of assailing the legitimacy of

colonial rule by showing the inconsistencies of Britain's position on the right to self-determination.⁶⁷ Following Prime Minister Churchill's statement that the Atlantic Charter applied only to Europe and not to British colonies, Azikiwe wrote that it was imperative for Africans to prepare their own political 'blueprint' rather than rely on 'those who are too busy preparing their own'.⁶⁸

Azikiwe did go about preparing his own blueprint of rights, the outcome of which was his *Political Blueprint of Nigeria* published in 1943. In it, he listed the basic rights that should be guaranteed to every 'commonwealth subject'. These included the right to health, education, social equality, material security and the right to recreation.⁶⁹ The *Blueprint* also included provisions for religious freedom, protection of life and property, collective bargaining, and the rights to public assembly, discussion and demonstration.⁷⁰ Azikiwe recommended that the Virginia Bill of Rights of 1776, which served as a model for the American constitution, should also serve as a model for preparing Nigeria's constitution. The Virginia Bill of Rights, he argued, was ideal because, 'it embodies all the basic rights for which democratic-loving humanity had fought to preserve in the course of history'.⁷¹ He also idealised the Declaration of Independence of Liberia of 1847 and its recognition of 'certain inalienable rights of all men'.⁷² Azikiwe's vision of human rights appears to have hinged more on Enlightenment liberal rights tradition than on a limited vision of the Atlantic Charter.

Under the auspices of his political party, the National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), Azikiwe led the drafting of the 'Freedom Charter' in 1948.⁷³ The charter affirmed a wide range of political, economic and social rights, including the right to life, freedom of opinion, freedom of association and the right to self-determination. It also called for the establishment of states on ethnic and linguistic bases as a guarantee of political representation.⁷⁴ Alluding to the Atlantic Charter, the preamble of the Freedom Charter affirmed the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they may live. The charter's preamble proclaimed: 'The tribes, nations and peoples of Nigeria and the Cameroons undertake, as of *right*, to arrogate to themselves, the status of an independent self-governing political community'.⁷⁵ The charter included a condemnation of slavery, servitude and imperialism; an affirmation of the equality of all persons; the right to basic education and health and even the right to recreation and leisure. Also inspired by the Atlantic Charter, Nelson Mandela and the leaders of the African National Congress in South Africa drafted their own Freedom Charter in 1955.⁷⁶

Beyond the power elites: human rights discourse in everyday life

Anticolonial discourses of human rights were not limited to political leaders and high office holders like Azikiwe. Ordinary people and local grass-roots activists also mobilised the idea and language of human rights in opposition to colonial rule. In order to construct a history of human rights and decolonisation, it is essential to pay attention to what I call the 'topography of human rights' – that is, to contextualise the particular settings in which human rights discourses were invoked. Given the objective of human rights ideology to give voice to the disenfranchised, it is crucial that the complete history of human rights be written not only from the perspectives of dominant actors in mainstream political processes, but also from the bottom-up, to reflect grass-roots impulses that shaped political and social changes. A history of human rights that solely relies on the record of activities of actors and institutions at the highest echelons of the political process risks becoming itself a narrative of power and domination.

Anticolonial invocation of human rights was evident beyond organised political and social movements. In the African Trust Territories, for example, the majority of petitions to UN bodies were from ordinary people – seamstresses, taxi-drivers, market traders and farmers, women and youth groups, and urban and rural inhabitants.⁷⁷ These petitioners and their metropolitan allies articulated their grievances against colonial rule in the language of universal human rights, invoking the UN Charter, the UDHR and the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of the Council of Europe.⁷⁸

Although anticolonial movements, like the colonial enterprise, were primarily male-dominated, woman also invoked human rights in anticolonial struggles. Perhaps the most prominent female anticolonial grass-roots activist of this era in West Africa was Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti who was a relentless advocate of self-determination, women's rights and a wide range of other civil and socio-economic rights. The Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU) which she formed in 1946 comprised both elite and market women. The organisation played an active role in local protest politics and grass-roots mobilisation of women in support of nationalist and anticolonial causes. In 1949 it waged a relentless campaign against an authoritarian chief who, as the local 'Native Authority' under the British indirect rule system, was seen as a symbol of colonial sexism and oppression.⁷⁹ The protest campaign forced the chief's abdication. In a letter to a British newspaper in 1947, Ransome-Kuti argued that under colonialism, African women had lost their traditional economic and political power. Not only were they denied suffrage and any voice in government, they were forced to pay taxes they could not afford and were denied basic amenities, leaving many of them 'poverty stricken and disease-ridden'.⁸⁰ She appealed to British women to help free African women from political, social and economic 'slavery', stating: 'Your country is responsible for the state of ours; can you let this state of things continue?'⁸¹

Beyond her local activism, Ransome-Kuti was active in several international women's organisations including the Women's International Democratic Federation, a post-World War II organisation that grew out of European resistance movements and was connected to the Communist International. Ransome-Kuti's anticolonial and human rights activism in the 1940s and 1950s took her across colonised Africa and beyond, including travels to Austria, China (where she met with Mao Tse-tung), Czechoslovakia, Denmark, England, Germany, Hungary, Poland, the Soviet Union and Switzerland. She had contacts with women's organisations in South Africa, Trinidad, Korea, India, Vietnam and Bulgaria. At a time when any affiliation with communist or socialist leaning organisations or individuals was seen as very dangerous by Western governments, Ransome-Kuti, as a woman and colonial subject, came under heavy pressure from British colonial authorities, intent on suppressing her local and international activism.⁸²

Like many other anticolonial activists of her era, Ransome-Kuti did not see a distinction between her demands for political self-determination and other human rights claims. Active in anti-imperialist, anti-racist and anti-sexist struggles for most of her life, she dedicated herself to issues such as women's suffrage and representation in government and considered herself 'primarily an advocate for human rights'.⁸³ She was part of a long tradition of women's activism across the continent that did not isolate their oppression as women from their oppression as colonial subjects and as Africans. They well understood that their liberation as women was as connected to issues of imperialism as it was to racism and sexism. These oppressions could not be disaggregated. The history of human rights and decolonisation in the colonised world is therefore incomplete without detailed study of actors like Ransome-Kuti who were able to connect grass-roots mobilisation with international activism.

Human rights and the post-colony

For all the talk about human rights within anticolonialism, political independence in the 1950s and 1960s did not usher a golden age of human rights. Once in power, anticolonial activists largely turned their backs on human rights. With the proliferation of authoritarian regimes in newly independent countries in Asia and Africa, it was clear that the promising adaptation of rights ideas in anticolonial struggles had faltered. Rights talk, once wielded vigorously and effectively by nationalists to challenge colonial domination and negotiate independence, was overshadowed by a discourse of sovereignty and national solidarity. New arguments emerged about the constraints and limitations of the human rights laws enacted as part of decolonisation processes. The central thrust of these arguments was that constitutional human rights guarantees imposed limits on the state's power over its own people and undermined sovereignty and national unity. Human rights talk was increasingly seen as a threat to the fragile post-colonial state. As one Tanzanian official report put it, the bill of rights limits the capacity of government to take measures necessary to suppress subversion and 'serves only to protect those whose aim it was to subvert and destroy democracy'.⁸⁴ As independence approached, even Nnamdi Azikiwe spoke of human rights and self-determination more in terms of national liberation than protecting the autonomy of minority groups within the state. He opposed constitutional reforms that encouraged regional autonomy at the expense of centralised political authority.⁸⁵ He was also ambivalent about sub-national demands for self-rule.⁸⁶ In some cases, such as Biafra and Katanga, tensions over sub-national self-determination struggles resulted in the outbreak of secessionist wars soon after independence.

With more and more African states gaining independence, there was less focus on human rights except as a tool in the fight against colonialism and white minority rule in southern Africa.⁸⁷ When the Organisation of African Unity was created in 1963 a few token references to human rights were included in its charter, but it was evident that the human rights language that had been used in opposition to colonial rule was of lesser value. To the extent that any attention was given to human rights by African leaders, their priority was on socio-economic rights.⁸⁸ Post-colonial ruling elites argued about the cultural relativism of human rights and the primacy of socio-economic rights over civil and political rights. The military leader of Ghana, Colonel Acheampong, famously stated that 'one man, one vote is meaningless unless accompanied by the principle of one man one bread',⁸⁹ while the Senegalese leader, Leopold Senghor, asserted that 'human rights begins with breakfast'.⁹⁰

These statist arguments become ubiquitous. Political leaders argued that the fledgling post-colonial state could ill afford the unrestrained licence of individual liberties. Forging arbitrary colonial geopolitical entities inherited at independence into viable nation states required imposing limits on individual liberties in the larger collective interest of the state. President Samora Machel of Mozambique proclaimed soon after his country's independence: 'For the nation to live, the tribe must die.'⁹¹ Individual rights centred on citizenship came to be differentiated from collective rights centred on the nation. The ideals of national unity manifested by centralised political power, common language and culture and economic and geographical limits, all so fundamental to the self-identification of the new states, tended also to express themselves in intolerant and repressive attitudes towards those who were perceived or perceived themselves as 'others'.⁹² Needless to say, these were false choices.

To read these developments simply as the abandonment of human rights by nationalist elites, as some scholars have,⁹³ misses the point. It is not enough to identify the 'stunning

political shifts' in human rights discourse which followed African decolonisation, it is even more important to understand the socio-political conditions that compelled and shaped these shifts. Ascendant nationalist elites who inherited political power from colonial authorities moved away from the human rights ideology that they once staunchly proffered, speaking instead a new language of power, sovereignty and conformity. Other activists who lost out in the transition struggles to inherit the colonial throne or found themselves in the margins of power within the post-colonial state continued to embrace universal human rights in opposition to statist discourse. These activists found renewed relevance in the language of human rights. For post-colonial dissidents such as J.B. Danquah in Ghana, Odinga Odinga in Kenya and the Nigerian opposition activist Chike Obi, human rights took on new life in the struggle against authoritarian regimes, one-party rule and military dictatorships. These post-colonial assertions of human rights become evident only when we broaden the focus of human rights history beyond the corridors of domestic and international power politics.

Although human rights ideology deployed within anticolonialism may have waned in the corridors of state power, it remained relevant as oppositional discourse against state power. More than simply the abandonment of human rights, these developments point to a recurring trend in the history of human rights in the twentieth century – the instrumentalisation of human rights and the opportunistic co-option of human rights more to attain or enhance power than to promote equity or alleviate human suffering. In the colonial context, anticolonial activists instrumentalised human rights language to further nationalist struggles for independence. They challenged attempts by European colonial powers to delink their collective aspirations for self-determination from the emergent universal human rights. Rather, they framed their struggles as integral to the human rights idea. In the post-colonial state, the anticolonial activist who became the new ruling elite re-instrumentalised human rights to foster statist agendas with invocations of cultural relativism, cultural rights, the collective right to development and the primacy of socio-economic rights over civil and political rights. Conversely, anticolonial activists who ended up constituting the opposition groups invoked ideals of individual-centred rights and civil liberties hinged on curtailing state power. The human rights discourse had come full circle, reinvented anew each time as contexts and political and economic interests changed.

The history of human rights in the twentieth century shows that human rights have rarely been invoked and deployed in normatively objective ways. The notion of a *pure* human rights ideology has been more aspirational than factual. Various historical actors have defined and invoked human rights in ways that are politically expedient at particular historical moments – European statesmen debating the UDHR in the 1940s, anticolonial activists in the outposts of Empire in the 1950s, post-colonial opposition dissidents in the 1960s and 1970s, Western and Eastern bloc leaders throughout the Cold War.⁹⁴ These actors have, to varying extents and degrees, all instrumentalised human rights in ways that served their political and ideological agendas. To argue the historical instrumentalism of human rights, however, is not to deny the real transformative power of the human rights idea. That history has been well documented.⁹⁵ The point here is to complicate what is often a linear, celebratory and triumphant narrative of the post-war human rights movement that excludes earlier rights movements at the edge of the empire.

Conclusion

The historical relationship between anticolonialism and human rights in the age of decolonisation is more complex than has been presented. Post-World War II articulations of

individual-centred, state-centric ‘universal human rights’ were neither settled nor paradigmatic. Later, ‘Third World’ articulations and contestations of this insular human rights idea expanded the frontiers of human rights discourse by highlighting its contradictions and questioning its universalist assumptions. It is mistaken to interpret these developments as marking simply, the succession, displacement, abandonment or corruption of the human rights idea. To do so would be to read the relationship between human rights and anticolonialism in terms of a one-directional intellectual and ideological exchange. The underlying premise is problematic: that anticolonial activists appropriated and deployed human rights language in their struggles for self-determination but these activists contributed nothing to an emergent universal human rights idea. My argument here is that anticolonialism did not develop in isolation of the universal human rights discourse. It was integral to the development and *venacularisation* of the post-war universal human rights ideal. By *venacularisation*, I mean the complex process by which external impulses were appropriated and intersected into local ideas and situations to produce hybridised understandings of human rights.⁹⁶

The focus should not be only on how human rights impacted anticolonialism but also on how anticolonialism shaped and engaged with an evolving human rights ideology. Colonised peoples not only draw on universal human rights in their struggles against imperialism, they also shaped the global meanings of human rights. The ideological shift in how ruling post-colonial elites engage with human rights reflects not simply the abandonment of human rights ideas but also reveals the processes of instrumentalising and co-opting human rights for political and ideological ends. Constructing anticolonialism and human rights as intersecting social and intellectual movements allows for a more nuanced and holistic history of human rights in the twentieth century; one that focuses not only on the triumphs of the post-war human rights movement, but also on its many underlying paradoxes and contradictions.

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Notes

1. The trip was originally sponsored by the British government as part of a cultural exchange programme with the colonies.
2. Atlantic Charter, 14 August 1941, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/atlantic.asp> (assessed 7 March 2014).
3. Robert E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History* (New York: Enigma Books, 2008), 363.
4. *The Times*, 11 November 1942. Prime Minister Churchill was not alone in seeking a restrictive interpretation of the principle of self-determination in the Atlantic Charter. The Soviet leader Josef Stalin who saw the Charter as an ‘anti-Soviet tract’ also asserted that it did not apply to regions of Soviet influence in Eastern Europe: Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black*

- Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935–1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 64.
5. National Archives of the United Kingdom (NAUK), ‘Memorandum on The Atlantic Charter and British West Africa by the West African Press Delegation to the United Kingdom, 1 August 1943’, CO 554/133/3.
 6. Ibid.
 7. James Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 240.
 8. Gabriel Olakunle Olusanya, *The West African Students’ Union and the Politics of Decolonisation, 1925–1958* (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1982), 15; Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, 240.
 9. Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War* (New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), 224. For a detailed history of the role of the WASU see C. Ake, ‘WASU in Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone’, *The Role of African Student Movements in the Political and Social Evolution of Africa from 1900 to 1975* (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1994).
 10. Robert E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History* (New York: Grosset and Dunlop, 1950), 353–63.
 11. For example, in 1942, the Phelps-Stokes Fund in the United States sponsored a report entitled: ‘The Atlantic Charter and African from an American Standpoint’. The report, which was written by the committee which included W.E.B. Du Bois, raised similar points as those raised in Azi-kiwe’s Memorandum and argued that the principles of the Atlantic Charter, particularly that of self-determination, be applied to colonised Africa. Eric Porter, *The Problem of the Future World: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Race Concept at Mid-century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 76.
 12. L.D. Reddick, ‘Africa: Test of the Atlantic Charter’, *Crisis* 50, no. 7 (1943): 202.
 13. Ibid., 202.
 14. Although the UDHR does not explicitly assert the right to self-determination in the same terms as articulated in the Atlantic Charter, the principle is implied in its article 21 which upholds the right to participate in government and asserts that the ‘will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government’. For a general treatment of the Atlantic Charter, see Douglas Brinkley and David R. Facey-Crowther, eds, *The Atlantic Charter* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994).
 15. See for example, Fabian Klose, *Human Rights in the Shadow of Colonial Violence: The Wars of Independence in Kenya and Algeria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Roland Burke, *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Charles Parkinson, *Bills of Rights and Decolonization: The Emergence of Domestic Human Rights Instruments in Britain’s Overseas Territories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Bonny Ibhawoh, *Imperialism and Human Rights: Colonial Discourses of Rights and Liberties in African History* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007); A.W.B. Simpson, *Human Rights and the End of Empire: Britain and the Genesis of the European Convention* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010); Jan Eckel, ‘Human Rights and Decolonization: New Perspectives and Open Questions’, *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 1, no. 1 (2010): 111–35; Meredith Terretta, ‘We Had Been Fooled into Thinking that the UN Watches over the Entire World: Human Rights, UN Trust Territories, and Africa’s Decolonization’, *Human Rights Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (2012): 329–60.
 16. Moyn, *The Last Utopia*. In particular, Chapter 3: ‘Why Anticolonialism Wasn’t a Human Rights Movement’; and Samuel Moyn, ‘Imperialism, Self-Determination, and the Rise of Human Rights’, in Akira Iriye et al., eds, *The Human Rights Revolution: An International History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 159–78.
 17. Eckel, ‘Human Rights and Decolonization’, 115.
 18. Ibid.
 19. A.W. Brian Simpson, *Human Rights and the End of Empire: Britain and the Genesis of the European Convention* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 301.
 20. Ibid.
 21. Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, 117.
 22. See Jan Eckel, ‘Human Rights and Decolonization: New Perspectives and Open Questions’, *Humanity* 1, no. 1, (2010): 115; and Terretta, ‘We Had Been Fooled’, 34.

23. Klose, *Human Rights in the Shadow of Colonial Violence*.
24. Fabian Klose, 'Debating Human Rights and Decolonization', <http://imperialglobalexeter.com/2014/02/18/debating-human-rights-and-decolonization> (accessed 17 March 2014).
25. Eckel, 'Human Rights and Decolonization', 115.
26. Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 149.
27. Johannes Morsink, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Origins. Drafting and Intent* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 12–14.
28. Tiyambe Zeleza and Philip McConaughay, eds, *Human Rights and Economic Development in Africa: Establishing the Rule of Law* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 9.
29. Simpson, *Human Rights and the End of Empire*, esp. Chapter 5, 'Human Rights and the Structure of the Brave New World'.
30. Simpson, *Human Rights and the End of Empire*, 223.
31. *Ibid.*, 223–4.
32. For example, a proposal by Arab and Asian states for Tunisian independence on the basis of UN principles of self-determination was rejected as interference in French domestic affairs. Office of Public Communication Bureau of Public Affairs, *The Department of State Bulletin*, 28 (1953): 396.
33. The chiefs transmitted their petition to the committee through the British anti-apartheid activist Reverend Michael Scott. *Times*, 27 October 1953, NAUK CO 936/99.
34. James P. Hubbard, *The United States and the End of British Colonial Rule in Africa, 1941–1968* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2011), 169–70.
35. George M. Houser, 'Human Rights and the Liberation Struggle: The Importance of Creative Tension', *Africa Today* 39, no. 4 (1992): 7.
36. Significantly, the report affirmed the position that the 'protection of human rights belong not to any state but to a universal conscience'. *The Times*, 23 September 1953.
37. 'Declaration to the Colonial Peoples of the World'. Reprinted in K. Nkrumah, *Towards Colonial Freedom: Africa in the Struggle against World Imperialism* (London: Panaf, 1945 [1962]), 44–5.
38. Roger S. Clark, 'The International League for Human Rights and South West Africa 1947–1957: The Human Rights NGO as Catalyst in the International Legal Process', *Human Rights Quarterly* 3, no. 4 (1981): 101; Terretta, 'We Had Been Fooled', 329–60.
39. Terretta, 'We Had Been Fooled', 345.
40. 'The Human Rights League, Zanzibar', Anonymous Confidential Memorandum, 8 November 1961, NAUK CO 822/2193.
41. Kwame Nkrumah, *The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (London: Nelson, 1957), 146.
42. Kenneth W. Grundy, 'Nkrumah's Theory of Underdevelopment: An Analysis of Recurrent Themes', *World Politics* 15, no. 3 (1963): 438.
43. *The Gold Coast Weekly Review*, 20 July 1955. Quoted in Martin L. Kilson, 'Nationalism and Social Classes in British West Africa', *Journal of Politics* 20 (1958): 380.
44. Christof Heyns, ed., *Human Rights Law in Africa*, Volume 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 173.
45. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harvest Books, 1973), 291.
46. Roger Berkowitz, 'Hannah Arendt on Human Rights', in *International Handbook of Human Rights*, ed. Thomas Cushman (New York: Routledge, 2011), 59.
47. UN Commission on Human Rights, *Report of the Tenth Session* (New York: United Nations, Office of Public Information, 1954), 37–8.
48. *West African Pilot*, 14 June 1942.
49. Clement E. Adibe, 'From Benign Neglect to Strategic Engagement: The Shifting Dynamics of America's Policy towards Africa', in *United States – Africa Security Relations: Terrorism, Regional Security and National Interests*, ed. Kelechi A. Kalu and George Klay Kieh (New York: Routledge, 2013), 35.
50. For example, Jan Eckel states that the invocation of the Atlantic Charter by anticolonial activists does not illustrate the prominence of human rights language in anticolonial thought. Eckel, 'Human Rights and Decolonization', 115–19.
51. The notion that the UN rose from the ashes of World War II as the moral guardian of a new and peaceful global order has been challenged. It has been argued that the UN's creators envisioned a world organisation that would protect the interests of empire even though this insular imperial vision was ultimately reshaped by the post-war reaffirmation of national sovereignty and the unanticipated rise of India and other former colonial powers. See Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted*

- Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).
52. Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, esp. the discussion of 'Smut and Imperial Internationalism', 30–5.
 53. Roger Normand and Sarah Zaidi, *Human Rights at the UN: The Political History of Universal Justice* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), 241.
 54. Several scholars have identified this as the core reasoning that underscored 'Third World' scepticism about universal human rights in the post-World War II era. See Marie Dembour, 'Foundations: Critiques', in *International Human Rights Law*, ed. Daniel Moeckli, Sangeeta Shah and Sandesh Sivakumaran (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 81; David Slater, 'Contesting Occidental Visions of the Global: The Geopolitics of Theory and North-South Relations', *Beyond Law* (December 1994): 100; Makau Mutua, *Human Rights: A Political and Cultural Critique* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 10; Isodore Bonabom, 'The Development of a Truth Regime on "the Human": Human Rights in the Gold Coast 1945–57' (PhD diss., University of Sussex, 2012).
 55. *West African Pilot*, 13 March 1945, 8. The legal scholar and UN Human Rights Special Rapporteur, Jeremy Sarkin, has described the German colonial campaign against the Herero between 1904 and 1908 as the 'first genocide of the twentieth century'. The massacres in German South West Africa (GSWA), Sarkin argues, were international crimes under applicable international, humanitarian and criminal law at the time of the killings in 1904. See Jeremy Sarkin, *Colonial Genocide and Reparations Claims in the 21st Century: The Socio-Legal Context of Claims under International Law by the Herero against Germany for Genocide in Namibia, 1904–1908* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2009), 5.
 56. At the Paris Peace Conference following the end of World War I, Japan pressed for the inclusion of language promoting racial equality in the Covenant of the League of Nations and Italian Prime Minister, Vittorio Orlando, called for the inclusion of a statement on human rights in the covenant. Both initiatives were rejected by the United States and its European allies. Vernon D. Johnson, 'The Structural Causes of Anticolonial Revolutions in Africa', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 18, no. 2 (1993): 207. For a detailed account of how the race issue was handled at the peace talks and the League of Nations, see Paul Gordon Lauren, *Power and Prejudice: The Politics and Diplomacy of Radical Discrimination* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), 98.
 57. Arguments that Third World actors were not part of the post-war human rights programme have been disputed. Roland Burke has argued that Asian, African and Arab human rights specialists played a key role in the evolution of the human rights programme almost from its inception. However, he reaches this conclusion mainly by shifting the focus from the drafting of the UN Charter and UDHR in the 1940s, to the age of the 'global United Nations' in the 1950s and 1960s when several newly independent nations of Asia and Africa became members of the UN. The essentially Eurocentric character of the earliest human rights discussions within post-war internationalism remains largely unchallenged. Ronald Burke, *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).
 58. Bonny Ibhawoh, 'Colonialism: Legacy for Human Rights', in *Encyclopedia of Human Rights*, ed. David P. Forsythe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 363.
 59. Azikiwe also spent some time studying at Storer College, Harvard University and the University of Pennsylvania. For a discussion of how Azikiwe's education in the United States shaped his political activism, see Patrick J. Furlong, 'Azikiwe and the National Church of Nigeria and the Cameroons: A Case Study of the Political Use of Religion in African Nationalism', *African Affairs* 91, no. 364 (1992): 433–52.
 60. James Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971 [1958]), 245.
 61. *Ibid.*, 240.
 62. Sam O. Idemili, 'What the West African Pilot did in the Movement for Nigerian Nationalism between 1937 and 1957', *Black American Literature Forum* 12, no. 3 (1978): 85.
 63. For a discussion of the influence of the Garvey Movement on anticolonialism and African nationalism see R.L. Okonkwo, 'The Garvey Movement in British West Africa', *The Journal of African History* 21, no. 1 (1980): 105–17.

64. 'Resolutions of the Pan-African Congress Manchester 1945, <http://www.law.emory.edu/wandl/Literature/Documents/africa/Pan%20African/20.htm> (accessed 6 March 2014).
65. Nnamdi Azikiwe, *Zik: A Selection from the Speeches of Nnamdi Azikiwe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 82.
66. *Ibid.*, 7.
67. J. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), 240.
68. Nnamdi Azikiwe, *Political Blueprint of Nigeria* (Lagos: African Book Company, 1945), 72. My emphasis.
69. *Ibid.*, 44–5.
70. *Ibid.*, 2.
71. Azikiwe referred specifically to the Magna Carta, the English Petition of Rights and the Habeas Corpus Act of the United States. *Ibid.*, 40.
72. Nnamdi Azikiwe, *Renascent Africa* (London: F. Cass, 1968 [1937]), 174.
73. National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroons, 'Freedom Charter', *West African Pilot*, 4 January 1949.
74. Eyo Ita, *The Freedom Charter and Richard's Constitution in the Light of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights signed by the United Nations Assembly* (Calabar: WAPI Press, 1949), 14.
75. National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroons, 'Freedom Charter'.
76. Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1995), 95–6.
77. Terretta, 'We Had Been Fooled', 331.
78. Henry Steel, Confidential Memorandum, 17 September 1959, NAUK CO 936/535.
79. Jeremiah I. Dibua, *Modernization and the Crisis of Development in Africa: The Nigerian Experience* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 69.
80. *Ibid.*, 69.
81. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, 'For Women: She Speaks for Nigeria – We had Equality till Britain Came', *Daily Worker* (London), 18 August 1947.
82. Cheryl Johnson-Odim, 'For their Freedoms: The Anti-imperialist and International Feminist Activity of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti of Nigeria', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 32 (2009): 53.
83. *Ibid.*, 51.
84. *Report of the Presidential Commission on the Establishment of a Democratic One-Party State* (Dar es Salaam: Government Printer, 1965), 31.
85. Azikiwe opposed constitutional reforms introduced by the British Governor-General, John Stuart Macpherson, in 1950 which allowed for regional legislative autonomy. Azikiwe, *Zik: A Selection from the Speeches of Nnamdi Azikiwe*, 7.
86. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, 347.
87. Magnus Killander, 'African Human Rights Law in Theory and Practice', in *Research Handbook on International Law*, ed. Sarah Joseph and Adam McBeth (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2010), 390.
88. *Ibid.*, 390.
89. I.K. Acheampong, *Speeches and Interviews Volume 1* (Accra: Information Services Department, 1973), 29.
90. Quoted in William Felice, 'The Viability of the United Nations Approach to Economic and Social Human Rights in a Globalized Economy', *International Affairs* 75, no. 3 (1999): 569.
91. Quoted in Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 135.
92. Patrick Thornberry, 'Is there a Phoenix in the Ashes? International Law and Minority Rights', *Texas International Law Journal* 15 (1980): 421.
93. For example, Burke, *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights*, esp. Chapter 5, "'According to their own Norms and Civilizations": The Rise of Cultural Relativism and the Decline of Human Rights'.
94. For most of the Cold War period, human rights was a propaganda tool in the ideological war between the Soviets and the Americans. For a discussion on the impact of the Cold War on human rights debates at the UN, see Normand and Zaidi, *Human Rights at the UN*, 197–200.
95. See for example, Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: Norton, 2007); Thomas Risse, Stephen C. Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink, eds, *The Persistent Power of Human*

Rights: From Commitment to Compliance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Kathryn Sikkink, *The Justice Cascade: How Human Rights Prosecutions are Changing World Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2011); Mary Ann Glendon, *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York: Random House, 2001).

96. For a detailed discussion of the idea of the 'vernacularisation' of rights, see Sally Engle-Merry, 'Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle', *American Anthropologist* 108, no. 1 (2006): 38–51; Judy L. Ledger and Kheang Un, 'Global Concepts and Local Meaning: Human Rights and Buddhism in Cambodia', *Journal of Human Rights* 2, no. 4 (2003): 531–49.