

Interrogating the Theoretical Basis of the Freedom Charter in South Africa

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Abstract : The “adoption” of the Freedom Charter in 1955 at Kliptown south of Johannesburg, South Africa represented a desire to create a society that is based on common citizenship, and democracy. The architects of the Charter had a vision of a society that lived in peace with itself. Today, the Charter is still promoted as the best thing that ever happened to a society ravaged by racism, dispossession, oppression and exploitation – a society divided in all aspects of its life. This paper moves from the understanding that land is fundamental to all life. It interrogates the Charter’s claim on land. At a time when the colonised world sought to free themselves from the chains of colonialism and Africans throughout the continent demanded Africa for the Africans, the Freedom Charter claimed South Africa for all who lived in it. To the extent that this paper problematizes the philosophical underpinnings of the Charter, it uses the methodology of dialectic materialism to understand the theoretical basis of the Freedom Charter. The paper argues that the understanding, desire and the vision of the Freedom Charter were, as they are today, irreconcilable. To that effect and in pursuit of narrow class interests, the Charter justified land dispossession and unsustainable living conditions for the dispossessed majority. The paper then concludes that, by misrepresenting the critically fundamental land question, the Charter tried to reconcile the dispossessed with their dispossession and thus reflected coloniality and whiteness long before colonialism and settler-colonialism came to an end in South Africa.

Keywords : colonialism, contradictions, freedom charter, South Africa

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