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Democracy Otherwise: Learning From the South

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Abstract

More than 40 years of neoliberal globalization have led to a democratic deficit that necessitates urgent redress. *Democracy otherwise*—which is grounded in decoloniality and its accompanying epistemologies of the South—provides urban and regional planners with an opportunity to learn from the diverse democratic practices emerging in the Global South, practices that are deliberately delinked from the state and capitalism. One such example is found on communal landholdings in South Africa, where residents deploy multiple principles of legitimacy to foster an emplaced democracy. But given the entwined relationship between planning and the state, and the state's support of market rationalities, decoloniality urges us to question whether alternative democratic practices are possible beyond local settings. Findings presented in this article suggest that place dependency diminishes transferability and scalability. Nevertheless, herein lies the power of an otherwise democracy to counter coloniality, while keeping alive Derrida's "always to come" narrative, which challenges the liberal tradition of democracy as the only and most profitable outcome. This perspective enables planners to learn from the South—not to replicate its rich diversity, but to appreciate multiple democratic possibilities that acknowledge pluriversality, relationality, popular knowledges, local experiences, and situated worldviews, while nurturing "polities of difference" and "becoming in place," in tandem with "idioms of autonomy and community."

Keywords

coloniality; epistemologies of the South; liberal democracy; Rural Women's Movement

1. Introduction

Public trust in democratic governance structures is at historic lows (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2022), while attacks on democratic institutions, coupled with increasing support for ethnonationalism and right-wing political parties, heighten concerns about a looming global anti-democratic

turn (Freedom House, 2021). But dwindling trust and attacks on democracy stem not only from right-wing nationalists; they also stem from a global political economy deliberately crafted to evade scrutiny from democratic institutions. Said differently, since at least the late 1980s, neoliberal globalization has been producing a democratic deficit because power is transferred from citizens to multinational corporations and private-sector entities that are not subject to direct democratic oversight (Purcell, 2009). To make matters worse, such transfers are supported by nation-states that subscribe to a market democracy (disguised as liberal democracy) and operate as if socio-economic and spatial inequalities can, and will, be corrected by the unfettered market (Azyyati Marzukhi, 2023).

Neoliberalism's ideological roots are found in classical liberalism, which "successfully universalized and hegemonized itself across the globe" (Hall, 2000, p. 228). Classical liberalism also seeded liberal notions of democracy that were (and continue to be) inclusive of capitalist ideals. Yet, as Stuart Hall (2000, p. 228) reminds us, "liberalism is not 'the culture that is beyond [other] cultures,' but [rather] the culture that won." Above all, liberalism is the culture that justified at least three centuries of European colonialism. But for decolonial scholars, colonialism is not a thing of the past. It "remains alive and well in the current structure of globalization" (Mignolo, 2000, p. 82; see also Connell, 2007), allowing Aníbal Quijano and Michael Ennis (2000) and Quijano (2007) to equate the contemporary neoliberal world order with the "coloniality of power." The deeply imbricated relationship between colonialism, liberalism, neoliberalism, and liberal democracy therefore necessitates a more nuanced understanding if "a democratic alternative not rooted in the liberal tradition" is sought to "challenge the foundations of the neoliberal project" (Purcell, 2009, p. 141).

By way of this article, I venture down the well-trodden path of neoliberalism's destructive outcomes; but I do so from the perspective of decoloniality—or an *otherwise* thinking—to demonstrate how the coloniality of power continues to jettison ways of practising democracy that do not accord with Euro-American market rationalities, regulations, and institutions. The planning literature on neoliberalism is extensive and my account represents a mere overview with undeniable omissions. Nevertheless, in the numerous criticisms of neoliberalism by planning scholars, the deep-seated logic of coloniality is often overlooked (Connell, 2007, 2014). Similarly, the legacy of colonialism tends to be ignored in theories of democracy; and these theories "do not travel well outside Western sites" (Banerjee, 2022, p. 283; see also Slater, 2002). This can be said even of, for example, John Rawls' and Jürgen Habermas' deliberative turn espoused in the late 1980s, or of Chantal Mouffe's (2005, 2008) more radical approach to democracy.

By contrast, "the decolonial turn is a turn towards different configurations of politics that contribute to worlds and politics *otherwise*" (Escobar, 2008, p. 132). *Democracy otherwise* is nestled in the decolonial turn that rejects the state and capitalism as sites for decolonial thinking. Yet, given the entwined relationship between planning and the state, "the state's structural dependence on capitalism" (Purcell, 2013, p. 20), and the state's role in establishing democratic institutions, decoloniality prompts us to ask whether alternative democratic planning activities are possible beyond activism in local settings. Findings presented in this article suggest that place-dependency diminishes transferability, the potential for scaling up, and universalized outcomes. Nevertheless, herein lies an otherwise democracy's power to counter coloniality while presenting planners with alternative democratic possibilities from the infinitely diverse South. However, "learning from the South," as argued by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2016a, p. 178), necessitates a willingness to "unlearn many self-evident ideas that were useful in the past but are not so anymore, and [a willingness] to learn about new ideas, some of which are altogether unfamiliar," such as "emplaced polities

of difference" and "becoming in place," along with "idioms of autonomy and community." Importantly, "the South" is neither a fixed, ubiquitous geography nor is it a stable power position (Bhan, 2019; Yiftachel & Mammon, 2022). Rather, "the South is a metaphor for the human suffering caused by capitalism and colonialism on the global level" (Santos, 2016b, p. 17). Santos also states that "there is a South because there was and still is a North" (p. 176). The South thus represents noncanonical practices that challenge the foundations of classical liberalism, neoliberalism, and liberal democracy (Ballestrin, 2015).

This article is structured into six sections. The first two sections revisit the overlapping relationships between colonialism, classical liberalism, neoliberalism, and liberal democracy. Section three considers some of the criticisms of liberal historiography and ideology, as argued by postcolonial scholars. It highlights their call for the production of knowledge from Southern locations and explains why this knowledge matters to the study of power and geopolitics. This section also includes important examples of alternative democratic practices that are found in the Global South and that decentre the state. However, where decoloniality diverges from postcolonial theory is in its explicit embrace of forms of knowledge production that exist in-themselves, of-themselves, and for-themselves (and not only for the purpose of "speaking back" to Eurocentrism). Local knowledge that responds to local problems and equips local planners to improve their practice is pivotal to decolonial thinking. Section four thus focuses on an *otherwise* conceptualization of democracy that is underpinned by Southern onto-epistemologies, while section five reveals an example of this found on communal landholdings in South Africa that fall under the custodianship of traditional leaders (namely kings, queens, and chiefs), but where residents deploy multiple principles of legitimacy to foster an emplaced democracy. The final section presents concluding reflections regarding context-specific democratic planning actions.

2. Briefly Revisiting the Philosophical Foundations of Classical Liberalism

Almost a century ago, Karl Polanyi (1944/2001, p. 146) observed that "the free-market [is] kept open by continuous, centrally organized, and controlled interventionism," even if laissez-faire ideologies espouse minimal state interference in the market. "Thus there exists an aidez-faire aspect [to capitalism] in which the state actively assists capital" while simultaneously "getting out of its way" (Purcell, 2009, p. 142). To counter capitalism's self-interests and attempts to separate itself from society, some form of state intervention (via regulations and social protectionism) is needed, which in turn embeds the market within societal control (Polanyi, 1944/2001). Herein lies Polanyi's (1944/2001, p. 146) famous "double movement" thesis between "a market society" and "a society with markets;" or between "the propensity of capitalist society to define and quantify social life in market terms," and the propensity of society to control forms of socio-economic exchange via direct democratic oversight. Polanyi (1944/2001, p. 147) concluded his double movement thesis by arguing that "planning" (in the broadest sense) enables "a society with markets," since planning encompasses "a collectivist reaction to the self-regulating market" and "a moral logic" to protect the public good. Indeed, "the rhetoric of serving the public good is central to the folklore of planning" (Campbell & Marshall, 2000, p. 306).

Polanyi's thesis spotlights the inherent tension between freedom and control found in liberalism, a tension identified by European economists and philosophers almost two centuries prior to Polanyi's writings (Winkler, 2011, 2012). This tension compelled Adam Smith (1776/1991), for example, to champion not only the idea of free markets in *The Wealth of Nations* but also the idea of "moral sentiments," which was penned

in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and which stipulated that "the private interests of men are desirable only when these interests [enhance] the interests of the whole society" (Smith, 1759/2000, p. 273). Jeremy Bentham, James Mill, and David Ricardo espoused similar sentiments in their utilitarian forms of liberalism that sought to maximize the greatest happiness of the greatest numbers through freedom and self-restraint (Bentham, 1789/1948). And it is this line of thinking that allowed John Stuart Mill (1859/1982, p. 59) to make a case for "social interests," which are "different from self-interests." Distinctively, social interests encompass the moral obligations citizens demonstrate towards others for a collective good, which deliberately necessitates combining "liberty with discipline, and individuality with sociality" (Hamburger, 1999, p. 232).

Liberalism, with its roots in Western rationality, gained popularity during the (European) Enlightenment and remained a persistent political force for the better part of three centuries. It served to plant the seeds of Western democracy while justifying three centuries of European colonialism. Yet, from its earliest inception, it encompassed a tension between freedom (including minimal state control; the idea of a self-regulating market; and freedom for some, but slavery for others) and necessary correctives (including some form of state planning and regulatory oversight) to temper capitalism's self-interests. Navigating this tension has, however, proven to be classical liberalism's undoing. In the contemporary era of neoliberalism, concerns for social protectionism, social interests, self-restraint, and the idea of embedding the market within societal control are simply discarded, thereby confirming Polanyi's (1944/2001, p. 268) warning that capitalism's "double movement can destroy society."

3. Neoliberalism's Erosion of Democracy

Under the neoliberal rubric, the market is not controlled by the state. Instead, it has become the state's regulating and organizing directive, with the market (not the state) defining social life (Epstein, 2005). The state needs merely to ensure that monetary, fiscal, immigration, public infrastructure, etc. policies accord with market rationalities, thereby rendering state planning, from a Polanyian standpoint, irrelevant (Epstein, 2005) because "profit and expediency are the only criteria for policymaking" (Brown, 2003, p. 47).

The market-oriented ideals advocated by Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman, and others in the 1950s began to flourish from the late 1970s onwards, and with the demise of the Soviet Union a decade later, neoliberalism became the dominant global order (Mignolo, 2021). Concerns about developmentalism in the South—itself a problematic concept imposed by the North—quickly transformed into economic globalization and market democracy (disguised as liberal democracy; Mignolo, 2021). Neoliberal globalization has thus come to resemble a contemporary reincarnation of the violent processes of European colonialism (Chakrabarty, 2000; Connell, 2014; Quijano, 2007; Tully, 2008). It jettisons local economies of reciprocity, communal practices of living, and alternative ways of exercising democracy by exporting a Western version of democracy to the South—this version meaning little more than "a code word for [a country's] availability to market rationality" (Brown, 2003, p. 48)—while the South is held hostage by global powers unless it is willing to forgo trade agreements, international aid, and the like (Banerjee, 2022; Chakrabarty, 2000; Slater, 2002). The South is thus compelled to accept "an externally imposed logic that is conditioned by ethnocentric privilege" (or what might otherwise be referred to as white privilege; Slater, 2002, p. 257). Such was the case in South Africa during the early 1990s when the long-fought-for democracy came at an unanticipated price: a reduced focus on redistributive policies in favour of global economic competitiveness.

But what keeps a redistributive agenda alive in this context is the resolute pressure from social movements who use the courts and mobilized actions not only to fight for restorative justice but also to spearhead decolonial values of the *democratic commons* (which is an altogether different understanding of "the commons" than the one posited by Garrett Hardin in the 1960s). The case of the Rural Women's Movement (RWM), which is discussed later in the article, is an example of this resolute pressure.

Furthermore, neoliberalism requires individuals not only to behave like entrepreneurs in every sphere of life but also to become self-sufficient agents who are responsible for their welfare. Individuals thus shoulder all the responsibilities for and consequences of their actions, regardless of systemic inequalities and constraints, while the state reneges on its responsibilities towards them (Grange & Gunder, 2019). One outcome of this logic is the inescapable rise in global inequality alongside "the extraordinary concentration of wealth in the hands of an ever-shrinking global elite" (Klein & Morreo, 2019, p. 2), and "the greater the separation between rich and poor, the more implausible is the liberal democratic claim that all citizens are equally valued and carry an equal voice" (Purcell, 2009, p. 144). Another outcome is a citizenry that strategizes only for itself and not with others to challenge the status quo, since "a fully realized neoliberal citizen [is] the opposite of a public-minded [citizen]" (Brown, 2003, p. 43). The success of neoliberalism thus lies in its nefarious ability to obscure, distort, and depoliticize the idea of democracy, whilst eviscerating concerns for equality, fairness, environmental justice, and ethics of care (Grange & Gunder, 2019).

However, the neoliberal calculus does not culminate in a reduced state. Rather, the state needs to protect financial institutions at all costs (Harvey, 2009), as only the *aidez-faire* aspect of Polanyi's (1944/2001, p. 147) "double movement" remains relevant in the current world order. This *aidez-faire* role was first deployed in 1982 when Mexico was on the brink of bankruptcy, and when investment banks based in New York would have been ruined by Mexico's economic demise (Harvey, 2009). In response, the US Treasury and the IMF colluded to bail Mexico out with the proviso that austerity and "good governance" measures be implemented (Harvey, 2009). The financialization measures taken by governments to address the subprime mortgage crisis of 2007–2010 represent another example of state intervention (Klein & Morreo, 2019), thereby rendering democratic institutions "largely irrelevant, and at times even impediments, to neoliberal governmentality" (Brown, 2003, p. 49).

Notwithstanding liberalism's myth of equality, which is selectively allotted to some through undeniable processes of racism, and the fact that democracies in the North are sustained by exploiting the South, Wendy Brown (2003, p. 51) laments the "extent to which basic principles of liberal democracy are abandoned" under the neoliberal apparatus. And by abandoning classical liberalism's necessary correctives, we find ourselves:

> Not simply in the throes of a right-wing or conservative positioning within liberal democracy, but rather at the threshold of a different political formation, one that legitimates itself on different grounds from liberal democracy even [if] it does not divest itself of the name. (Brown, 2003, p. 56)

For Brown (2003), this threshold is worrying, as it signals the eventual demise of liberal democracy, while Walter Mignolo (2021, p. 732) goes one step further by forecasting the "collapse of Westernization" in light of the ever-growing global role of the intergovernmental BRICS coalition. This emerging role might, however, prove to be catastrophic for democratic goals and practices, since various nation-states within BRICS's

geopolitical orbit display regressive democratic track records. The search for credible alternatives then becomes more urgent than ever. Yet, many political theorists might be ill-equipped for this task, given their tendency to ignore the entangled connection between coloniality and liberal democracy (Escobar, 2007). Even Chantal Mouffe (2005, p. 32)—whose theory of democracy is mindful of pluralism and alternative modernities—maintains that "liberal democracy is not the enemy to be destroyed." Rather, principles of "liberty and equality for all [necessitate more] effective implementation" (Mouffe, 2005, p. 32). Earlier discussions suggest why a more "effective implementation" of liberal principles might be fruitless in stemming neoliberalism's dismantling of democracy. Mouffe's claim also retains "the primacy of the West as the ultimate standard against which to evaluate [all] other [imaginaries]" (Singh, 2019, p. 341).

4. The Search for Alternative Imaginaries Found in Postcolonial Scholarships

Alternative imaginaries have long been sought by postcolonial scholars who call for theories "from the margins" by centring the "politics of location" (Roy, 2015, p. 201). Still, the struggle to disrupt "liberal historiography"—that claims to "speak for all of society"—continues, while other histories are silenced (Chatterjee, 2013, p. 69). By way of an example of this silencing, Partha Chatterjee (2013) and David Slater (2002) demonstrate how the American and French Revolutions serve as foundational texts for democracy, while the Haitian Revolution (that also began in the late 18th century, and ignited the ending of the trans-Atlantic slave trade) is either relegated to a footnote on democracy or erased from history altogether due to the power of the Euro-American archive (see Trouillot, 1995, for an illuminating account of the Haitian Revolution). Subaltern and postcolonial studies challenge liberal historiography. They unmask the location of knowledge production (Robinson, 2005; Vegilò, 2021). And they aim to rectify the epistemological problem of Eurocentrism by paying attention to how histories of colonialism and imperialism continue to shape polities in different world regions (Roy, 2015). In doing so, they unsettle taken-for-granted assumptions about "the economy" and "the political" (Chakrabarty, 2000), while rejecting "universal grammars" (Mbembe, 2001) that "exclude, displace, and occlude other analytical directions which are vital to the study of power and geopolitics in a genuinely global, rather than Occidental, context" (Slater, 2002, p. 259).

This line of thinking prompts David Slater to explore Andean geographies of democratization for the purpose of expanding our perspectives on power and geopolitics because "much writing on democracy [remains] limited by universalist assumptions" (Slater, 2002, p. 256). What he discovers, which is unsurprising, is that "Western-style arrangements for democratic rule" and imposed "policies for 'good governance' " are failing to address increasing economic inequalities and socio-spatial injustices in Southern contexts (Slater, 2002, p. 257). In fact, these arrangements and policies are merely creating "a growing disillusionment with formal institutions" (Slater, 2002, p. 257). In response, residents are establishing "new networks of resistance" to counter "the neoliberal framing of order" through mobilized forms of "popular democracy" (Slater, 2002, pp. 258–260). Slater's "popular democracy," based on empirical research undertaken in Peru and Bolivia, corroborates James Holston's (1998, p. 53) findings from Brazil, where sectors of civil society are facilitating "spaces of insurgent citizenship" to dislodge modernity's "absorption of citizenship in a project of state-building." By resisting the state's interpretation of citizenship, and by claiming new political rights, such forms of insurgency are spearheading "alternative possible sources for participating in society" (Holston, 1998, p. 53). Gavin Shatkin (2011, p. 80) equally speaks of "other urbanisms at work" in cities of the Global South that "constitute alternative [political] regimes," which he terms "actually existing urbanisms."

Interestingly, Shatkin's research points not only to progressive or emancipatory urbanisms but also includes "drug gangs and other political manifestations of violence" founded on ethical values that are "sometimes morally ambiguous, or outright reprehensible" (Shatkin, 2011, p. 80). However, such urbanisms are indifferent to democratic principles and are therefore excluded from the discussion presented in this article.

What these studies have in common is that they do not accord with conventional political theory. They demonstrate the "existence of power centres outside the state," which "resist [neoliberal] worlding practices" (Shatkin, 2011, pp. 79–80). And they are shaped by "historical difference" in specific locations (Roy, 2015, pp. 201–202). Decentring the state, centring place, and acknowledging historical difference also serve as cornerstones for decolonial praxis, especially since context-specific dimensions are often excluded in modernity's dominant concerns for universality, progress, reason, and technological advancement (Escobar, 2007). To counter modernity's unidimensional and context-indifferent logic, decolonial scholars, like Arturo Escobar, draw on Julie Graham and Katherine Gibson's "politics of becoming in place" (Gibson-Graham, 2003), which emphasizes "emplacement" and "relational ontologies" as key to "becoming something other" than what the contemporary world order demands (Escobar, 2007, p. 200).

But where decolonial theory gradually departs from postcolonial theory is in its explicit embrace of knowledge in-itself, of-itself, and for-itself; and this knowledge is based on Indigenous onto-epistemologies. This departure is respectful because, from a decolonial standpoint, all modes of knowledge production are valid (Eze, 1997; Winkler, 2018, 2024). Decoloniality is therefore less focused on "seeing difference in repetition" or establishing "a method for interpreting the West" so that the Global South is empowered to "speak back to the West" (Roy, 2015, pp. 205–207). Nevertheless, an argument for knowledge in-, of-, and for-itself will inevitably fuel Allen Scott and Michael Storper's (2015, p. 10) criticism of postcolonial (and presumably decolonial) theory, which, in their opinion, denudes the possibility of establishing "a coherent concept of the city as the object of theoretical inquiry." For them, postcolonial theory simply creates "a new particularism," even if they go on to state that "particularism can often be a positive attribute of academic work" (Scott & Storper, 2015, p. 12). Yet, as they emphatically maintain, "there are systematic regularities in urban life that are susceptible to high-level theoretical generalization," and these systematic regularities (that ought to be applicable regardless of context or history) are absent in postcolonial (and decolonial) theory (Scott & Storper, 2015, p. 11). However, at this intellectual impasse I am reminded of John Friedmann's (2011, p. 133) assertion that "the purpose of theorizing is to improve the practice of planning," and to do this, "planners need to have a good understanding of the inner workings of city-forming processes before we impose on them a normative structure or talk of strategic intervention" (Friedmann, 2011, p. 139). This suggests the importance of establishing, in the first instance, explanatory and analytical frameworks, even if findings point to context-specific particularities. Situated particularities focus our attention on what is going on and why, and if local planning praxis needs to be improved without attempting to establish "high-level theoretical generalizations." Local solutions to local problems are desperately needed, especially in Southern contexts. *Democracy otherwise* is conceptualized as a means to explore alternative democratic practices, so that planners might, in the first instance, begin to understand, explain, and analyse some of the "inner workings" of alternative democratic practices before hoping to launch strategic interventions. Furthermore, and from a decolonial standpoint, any venture into the normative terrain of planning necessitates resident-driven processes and outcomes that, in turn, shape what *democracy otherwise* might mean in a situated context.

5. Principles That Inform an Otherwise Conceptualization

While *democracy otherwise* seeks to challenge Western framings of democracy as universally applicable, its overarching objective is to acknowledge, understand, and learn from alternative democratic practices that are delegitimized by coloniality. That said, it is not a framework geared towards the "outright rejection of Western notions of democracy" (Banerjee, 2022, p. 289). Rather, it allows disparate points of view to coexist by respecting and working with pluriversal (as opposed to universal) worldviews (Escobar, 2010, 2019a, 2019b). It also recognizes the fruitlessness of privileging the state as a site for otherwise thinking, since coloniality retains its stronghold on governments beholden to centres of global power (Escobar, 2010; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Decolonial (and postcolonial) scholars arrive at this conclusion by observing how nation-states in Africa, Asia, and Latin America were, and remain, "governed by the same rationality that inscribed the colonial project" after gaining independence (Banerjee, 2022, p. 290). Here, power simply shifted to and remains within the clutches of local elites. Sites for alternative democratic practices are, instead, found in "multiple local forms of governance that avoid the pitfalls of contemporary liberal democracies" (Banerjee, 2022, p. 290). The task then for *democracy otherwise* is:

> A decentring of capitalism in the definition of the economy; [a decentring] of liberalism in the definition of society and the polity; and [a decentring] of the state as the defining matrix of social organization. This does not mean that capitalism, liberalism, and state forms cease to exist. *It means that their discursive and social centrality have been displaced somewhat*, so that the range of existing social experiences that are considered valid and credible alternatives to what exist is significantly enlarged. (Escobar, 2010, p. 12)

This range of existing, valid, and credible alternatives informs Boaventura de Sousa Santos' *epistemologies of the South* (Santos, 2003, 2016b). As an explanatory and analytical framework that operates not only at the intersection of theory and practice but also at the intersection of the Global North and the Global South, *epistemologies of the South* derive their validity from local struggles, local experiences, popular knowledges, and a "politics of difference" that is deliberately delinked from modernity's approach to politics and planning (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Such epistemologies also derive their validity from a form of epistemic disobedience that disrupts foregone conclusions about democracy and foregrounds autonomy from the state. For Escobar (2019b, p. 138), autonomy enables residents to exercise both self-determination and collective action, which he conceptualizes as "idioms of autonomy and community." These interwoven idioms, as Escobar (2019b, pp. 133–138) goes on to explain, "contribute to an explicit sense of politics" in contexts where "modes of living [are] based on relational interdependences with land and place," and where "Indigenous cosmovisions" inform praxis. Popular democracy, insurgent citizenship, and actually existing urbanisms—as envisaged by Slater, Holston, and Shatkin, respectively—equally encompass forms of autonomy from the state. However, these studies, while significant and relevant, stop short of delving deeper into the fluidity, volatility, and unpredictability of self-actualization and collective action. They also stop short of exploring the interwoven and relational nature between Indigenous knowledges and land/place. Moreover, Slater and Shatkin seem doubtful of the idea of generating knowledge that might be deemed "particular" (i.e., in-, of-, and for-itself). As an anthropologist, Holston is less hesitant about the validity of producing context-specific knowledge. It is also important to recognize that Escobar's idioms differ from John Stuart Mill's (1859/1982) liberal assertions for "individuality and sociality," as emplaced polities, and not capitalism's prosperity, is centred in decolonial thinking. By centring emplaced polities, an

otherwise framework makes use of Gibson and Graham's "politics of becoming in place" (Gibson-Graham, 2003), which is shaped by relational ontologies that emphasize attachments to land, the ancestors, and all animal and plant nations that are sustained by the land.

6. An Example of *Democracy Otherwise* in a Situated Context

In 2021, South Africans witnessed a landmark High Court case initiated by the Rural Women's Movement (RWM, the plaintiff) with support from the pro bono Legal Resources Centre. The defendants were the Ingonyama Trust and the South African state. What makes this case unique is that, for the first time in South Africa's history, a legal ruling was based on decolonial values that acknowledge residents' ontological relationality to the land that constitutes the *democratic commons*. To clarify, since 2012, representatives of the Ingonyama Trust (of which the Zulu king is the sole trustee) have been converting communal landholdings in KwaZulu-Natal (a province of South Africa) into leaseholds with the aim of extracting rents from residents. In response, the RWM based their affidavit on the fact that customary land rights (derived from decolonial values) preclude Western notions of absolute land ownership and that South Africa's traditional leaders (kings, queens, and chiefs) are mere custodians of the democratic commons (*The Council for the Advancement of the South African Constitution and the KwaZulu-Natal Rural Women's Movement v. the Ingonyama Trust and the Ingonyama Trust Board*, 2021). The High Court judges thus ruled against the Ingonyama Trust, whose conduct was found to be unconstitutional because it undermined residents' customary land rights to live on and use communal landholdings without being charged a monetary value to do so (Manona & Kepe, 2023). They also ruled against the South African state, which was found to be negligent in protecting residents from the Ingonyama Trust's exploitative practices (Manona & Kepe, 2023).

Before exploring an example of co-sustaining polities of difference and becoming in place, alongside idioms of autonomy and community, it is important to note that the Ingonyama Trust Act was formulated by the Zulu king in collaboration with the Inkatha Freedom Party and the apartheid state. This Act was promulgated on the eve of the first democratic elections in 1994 (Manona & Kepe, 2023). The Inkatha Freedom Party—which, at the time, held majority support in KwaZulu-Natal—threatened to withdraw from the national elections, thereby placing the incoming African National Congress (ANC) in a precarious position that ultimately resulted in it "turning a blind eye" to the nefarious collusions between the Inkatha Freedom Party and the National Party (which was the political party in power during the apartheid era). The Ingonyama Trust Act thus constitutes one of the several land reforms implemented between 1991 and 1994 by the outgoing apartheid state which explicitly targeted communal landholdings and state-owned land for the purpose of privatizing these lands (Steyn, 1994). As part of these privatization measures, tenure rights were reconfigured to exclude residents from controlling communal landholdings (Steyn, 1994). These reforms (which remain for the most part unamended and unrepealed) sparked communal landholders' disquiet. Nevertheless, "the Ingonyama Trust Act was fuzzy with respect to the powers, functions, and future of chieftaincy structures" (Manona & Kepe, 2023, p. 5). This fuzziness seemed to be of minimal concern to the incoming ANC state since it assumed that traditional governance structures would become obsolete once democracy was established (Ntsebeza, 2005). But this did not happen. Instead, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act of 2003, and the Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Act of 2019 all recognize the authority of traditional leaders, despite the fact that these Acts refrain from stipulating who, precisely, is responsible for governance and land administration on communal landholdings (Winkler, 2021). These Acts also assume that traditional leaders

will participate in, and work through, democratic state structures, including ward council structures (Winkler, 2021). Again, this assumption has not come to fruition. As a result, land-rights activists campaigned (and continue to campaign) for all governance and land administration functions on communal landholdings to be transferred to democratic state structures, and for traditional leadership structures to be revoked (Kepe & Hall, 2018; Ntsebeza, 2005). For these activists, kingdoms and chieftaincies are inherently undemocratic, thereby depriving rural residents of choosing their leaders (Ntsebeza, 2005).

Notwithstanding this reality, the 2021 High Court example represents much more than rural women's fight to protect their lands and values through a legal system that upholds this democratic right. It also represents an *otherwise* approach to democracy that enables residents of communal landholdings to mobilize against the official political regime (whether the state or traditional leaders) during one moment in time, and, during another moment, to mobilize in support of traditional leaders when communal landholders lose confidence in the state's official democratic structures (Winkler, 2021, 2024). Official democratic state structures include electing the political party that governs communal landholdings via party-appointed ward councillors. Ward councillors are supposed to govern communal landholdings in collaboration with traditional leaders, which creates its own set of governance dysfunctionalities (Winkler, 2021). Yet, it is precisely these dysfunctional dynamics and oscillating alignments that create opportunities for an *otherwise democracy* to arise. To be sure, members of the RWM strategically chose to counter the state and traditional leaders via the 2021 legal action. But when such measures no longer serve an emplaced politics, members of the very same Movement realign themselves with the state by, for example, partnering with the KwaZulu-Natal provincial government to establish the Women's Advancement Fund, which supports women entrepreneurs in overcoming unique challenges in the commercial sector (KZNOnline, 2024). The Movement is also actively involved in state-led campaigns to combat gender-based violence and regularly engages with policymakers to ensure that any legislative amendments reflect the needs and rights of rural women ("Africa: South Africa's land," 2020).

On the other hand, (re)alignments with traditional leaders have resulted in a noticeable resurgence of their roles over the past two decades, even though traditional leaders do not draw power from the ballot box (Ainslie & Kepe, 2016; Winkler, 2021). To be clear, traditional leaders are not elected; they are born into their political positions. This explains the state's decision to promulgate the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act of 2003 and the more recent Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Act of 2019 (despite the fact that both Acts of Parliament are currently in abeyance). So, while (re)alignments with traditional leaders might seem puzzling to Occidental thinkers (as such leadership structures undermine Western understandings of democracy), something altogether different and powerful is taking place on communal landholdings in South Africa (Winkler, 2024). Yet, the resurgence of traditional leaders' roles—along with the state's power—is always volatile, transient, and subject to emplaced democratic practices that are sometimes oppositional and sometimes allied with the official political regime, thereby disrupting foregone conclusions about democracy that presume that "no political regime can tolerate multiple principles of legitimacy without jeopardizing its very survival" (Mouffe, 2005, p. 122). South Africa's democratic commons encompass multiple principles of legitimacy which, at times, call into question the existence of the official regime and, at other times, support it. These multiple legitimacies are enabled through a "politics of difference" characterized by a fluid relationship with established powers. Multiple legitimacies are also enabled via a "politics of becoming in place" that comprises an intimate relationship to the land itself and a resolute defence of this ontological relationality (as demonstrated by the RWM's

affidavit). Collectively, these polities assert a form of autonomy from both the state and traditional leaders through emplaced democratic processes involving self-determination and collective mobilisation. Here, "idioms of autonomy and community" contribute to a collective sense of power, whilst enabling residents to simultaneously assert themselves as autonomous political actors (Winkler, 2024). And by challenging the foundations of liberal democracy through multiple legitimacies that are in perpetual states of oscillation, communal landholders are taking control over the production and planning of their democratic commons. The idea that "self-determination [is a] concept that sits uneasily with liberal democracy" (Banerjee, 2022, p. 291) is thus immaterial to South Africa's communal landholders.

From a planning perspective that aims to understand *democracy otherwise* in situated contexts, it is essential to recognize the many different emplaced democratic practices exercised across diverse world regions, even if these practices tend to be fluid, transient, small-in-scale, deliberately place-dependent, and resistant to being scaled-up (and universalized). Yet, for Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams (2015, p. 13), these types of anti-hegemonic endeavours simulate a mere "folk politics [that] cannot mount an effective opposition to neoliberal capitalism." While Srnicek and Williams (2015, p. 17) might be correct in their assertion, their alternative ("a full-throated embrace of the project of modernity") is disturbing even if their end goal is to build "a world more modern than capitalism will allow." But rather than resort to an outright disqualification of *democracy otherwise*—and given decoloniality's respect for all knowledges in a pluriversal world—perhaps a response to Srnicek and Williams lies in Jacques Derrida's (2005, p. 152) claim: "If democracy that is 'already here' cannot represent all its citizens equally and absolutely, then its lack of closure implies there is a democracy *always to come*." In other words, democracy, from the perspective of modernity and conventional political theory, relies on the idea of "sovereignty to legitimize its existence" (Mouffe, 2005, p. 122), which, in turn, necessitates an assimilation and homogenization of difference. However, as Derrida (2005) argues, difference is a precondition for the formation of democracy, thereby rendering the sovereignty of a political regime vulnerable to differences that cannot be assimilated or homogenized. It is this tension between necessitating sovereignty and difference that opens radically different horizons for democracy (Derrida, 2005), including *democracy otherwise*.

7. Concluding Reflections

Under neoliberalism, "the interior essence of the state is captured" (Purcell, 2013, p. 30). And given the entangled relationship between planning and the state, we might conclude that there is little that planning can do to address the democratic deficit left in the wake of neoliberalism. But for Mark Purcell this conclusion is not good enough (Purcell, 2013). Instead, he urges us to conceive of an altogether different approach to planning: an approach that "refuses the state and capitalism [and that] works tirelessly to ward off new forms of hierarchy [and hegemony]," whilst emplacing itself within "the whole body of society" without attempting to direct and control society (Purcell, 2013, p. 35). In this conceptualization of planning, "actions [are] taken;" but not by "a specialized group, institution, or planning department," but by "everyone acting together to coordinate activity" (Purcell, 2013, p. 35). Such a radical re-making of planning can be enhanced by first engaging with explanatory and analytical frameworks—including situated frameworks that hope to understand some of the inner workings of otherwise approaches to democracy—before launching into normative proposals that are shaped by resident-driven processes and outcomes. As an aside, it is important to stipulate that Purcell's political vision for planning is based on a Deleuzo-Guattarian perspective and not on a decolonial perspective. Nevertheless, aspects of his argument resonate with decoloniality.

Democracy otherwise equally rejects market democracy (masquerading as liberal democracy). It values "the whole body of society" in fulfilling democratic planning practices, and it resists "new forms of hierarchy and hegemony." However, and importantly, *democracy otherwise* is not contingent on establishing more radical planning approaches, since alternative democratic practices already exist across diverse world regions despite (or because of) neoliberal globalization. For this reason, Santos (2020, pp. 31, 46) maintains that:

> The rich diversity of democratic experiences arising in different parts of the world may well prove to be a key step towards the necessary reinvention of democracy in contexts of increasing cultural, ethnic, [political], and religious diversity, as is the case in Europe, [the US, and elsewhere]….[Hence his call to] learn from the Global South.

Yet, while the state is decentred in decolonial thinking, citizens' democratic right to, for example, lodge legal actions against the state (with the security of knowing that the judiciary is independent of the state) cannot be underestimated. These democratic rights are demonstrated by the example of the RWM. Still, the fact that a class action lawsuit took place—and that the RWM was victorious in its defence of the democratic commons—is not the catalyst for an *otherwise democracy*. Rather, in the context of South Africa's communal landholdings, dysfunctional governance structures and emplaced polities serve as catalysts to challenge the foundations of coloniality, liberalism, neoliberalism, and liberal democracy through the use of multiple principles of legitimacy that are in perpetual states of oscillation. Here, political fluidity empowers residents to experiment with the opportunities that alignments with the official regime (whether the state or traditional leaders) have to offer. And when these opportunities cease to exist, residents oppose the regime. Each alignment/opposition serves to unsettle the official regime's control over communal landholders, regardless of ballot box outcomes or traditional leaders' birthrights.

Most catalysts for alternative democratic practices are place-dependent (see Holston, 1998, 2008; Shatkin, 2011; Slater, 2002). It is precisely this place-dependency that negates transferability to other settings, and if attempts are made to scale up or transplant an emplaced politics, neoliberals will, in all likelihood, "capture its banner" (as they did with multiculturalism; Purcell, 2009, p. 147). But an awareness of this potential vulnerability is also an *otherwise democracy's* power since it keeps alive Derrida's "always to come" narrative that challenges the liberal tradition of democracy as the only, and most lucrative, outcome. This power allows planners to learn from the South's "rich diversity of democratic experiences" (Santos, 2020, p. 31). It also offers a role for emplaced planning praxis that is mindful of pluriversality, relationality, local experiences, and situated worldviews, whilst supporting polities of difference and becoming in place, in tandem with idioms of autonomy and community.

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Data Availability

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