



A Contextual and Dialogical Approach to Human Rights: Reconceptualizing Universality

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Abstract

Universal human rights that are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) are globally celebrated as a basis for global justice. Yet its claims to universality have been constantly contested by criticisms that point to its embeddedness in particular historical, cultural, and ideological traditions. To identify the conceptual tensions between moral and legal universalism when adapting human rights norms, this article analyzes the dilemma of universalizing human rights norms across very different socio-political and cultural landscapes. It interrogates the implication of cultural relativism, gendered hierarchies, and the structures of power for political legitimacy and applicability of human rights discourse. This study argues for the reconceptualization of universality as a process that is dynamic as well as context-sensitive, yet maintains an ethical core while permitting multiple perspectives. It does so through an interdisciplinary analysis of a nuanced approach toward the reconciliation of foundational human rights principles with the practical realities of a world that is interconnected yet culturally diverse. This article adds to these debates about human rights by addressing those theoretical and practical challenges to the adaptability and normative coherence of human rights in contemporary global governance contexts.

Keywords: *Human Rights; Universality; Cultural Relativism; Interdisciplinary Human Rights Theory; Contextual Adaptation*

Introduction

Human rights, encoded in documents like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), are one of the most extensive and long-lasting global moral and legalization projects. Originating from the brutalities of the Second World War and the need to establish humanitarian rights in a post-war world, the principle of rights is based on the proposition that every human being has some rights which are



inalienable when accorded to them¹. At its foundation is the desire to occupy a realm beyond and fight for such core democratic values as equality, justice, and freedom in different societies. But the concept of the universal has never been smooth sailing for anti-essentialists and cultural, political, and philosophical doubts regarding the concept's viability in a post-modern global world (Donnelly, 2007, p. 281).

The premise of universal human rights rests on two foundational pillars: moral universalism and recourse to the idea that fundamental rights stem from such universally shared values at law or legal universalism, under which these principles are given an international legal force (Benhabib, 2011, p. 63). Problematic colonial and imperialist impulses have also been attributed to the framework of human rights, which, are seen as an ultimate goal. The theoretical questions concerning the compatibility of rights with cultures, religions, and regions' strengths and continuities still arise as advocates and critics weigh on the legitimacy of human rights in the modern world.

This article attempts to find whether the debate concerning the universality of human rights can be addressed by conceptualizing the human rights framework by combining different perspectives or theories. Universality is reimagined not as a fixed doctrine but as a dialogical, culturally specific process that balances ethical principles with diverse human experiences. This article is structured as follows: it examines the evolution and debates on universalism, analyses challenges to adaptability and evaluates contemporary perspectives to explore an inclusive and transformative model that fits well with 21st-century human rights.

Methodology

Using a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach, this study critically examines the idea of human rights as universal, with the added theory that while every person may hold and live by these rights, the reality of human rights through history, culture, and social context is free from general application globally. It is an analysis of the philosophical and legal foundations on which human rights discourse is based, using a conceptual analysis of moral and legal universalism. The research analyzes how human rights are constructed in legal, political, and academic narratives with the use of critical discourse analysis to identify dominant perspectives and counter-narratives that contest universality claims. The study draws from legal studies, political theory, philosophy, and postcolonial studies to integrate insights to analyze, comprehensively, the maze of structural, cultural, and ideological tensions in the global human rights framework. For example, they are further supported by a comparative case study approach that deploys how universal human rights principles respond to varied legal systems, traditions, and socio-political structures, and what the scope of this diversity permits in terms of contextualizing human rights principles without undermining the principle's normative integrity.

Since this study is qualitative, however, certain limitations exist. Because of its empirically based approach, empirical data is not extensively utilized and therefore the generalizability of the results is somewhat questionable. Furthermore, although the case studies selected provide interesting experiences of the adaptability of human rights, they do not cover all regional cases. This research does not seek to settle the matters between universalism and cultural relativism but rather offers the paradigm of a context-sensitive and dialogical approach to human rights. Through this methodology, the study provides a more normalized explanation of how universal human rights can be strengthened rather than undermined by the complexities of the various cultural and political contexts.

¹ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (n.d.). What are human rights? United Nations. Retrieved December 12, 2024, from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/what-are-human-rights>

The Evolution of Universalism in Human Rights and Debates Surrounding It

The idea of universal human rights constitutes a synthesis of the philosophical, legal, and cultural traditions. Numerous principles in human rights show that it is inextricably bound up with human dignity. Traditionally, the concept of 'human rights' has been impacted by several academic disciplines, namely, law, philosophy, political science, and sociology; these have all presented different narratives arising from their techniques, presuppositions, and basic concepts (Freeman, 2011, p. 12). Although these viewpoints enhance the comprehension of human rights, they also underscore difficulties and contradictions, especially with assertions of universality.

A fundamental position is legal positivism, which perceives human rights as originating from laws and formal agreements, exemplified by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), enacted in 1948. The UDHR, regarded as the foundation of modern international human rights, proclaims that all individuals are born free and equal in dignity and rights, regardless of culture or geography (United Nations, 1948, preamble). Developed by experts from many legal and cultural contexts from around the globe, the UDHR sought to provide a universal framework that transcends cultural and political relativism. These 30 articles outline rights such as; equality and freedom from being oppressed and education making a global human rights framework. But, critics, according to Alston & Goodman (2013, p. 146), contend that the Declaration is biased towards the West as it was authored at a time when many non-Western countries and colonized areas were not included. People like Makau Mutua insist that the Declaration is one of imposing Western values and represents ideological imperialism. To counter this, defenders note that influential non—Western thinkers such as Chang and Malik, played quite an important role in the development of the process making sure the process had very diverse cultural and philosophical perspectives. Though rooted in Western influences, the open composition process is a source of moral authority and lends it some claim to universality, though it can also be seen as being culturally exclusionary at some points (Alston & Goodman, 2013, p. 147).

On the other hand, natural law theory establishes human rights in terms of rationality, which is inherent, universal, and eternal in mankind with special emphasis on freedom and equality as natural rights (Donnelly, 2007, p. 286). This viewpoint references prior historical landmarks, such as the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789) and the American Bill of Rights (1791), which underscored individual freedoms and justice (Ishay, 2008, p. 88). Religious traditions contribute to the foundation of human rights by offering moral frameworks that resonate with the concepts of dignity and equality, even if they do not expressly employ the term "human rights." These traditions also highlight the common human ideals inherent in all cultural and spiritual frameworks, countering the argument that human rights are solely Western inventions (Witte & Green, 2012, p. 16).

The conceptual foundations of the Banjul Charter are deeply rooted in African intellectual traditions and also critiques of universalism as well as a monolithic framework of human rights. Amselle and Diagne (2020, p. 120) disagree with the notion that human rights are solely a Western construct, acknowledging that African societies have traditionally upheld principles of dignity, solidarity, and communal responsibility through pre-colonial governance systems and ethical frameworks that emphasize fairness, inclusion, and respect. For example, the Mande people's "Hunters' Oath" from Mali is considered as the precursor to human rights charters which call for non-discrimination, human dignity, and Freedom. Focusing on the African perspective in rights assertion, it opines on poverty, hunger, and unfairness, and preserves African cultural ethos. Again, its origin is contentious though the Oath remains a subject of discourse today in the consideration of the government's best practices and the principles of human rights (Mann, 2022, p. 137). They assert that human rights frameworks lack uniformity and are shaped by many cultural and historical contexts. Diagne's examination of the Mande Charter—a precolonial African document advocating for equality, justice, and social responsibility—underscores Africa's lasting contributions to universal justice concepts, offering a compelling counter-narrative to Eurocentric perspectives on human rights.

Judith Butler's (2000, p. 12) inquiry into 'who decides what is universal?' introduces a profound dimension to this discussion, as she posits this question as central and intrinsically linked to power dynamics. Butler contends that universality is neither inherent nor impartial; rather, it is constructed by individuals in positions of cultural, political, and social authority, whose norms and values frequently attain the status of "universal." Nevertheless, she argues that universality is not a fixed concept; rather, it is a dynamic, performative process that can be challenged and redefined by those who have historically been marginalized in its creation. The process of determining universality is not confined to a single authority; rather, it arises from hegemonic conflicts and ongoing negotiations, allowing marginalized voices to contest and broaden their influence (p. 13). Consequently, the authority to determine what constitutes the universal resides in the capacity to engage in these discussions and redefine the parameters of inclusion and exclusion.

Now we have insight into the discussions on the evolution of universalism in human rights. Yet the challenges only become more difficult when we attempt to evaluate its adaptability and practical implementation in the system. In the next section, we will discuss these problems.

Challenges to the Adaptability of universal human rights

Western and non-Western thinkers have long debated the relationship between Universal Human Rights and cultural or religious traditions. Some argue that universal principles should be global norms consistently applied worldwide while others believe right from wrong is relative to individual cultures, and that respect must be paid. For human rights to be universally accepted, I understand that it is necessary to meet two fundamental conditions: abolishing such clashing standards and making them the only standard for addressing human dignity. These conflicts illustrate the difficulty of fixing one set of standards with a diverse range of cultural perspectives.

In this section at first, I am going to discuss three primary areas where universal human rights face challenges with its clashing standards:

- A. Religious and Cultural Relativism
- B. Unequal Gender Relations or Discrimination Against Women
- C. Challenges Posed by Political Ideologies and Institutions

A. Religious and Cultural Relativism

The universal human rights principle is intrinsically in conflict with cultural relativism. In Talal Asad's (1993, p. 28) critique of religion as a speculative, non-referential category in anthropological discourse, religion is presented as a static, universal category that organizes all other social life around it and which ensues from a distinctly Western secular lens, which marginalizes non-western epistemologies. Secularization, as Asad (1993, p. 43) explains, is a process that delineates religion as a distinct category, restricting its function to personal belief and progressively reducing its impact and significance in wider societal and public spheres. From this worldview, it views a process of disenchantment, wherein the hegemony of religion was replaced by rationality. It was once believed that secularization was an inevitable process whereby religion would eventually become less and less important in the modern world. Secular human rights frameworks often assume based on these assumptions and portray religion as a practice of private belief wholly removed from public life. So, the secular framing of Asad is further underscored by his critique that this overlooks the intensely communal and political dimensions of religion in many cultures. For example, the Islamic practices of justice and welfare emphasize the significance of collective dignity and collective responsibility, clashing significantly with the individualism that undergirds Western human rights orthodoxy. Using this critique as his starting point, Sachedina (2009, p.18) further develops this argument by arguing that properly situated Islamic values can add a wider and more inclusive dimension to human rights discourse. He maintains that the negative

interpretations of Islamic law are historically contextualized as opposed to theological in any specific way. An example of this would be the interpretations that legitimize gender inequality can be questioned from within Islamic traditions, and they can be questioned through the lens of justice and human dignity principles that share similarities with universal human rights (p. 21). The value of these insights lies in their indication of the potential of religious traditions to both play a critical role and be complementary to universal human rights frameworks.

Clifford Geertz, (2000, p. 112) nuances this concept by seeing religion, as a cultural system, as a set of symbols and practices that create community meaning. Geertz's treatment of religion as something that has to do with the symbolic and interpretive does not negate his cultural relativism, instead, it is a plea for human dignity to be recognized in plural ways. However, this perspective raises critical questions: if cultural systems are internally coherent but mutually incompatible, how is it possible to attain the universality of human rights without cultural hegemony (Asad, 1993, p. 29)? And, these debates are extended with Edward Said's (2003, p. 7) critique of Orientalism, which places those debates in history. Aiming at conventional Western approaches to human rights discourse, he shows these same discourses have participated in colonial projects by representing non-Western societies as lacking modernity or rationality. Such a critique requires universal human rights to undergo a process of self-reflexive decolonization of their assumptions.

The debate between secularism and public religion is similarly illustrated in the writings of John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas. John Rawls (1997) argues for public reason as a common framework of universally available principles (e.g., equality and justice) to oversee political deliberation. This approach restricts culturally specific or religious doctrines unless translated into secular terms, and does so neutrally but at the risk of marginalizing cultural differences (Rawls, 1997, p. 780). By contrast, liberal philosopher Jürgen Habermas (2005, p. 11) comes at this through a more relativist responsive approach, being cognizant of the cultural contingency of secularism and the admittance of religious arguments into the public domain without immediate translation. Habermas's post-secular model tries to find a path between universalism and relativism through the inclusion of dialogue in the public sphere using secular systems but also respect for religion. In combination, these two perspectives bring out the difficulties in reconciling universal democratic norms with cultural, and religious particularities in pluralistic societies. For Habermas, Rawls's proviso becomes a proviso of translation, oriented towards a mutual effort to make religious arguments accessible to a secular public discourse in such a way as to not suppress their original meaning. It thus raises the urgency for us to critically reconsider secularism as a construct born of historic inequities. In this regard, Abu-Lughod (2006, p. 1626) pointed out that while religious laws limit the freedom of an individual by calling on the authority of the Divine, secular frameworks (especially those based on the Western liberal doctrines of human rights) may put restrictions on personal choice too. The restrictions may be justified in the name of secularism and rights, but they are still restricting, and they do still question how free each system really is!?

Placing the above discussion in this context shows that any universalist claim in human rights has to take account of these inequities yet remain conscientious of the variety of religious or cultural contexts that engender what it means to be human and thus dignified.

B. Unequal gender relations and discrimination against women

While human rights frameworks promise universality, they frequently miss the systemic and intersectional nature of gender-based oppression. Cultural traditions, economic inequalities, and structural biases marginalize women and consequently, their rights are inadequately protected at normative as well as implementation levels, which feminist critiques illuminate.

Martha Nussbaum (1999) criticizes cultural practices that impoverish and destroy the opportunity to realize capabilities that are integral to living a dignified life, for example, female genital mutilation and

child marriage which violate the capability to have bodily integrity and the capability to be educated (p. 44). Cultural traditions must evolve to put women's dignity and functioning first, she argues. Nussbaum's emphasis on universal principles is, however, liable to be criticized precisely for the way it may impose Western values on diverse societies. This tension illustrates a broader issue: The way to communicate universal human rights without consolidating cultural specificity and, more importantly, perpetuating systemic inequities. This conflict may be unavoidably managed by utilizing Judith Butler's (2000) idea of the restaging of the universal. As I understand, according to Butler, the conception of some universal categories such as 'woman', fails to represent the real life and material circumstances of women. By the way of she critiques abstract universality and addresses its limitations in arresting the specific and diverse experiences of individuals (p. 16). She affirms that for universals to be meaningful they need to translate these notions through struggles at the national level. For example, legal change may be pursued in one society, whereas changing people's paradigms might be more helpful in another. However, this has prompted pertinent issues concerning the stability of the universality granted to human rights whenever they are conditioned by this sort of localized political-economic production (p. 31).

Similarly, Nira Yuval-Davis (2011, p. 140) cautions that implementation of the universal human right is a far more complex endeavor since she also focuses on the intersections of gender, religion, and politics in the construction of women. Instead, she disparages frameworks that seek to compartmentalize the fight for women's rights from struggles for cultural and political citizenship (p. 141-142). The viewpoint is consistent with postcolonial theorizations that also reject universal frameworks and suggest that gender inequalities cannot be appraised independently of the colonial/non-colonial global hierarchal context. The same message is conveyed about the need for feminist solidarity that connects heterogeneous women and calls for joining efforts in fighting for injustice while recognizing difference, as Bell Hooks points out in her work from 2014 (p. 109). Similarly, Gayatri Spivak (1988, p. 284) also points to how it is possible to disregard or silence the subaltern voice in hegemonic discourse. While token inclusion of marginalized voices is simply not enough, she argues, to achieve meaningful universality in human rights frameworks, marginalized voices must be amplified. Spivak's outlook is in tune with Geertz's proposal for pluralism, and at the same time works to overturn the structural power dynamics that are still forging the contours of global human rights debates. Saba Mahmood (2009) also raises a question as to why all women would desire in liberatory Western style. To support this argument, Mahmood provides an ethnographic study of some women who pursue moral and religious conservatism to construct an 'ideal ethical self' using Islam (p. 14). Such a movement undermines the universality of feminism and the propensity toward the conceptualization of liberty and agency that do not correspond to Western vision. Indeed, Mahmood's work should be acclaimed for establishing the religious and moral tropes that can further agency differentially from applications of oppressed discourses.

At the normative level, it can be noted that feminist critiques argue that human rights frameworks were developed in the male-dominated spheres of public life, excluding women. This male-dominated epistemology fails to address the private domain, where most violations of women's rights are witnessed. Furthermore, the exercising of civil and political liberties provides more visibility than economic and social liberties which are equally important in achieving gender equality. Cultural relativists go further and argue that these frameworks are a priori Western, liberal 'impositions' that do not translate into other world's moral and ethical concepts. Both feminist and cultural relativist critiques converge on a fundamental question: the question is how can a universal human rights regime tackle pervasive gender discrimination, which is entrenched socially and culturally? When people criticized human rights and said it was an invention of the Western world, specifically for the 'white, property-owning man' feminist scholars explained that women and other marginalized groups were written out of this system. This exclusion continues to maintain and support a system that is impartial and disadvantageous to women's needs and interests. By applying Nussbaum's, Butler's, Yuva-Davis' and Mahmood's critical feminist concepts an approach of this kind may open possibilities of supplementing identified by the multifarious

systemic and intersectional barriers dominating the female subject positioning and limiting women's and girls' accessibility to universal human rights globally.

C. Challenges Posed by Political Ideologies and Institutions

Political ideologies and institutional power structures are still blocking the way toward universal human rights, and this shows the aspiration to incorporate them into all aspects of social life up the left and right-wing political spectrum. Although universal human rights are often framed as apolitical, their construction, meaning-making, and implementation are inextricably linked to power and discourses. Here I will try to analyze the works of Michel Foucault, Seyla Benhabib, and Achille Mbembé on how the political system often uses human rights in various ways but fails to implement them universally due to contradictions and limitations. These theories shed light on the difficulties of state sovereignty, structural exclusion, and ideational appropriation, all of which belied the universality of human rights in both theory and practice.

Power, Discourse, and the Instrumentalization of Rights

Michel Foucault's theoretical understanding of power and knowledge (1981, p. 52) questions the oppressed notion of human rights and its applicability. The biopolitical understanding of human rights places it at the intersection of power that aims to manage and control populations and construct social domains of inclusion/exclusion (p. 53). He demonstrates that political institutions set up human rights agendas in a certain way that will favor certain people while excluding others and in the process developing systems of power (p. 54). It means that human rights are not mere pass insomuch as they are contingent on political ideologies to define them, and more often than not, to endorse the status quo. Thus, power is not only present outside marginalized groups: in fact, rights-talk itself can perpetuate power structures that abuse it to better control the masses (p. 55). The claims of human rights, therefore, are placed within governance structures so that specific actors can deem someone as having humanity and someone as being inhuman. This instrumentalization is a problem because it erodes the idea of human rights as an equal and universal concept that can be defended by everyone since the enforcement of these rights depends on the priorities of dominating institutions.

Seyla Benhabib (2011, p. 75) unmasks the foundational human rights dilemma in the contemporary global order: human rights and state sovereignty are not companions but adversaries in the international system. Although human rights are supposed to be global, state governments' authority can refuse international intervention and decide internal issues. This tension creates a paradox: States, being the key actors on the international stage, advancing human rights primarily for instrumental, power-protective purposes contribute to the relativization of human rights and thus the weakness of enforcement. Benhabib also dismantles a liberal view of human rights when she astutely says that international political establishments use human rights selectively to serve their own strategic ends – a far cry from the true idea of universality (p. 59). Thus, the dynamics of selective qualifiers enhance these trends as states apply human rights rhetorically to support their activity for ideological or strategic agendas. As a result, the concept of universality loses some of its power, because its achievement is contingent upon certain levels of political will, which are unreliable and can be produced or not produced to suit certain ends by certain actors. She also thinks, indeed a non-parochial view of human rights though rejected by most parochial moral or cultural traditions can garner recognition from practically all political and economic justice traditions globally (p. 60). This implies that human rights are more properly seen as an overlapping consensus, which is political – not moral – requiring a common set of principles adequate for justice and politics irrespective of metaphysical disagreement.

Necropolitics, as defined as Achille Mbembé's (2003, p. 39) critique of the exercise of power over life and death by political systems is fundamentally opposed to the universality of human rights. According to Mbembé, the modern state is a generator and sustainer of structures of exclusion through

biopower, deciding which lives count and which do not (p. 17). This reveals the structural inequalities of political systems that dehumanize and destroy the protective power of human rights for marginalized populations. And, universal human rights frameworks cannot recompense systemic exclusions grounded historically and institutionally in power relations. States and political institutions through this render some groups expendable, and do so within the context of challenging the foundational premise of universality, that all human beings have equal value and dignity (p. 24). Human rights frameworks have been unable to transcend strongly entrenched power hierarchies that devalue the lives of the marginalized, a feature exposed by the structural violence inherent in necropolitical systems.

To address these challenges of political ideologies and political institutions we must revisit the assumptions underlying the concept of universal human rights. As such, frameworks of power, sovereignty, and exclusion are used to reveal that human rights must be understood. Overcoming these limitations requires dismantling power hierarchies, confronting ideological instrumentalization, and centering marginalized voices.

Initiatives to Confront Challenges to Universal Human Rights

At this stage of the discussion around the most debated issue until now in the global human rights debate, I find Jack Donnelly's (2007) idea of relative universality quite convincing to figure out how universal human rights are adaptable under the diverse cultural and historical contexts by keeping their core principles. Such universality is evident even in their capacity to conquer the present global challenges of nearly all societies today like the ones presented by both market and bureaucratic states (p. 287). The core principles of human rights are nonnegotiable but, as Donnelly insists, application of them must accommodate cultural and contextual variation in a spirit of respecting local values and traditions. The right to religious freedom (UDHR Article 18) is universal in terms of applicability, yet not everyone has established the same. This process dovetails in favor of inclusiveness and tends to harmonize human rights, should it be possible, with cultural particularities. Another important idea signifies the overlapping consensus; that is, human rights should be endorsed by societies with different philosophical, religious, or cultural traditions for different motives (p. 289). He opposes cultural relativism and believes that human rights contradict non-Western cultures since no culture fundamentally denounces these principles; on the contrary, they can be modified to correspond to local circumstances (p. 295). He acknowledges political sovereignty and inconsistent enforcement as obstacles to universal implementation and stresses dialogue, respect for diversity, and bolstering international legal frameworks to develop a framework to reconcile the universal element of human rights with their contextual flexibility. This "relative universality" makes human rights at the same time universally relevant, and culturally sensitive (p. 294). Thus in doing so Donnelly has presented one of the dimensions of human rights but to represent the modern demands though today's challenges, as argued by Esposito (2012), Agamben (2004) – and the posthumanist – questions the very ideas of the what person is and anthropocentric forms of rights. Let us now turn to these ideas.

Esposito (2012: p. 1) talks about 'personhood' in modern human rights discourse. However, critiques are still imbued with 'conditionality', which perforce limits universality through the abjuration of those who don't fit into that term. For example, in bioethics, there is still disagreement over which lives are persons and stateless people rarely have their rights recognized in states (p. 2). For Esposito, the biopolitical outcomes of this structure of personhood demarcate zones of inclusion and exclusion, proliferating, not overcoming hierarchies (p. 6). In suggesting that the direction to "impersonal" might serve as a more inclusive basis for human rights, he orients this thinking on the shared dignity of life beyond personal attributes (p. 16). However, this shift disrupts long-standing legal and political systems that emphasize individual responsibility and state sovereignty (p. 4). Consequently, defeating structural inequalities and introducing affirmative biopolitics of affirmation of all beings can make the universality of human rights absolute (p. 18).

It requires dismantling ways we exclude that make human and human identity into something that happens through boundaries (animal versus human, citizen versus outsider) to make universal human rights universal, as Agamben (2004) argues. The anthropological machine reinscribes hierarchies by outside 'animality' from the human or bringing the animal into the human (p. 38). As bare life has been mediated out of political or social protection, Agamben (p. 16) points out that figures such as refugees become susceptible to being excluded. Achieving universality requires moving beyond such divisions to be an inclusive framework that recognizes the universal vulnerability of all life, recognizing that cultural or species barriers do not bind rights but instead extend ethical inclusion (p 22 – 23).

Posthumanism problematizes some assumptions of humanism, a humanist project of the Enlightenment period. It promotes a regime that de-links human rights from anthropocentrism: interconnection with technology and the environment and relational subjectivity (Schipper, 2018, p. 68). It advances a broader human rights framework by applying moral and legal rights to biophysical entities, systems, and robotic ones. Notwithstanding, posthumanism is a viable path to meet global technological, ecological, socio-political, and legal challenges and redefine the meaning of human rights for the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

Human rights are not only universal dogma but a dynamic and dialogical process of learning and adjustment to human rights values, such as dignity and equality, in response to diverse cultural, political, and ecological contexts, and as part of that process, projecting those norms onto new situations and circumstances. The contradictions inherent in the tension between universal principles and the contextualities of human rights are central challenges attended by the discourse of human rights, as demonstrated by this article. The structural and cultural barriers to the inclusivity of traditional frameworks and knowing that structural inequalities, power hierarchies, and anthropocentric bias are necessary to include in conventional frameworks have been highlighted by it through interdisciplinary critiques, posthumanist, feminist, and postcolonial. The history of the evolution of human rights indicates that the search for freedom, emancipation and the making of laws against atrocities like slavery, torture and all others drove this journey. Human rights, at their essence, consist of wanting to relieve both physical and mental pain. It calls to action any societies and people to show compassion and humanity to one another.

The unparalleled power of Mande 'Hunters' Oath' (Mann, 2022, p. 129)—"Every life is a life. May the whole world hear it."—captures the essence of human rights: the particular recognition of inherent dignity and equality. Cultural relativism can be challenged through dialogue, the coming together of digital and environmental rights can incorporate human rights, and relational ethics can be embraced to provide a transformative basis for addressing human rights in the 21st century. Finally, universal human rights must move beyond the problems of a world where diverse peoples have reached technological and ecological limits. We need courage, creativity, and collaboration to evolve this into a shared vision of our work, crossing borders and generations so that visions of justice build on each other yet remain true to self and place. Human rights are a compass that compels us to be equal, dignified, and mutually accountable. Adaptability and innovation are their supports, and they can ensure they keep their everlasting imprint on global justice, defending the dignity of all human and non—human beings. Human rights promise to be a transformative approach leading us to a more equitable, inclusive future



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