

AYELET BANAI

# The Liberal Difference: Left And Right Conceptions Of Global Injustice

**ABSTRACT:** In left critiques of globalization, it is often argued that liberal-egalitarian principles are inadequate for thinking about and struggling for global justice; that they are, in fact, part of the problem. For the case of identity politics as a left alternative, the paper points at two fallacies in this notion, regarding two 'liberal' elements: individualism and universalism. (1) The paper examines group-identity claims in far right conceptions of global injustice, and shows that cultural diversity of groups does not necessitate or even favour equality and democratic participation. (2) It then examines the left group-based claims in the global justice discourse, showing that the aspirations for equality and freedom assume the liberal notions that have been often rejected as inadequate. The paper concludes that this ambivalent position undermines the democratic and egalitarian aspirations of left critiques of the global order. The analysis is based on manifestos and publications of political parties and movements in Western Europe (France, Germany and Austria).

**KEY WORDS:** diversity, global justice, ideology, left and right, universalism

•

## **Introduction: two logics of global injustice**

When it comes to global justice, it is often argued that liberal principles and ideals, even in their egalitarian forms, are part of the problem.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes this notion is so entrenched that it is not even argued for. Indeed, for the philosophical and political forces that have led the mobilization against global injustices, the flaws in liberal-egalitarian notions of the just society were manifest already in the domestic arena and were thus discredited for decades as a basis for a desirable alternative. Greens, post-Marxists of various descriptions and proponents of identity politics are prominent cases in point, both in political thought and in activism. It thus appears to make no sense, from a radical perspective, to reconsider the merits of the liberal-egalitarian imagination as a means to expose and remedy global and international injustices.

This paper presents two fallacies in this notion. (1) In the discourse of the far right, the anti-egalitarian and exclusionary positions regarding global matters are closely related to the rejection of two liberal notions. Those are (a) the idea that society is made of individuals, and (b) the notion that universally applicable political ethics can exist, independent of ascriptive identities. The idea of rights is closely related to the two notions, being the political mechanisms to institute

---

1. For activists' positions, see an overview in Simon Tormey, *Anti-Capitalism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2004), Chs. 3-4. For a critique of liberal theoretical positions, see Katrin Flikschuh, 'The Limits of Liberal Cosmopolitanism', *Res Publica* 10/2 (2004), 175-192, p. 176.

them. These notions are often called individualism and universalism. Though these words have come to bear many other meanings, I will use them in the paper in the narrow sense specified above.<sup>2</sup> (2) The second problem that I will discuss in this paper begins with an objection to the first argument. The objection is that even if the rejection of universalism and individualism indeed yields anti-egalitarian positions regarding the global order, this does not imply that one cannot develop an egalitarian position without them. This point is especially relevant for Anarchists and Marxists. They have surely developed, in principle, political alternatives that reject rights and certain notions of individualism, but yet adhere to more egalitarianism than liberal doctrines are usually expected to sustain. Here I will examine the case of identity politics due to its academic and public visibility.

Indeed, I cannot claim to show that it is *impossible* to develop an egalitarian alternative for the global order without taking on board individualism, universalism and rights. It is not only a theoretical problem to establish that something cannot exist, it is also particularly ambitious in the realm of political thought, where the possible conceptual combinations are infinite, not to mention the variety of meanings that political ideas can get over times and places. Thus, I will restrict my argument to showing that (a) culture-based claims in left critiques are indeed critical towards the liberal principles specified above; and (b) egalitarian aspirations are not necessitated by the culture-based claim for justice in left critiques of the global order. Therefore, the critique of the liberal notions in identity-politics undermines its own egalitarian basis.

To expose these two problems, the paper looks at the positions and arguments on matters of global justice, which were put forward by parties and movements in West European democracies. I focus on the ideological families that have dedicated most attention to the global issues. Those are the Greens and the 'movement for global justice' on the left, and at the other end of the political spectrum, are the ideologies of the new far right.

### **What's Liberal?**

Before discussing the cases, I should clarify the use of the term 'liberal' to describe this set of concepts and positions. The word may be misleading. I do not allude to any specific interpretation of liberal politics, nor to a specific liberal political theory. Not only because this term is so contested, but also because I do not necessarily wish to endorse any of the mainstream positions about what liberalism means in politics and theory today, nor do I wish to engage with their arguments. Both the ideas of the individual and of the universality of political ethics can have various and rather diverse theoretical and practical interpretations. Assuming an individual, does not say much about what kind of individual we assume.<sup>3</sup> It does not, for example, exclude the notion of an intersubjective character of the self.<sup>4</sup>

2. For conceptions of individualism see Steven Lukes, *Individualism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973). For possibilities in universalism see, Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture* (Princeton NJ: PUP, 2002), pp. 26-28.

3. Lukes (1973).

4. Benhabib (2002) p. 51.

Assuming universal ethics does not necessitate abstract individuals or context-less theorizing.<sup>5</sup> I use the term ‘liberal’ since this is the modern ideology that first adopted these ideas to its thought and politics, and the one most associated with these principles, even if the specific meanings given to them are and should be contested. By no means do I intend to argue that all philosophies that I referred to in this section should be considered ‘liberal’. Indeed, the philosophical gaps between Rawls’s theory of justice and Habermas’s discursive ethics may be wide and significant. In the world of ideologies, however, there are different sets of distinctions, which may group together diverse philosophical assumptions. For these reasons and under these precautions, I use the term ‘liberal’ in the sense specified above, even if I seem to apply it to ideas that are a far cry from some contemporary ideologies that are labelled ‘liberal’.

### **‘The world of Ideologies’**

Ideologies for the purpose of this paper mean political ideas articulated by collective political actors for public consumption. Ideologies usually prioritise some political problems that they consider important over others, and propose courses of action in relation to these problems. In this sense ideologies are a form of political thought circulated among large audiences by means of communication of political parties and movements, and sometimes by mass-media. Manifestos, publications and policy documents of political parties and movements are the major sources of information on their ideologies. They can reveal how the participants make sense, explain and justify their positions and political action. While this is not a complete definition of the concept of ideology,<sup>6</sup> this feature sets a distinction between political philosophy and political ideology pertinent for this paper. The normative theories of global justice - debated among political philosophers in careful analyses with tight control over the meaning of the concepts in use - are a distinct body of knowledge from the one explored here. The relationship between the two modes of political thought merits a discussion that exceeds the scope of this paper.<sup>7</sup> For the analysis of this distinct mode of political thought, I employ in this paper a conceptual approach,<sup>8</sup> aiming to explore the different meanings given to common concepts in different ideologies.

### **Difference, exclusion and ‘global injustices’**

The first step to understand the importance of the liberal cause in the global arena is to acknowledge that radical left-wingers are not the only ones who have taken on the international order and its harms. In Europe, a far right scene of opponents to the global order has grown and flourished. Exploring their positions and conceptual framework makes clear that not all objections to the global order are ‘progressive’ or meant in any way to increase liberty, justice or inclusion.

5. See discussion in Rainer Forst, *Contexts of Justice* (Los Angeles: UCLA University Press, 2002), Ch. 4.

6. For discussions regarding definitions of ‘ideology’, see Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), and Michael Freeden, *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

7. See Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), Ch.1.

8. *Ibid.*, Part I.

This acknowledgement as such may challenge some ideas put forward in left-critiques of the global order that see any resistance as desirable. Those who are aware of the anti-capitalist scene of the far right usually consider its arguments empty rhetoric and populism. This classification does not explain, however, what is wrong with these ideas and positions. Here, I show that the far right positions on global ‘injustice’ are compatible with, and an expression of, long standing concepts in this tradition of political thought. At the same time I attempt to identify the conceptual core of their anti-egalitarian and exclusionary positions. As mentioned above, I argue that these are closely related to the outright rejection of certain liberal notions.

Jörg Haider was the successful leader of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ). Under his leadership (1986-2005) the party met unprecedented success in elections for the national and European parliaments, and even made it to the Austrian government. Last April, Haider left the FPÖ to found a new party. Reportedly, one of the new party’s main objectives is to act on the problems of globalization.<sup>9</sup> Beyond internal power struggles, it appears that the central disagreement behind the split had to do with Haider’s position that globalization (rather than European integration) is the problem of first priority. In a subsequent interview, a speaker for *Attac*<sup>10</sup> in Austria dismissed Haider’s new anti-globalization clothes as populism.<sup>11</sup> That said, Haider is not alone in the anti-globalization scene of the new far right. The visions of the new far right on matters of the global order provide a concrete and articulated position that is highly critical of global capitalism without being concerned with any egalitarian issue. A core element in this worldview is the assumption that human kind is naturally divided into inherited groups (ethnic, cultural and national), which should form the basis of the desirable political order.

This element labelled ‘identitary politics’ is important since it makes sense of a number of important aspects in the ideologies of these parties.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the ideal of natural and organic communities divided according to ethnic or national line, connects current ideologies of the far right to 19th traditions of rightwing radicalism, which was to occupy an important position in Fascism. George Mosse, for example, identified the myth of organic national community as one of the elements for a general theory of fascism.<sup>13</sup> Then and now, this idea comes as a

9. Reported in, ‘Haider als Globalisierungskritiker’, *Der Standard*, (Austria) 13 April 2005. Petra Stuber, ‘Haider zum Chef der neuen BZÖ gewählt’, *Die Welt*, 18 April 2005.

10. I discuss *Attac* in more detail on pp. 50-52.

11. ‘Haider als Globalisierungskritiker’, *Der Standard*, (Austria) 13 April 2005, interview with Karin Küblböck, *Attac* Austria.

12. Hans-Georg Betz and Carol Johnson, ‘Against the Current - Stemming the Tide’, in *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9/3 (October 2004) 311-327, pp. 319-21; Andrej Zaslove, ‘Closing the Door? The Ideology and Impact of Radical Right Populism on Migration Policy in Austria and Italy’, in *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 9/1 (February 2004), 99-118, pp. 103-6.

13. George Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1999), p. 42. The debate about ‘What is Fascism?’ is indeed voluminous, however Mosse’s position is surely not marginal. On the debate see Roger Eatwell, ‘On Defining the Fascist Minimum: The Centrality of Ideology’, *Journal of Political Ideologies* 1/3 (October 1996), pp. 303-319, and Roger Griffin, ‘The Primacy of Culture: The Current Growth (or Manufacture) of Consensus within Fascist Studies’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 37/1 (2002) 21-43.

conscious adversary to liberal and social-democratic notions of the individual and of universal political ethics, as well as to pluralism which takes competing desires and interests within society as a given, rather than as a problem to be eradicated.<sup>14</sup>

The extreme, far or radical right are not synonyms for fascism. In fact, it has been argued by researchers of the far right, that some of the more visible examples nowadays, such as the French *National Front* and the Austrian *Freedom Party* cannot be identified as neo-fascist parties. If the term fascism was useful for polemic purposes - to define a political no-go area, so that anything that was classified as fascist was by definition wrong and evil - this convenient strategy may not be available when far right parties cannot be identified as fascist. During the 1980s and 1990s in a number of Western European democracies, far right parties moved into mainstream politics. According to Piero Ignazi, since the 1980s the new parties 'in fact, are no longer neo-fascist parties'. They are rather 'a different *type* of extreme right'.<sup>15</sup> Although there is a consensus among scholars that they are a considerable challenge to liberal democracies, the new far right parties do not reject the liberal-democratic order upfront, nor do they adhere to an alternative dictatorial political order in the way fascist and 'traditional' extreme right parties did.<sup>16</sup> The importance of ascriptive identity still marks them. Ignazi includes this element in the main characteristics of the new type of far right parties:

...they are against the universal idea of equality as rights should be allotted on the basis of ascriptive elements (race, language, ethnicity); and finally they are somewhat authoritarian because they conceive supra-individual and collective authority (State, nation, community) as more important than the individual one.<sup>17</sup>

The concepts of state and race of classic fascism also changed their appearance in the new parties of the far right. The concepts of culture and identity and the need for their preservation have become the basis for exclusion and xenophobia.<sup>18</sup> In these ideologies, ethnic, cultural or national lines of divide are considered given boundaries between natural communities.<sup>19</sup> This natural order is perceived as the basis for self-determination and legitimate government. The program of government of the French *National Front*, for example, opens with an insight derived, according to the authors, from the 'history of all peoples'.<sup>20</sup> The primary task of political institutions, in this view, is to keep the 'founding values' of the community of which they are in charge. The institutions should

14. On this idea in early radical-right traditions see: Zeev Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology* (Princeton: PUP, 1994).

15. Piero Ignazi, *Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe* (Oxford: OUP, 2003), p. 2.

16. Betz and Johnson (2004), p. 312. Roger Griffin, 'Interregnum or Endgame? The Radical Right in the "Post-Fascist" Era', in Michael Freeden (ed.), *Reassessing Political Ideologies* (London: Routledge, 2001).

17. Ignazi (2003), p. 2.

18. Pierre-André Taguieff, 'From Race to Culture: The New Right's View on European Identity', *Telos* 98-99 (1994) pp. 99-125. Betz and Johnson, (2004), pp. 316-20.

19. Taguieff (1994).

20. Front National, 2001, *Le programme de gouvernement du Front National*, (Paris: Editions Godefroy de Bouillon 2001), p. 15. (All translations are my own.)

govern in accordance with these values, which are also the source of legitimacy of governance.<sup>21</sup> The values are generated from the heritage, history, language, and culture of the community. In the discourse of the *National Front* the natural pre-political order is composed of ‘nations’ or ‘civilizations’.<sup>22</sup> Other members of this ideological family speak about cultural, ethnic and linguistic groups as the pre-political collective units.<sup>23</sup>

If this current of rightwing extremism cannot be simply identified with fascism, it is clearly the bearer of other parts of the intellectual traditions of the radical right. These intellectual traditions in Europe date back to the second half of the 19th century. They were hostile to the attempts of parliamentary democracy after the European Revolutions of 1848.<sup>24</sup> It was argued in these ideologies then and now that the individualistic and universalistic concepts of liberal democracy are disastrous. Facing a new set of political problems in the post-Cold War international order, the parties of the new far right revitalize with much precision these long-standing ideas. Indeed, the main problems that they identify in present day global capitalism are based on these notions. In far right views, the first problem in the new world order is the primacy of the market and the economy over all communal values. The second problem is the destruction of the natural communities, homogenization of cultures, and more often than not, the political and, thus, cultural hegemony of the United States.

Prominent examples of these concerns can be found in the platforms of the French *National Front (FN)* as well as in Germany’s much less electorally successful far right parties - the *Republikaner* and *NPD*. In the extra-parliamentary arena, thinkers of the *New Right*<sup>25</sup> have developed the ideas, sometimes labelled ‘ethno-pluralism’, into an in-depth framework of political thinking. In the *FN* party program the ‘dogmas of free trade’ are presented as a danger to the independence of France and to the common good of the French.<sup>26</sup> The primacy of the economy over all collective values and the American hegemony are two key problems in the process of the expansion of global markets. According to the party program, the market is powerful in erasing tradition, heritage and whatever was there before. Natural communities ‘in France in Europe and in the Third World’ are the first victims of this dominant ideology.<sup>27</sup> The pressure of

---

21. *Ibid.*, p. 15

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 16-20.

23. Alain de Benoist and Charles Champetier, ‘Manifeste : la Nouvelle Droite de l’an 2000’, *Eléments* n°94, (February 1999) <[http://www.grece-fr.net/textes/\\_txtWeb.php?idArt=71](http://www.grece-fr.net/textes/_txtWeb.php?idArt=71)> (accessed 25/07/05). FPÖ *Program of the Austrian Freedom Party*, 1997. (‘Identity’ in the English version of the document is the translation of *Heimat* in German).

24. See Zeev Sternhell, *La Droite révolutionnaire, 1885-1914* (Paris: Fayard, 2000).

25. This ‘new right’ is not the currents of conservatism identified with Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. Instead this ‘new right’ (*Nouvelle Droite*) is the circles connected to the French think tank GRECE (*Groupement de Recherche et d’Etudes pour la Civilisation Europeene*) and to the philosopher Alain de Benoist. It has a sister network in Germany - mainly identified with the weekly and publishing house *Junge Freiheit*, and some sympathizers in Austria that have operated in the 1990s within the *Austrian Freedom Party*.

26. Front National (2001) p. 258

27. *Ibid.*, p. 258.

immigration is explained as the outcome of an international division of labour and the application of a uniform model of development in Africa and Asia.<sup>28</sup> According to the *Republikaner's* party-program, globalization means unlimited business competition in which the economic powers prevail over the legitimate interests of people. The global competition, with no state regulation is being used to set the workers against each other, to press down wages, to abolish social benefits and to push aside environmental protection. At the same time, globalization means extensive Americanization, since the USA possesses the greatest economic power.<sup>29</sup> Sometimes the process is straightforwardly defined as imperialism in which the European nations are being colonized, too.<sup>30</sup> For both parties, the main alternative to this situation is to reinforce state sovereignty. The state in this perspective is the expression of the values of the national community. Peoples have their histories, cultures and languages that the political institutions, i.e. the state, are there to preserve. Here also lies their objection to European integration. The European Union is part of the problem inasmuch as it gives in voluntarily to American interests in its foreign policy, and also functions as a means of economic and cultural globalization that imposes the American model and norms in Europe.<sup>31</sup> The collective identities that are presented as the desirable alternative to this global homogenization are not always nation-states. There are other perspectives that do not highlight the sovereignty of the state as the right thing, but ideas that can be called cultural nationalism, where the collective is defined according to ethnicity or culture.

According to those of the new right, Europe is a victim of the expansion of the markets and American hegemony, just like those in Africa and Asia. A social, political and economic model is being forced onto Europe. In this conceptualization, the European nations are victims of global capitalism. These parties do not support much state intervention in the economy, partly due to the Cold War legacy and partly due to resentment of state bureaucracy. However, a distinction between financial or speculative capitalism and productive capitalism (as old as the revolutionary right itself) is used in this context to identify the problem and point to the alternatives. The second axis of problems in the new global order, according to these ideologies, is the unilateralism of this system - the hegemony of the United States, which not only harms the interests of the European nations, but also hampers democracy and self-determination of all peoples.

The stress on 'difference' and 'self-determination' gave some currents of the far right the name 'ethno-pluralism'.<sup>32</sup> The peculiar meaning of pluralism in this context is telling. On the one hand, these ideologies, at least in public discourse,

---

28. Ibid.

29. Die Republikaner, *Parteiprogramm 2002 der Republikaner*, p. 9 <<http://www.rep.de/index.aspx?ArticleID=6f0f68dc-bbc6-47e0-8e84-3762f8b9ab98>> (accessed 25/07/05).

30. See for example: Horst Mahler 'Globalism as the highest stage of imperialism', Horst Mahler, 1999, *Der Globalismus als höchstes Stadium des Imperialismus*, a speech of April 25, 1999 Available at: <<http://www.deutsches-kolleg.org/wnd/texte/991115.html>> (accessed, 25/07/05).

31. Front National, (2001) pp. 146, 149.

32. Taguieff (1994), and Alberto Spektorowski, 'The New Right: Ethno-Pluralism and the Emergence of a Neo-Fascist "Third Way"', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 8/1 (2003), pp.111-130.

omitted the old fascist idea of supremacy of one group - be it of a nation or a race, or even a religion. On the other hand, they did not in any way desert the belief in the essential importance of these categories as the bases for the good society. This pluralism knows no individuals, and the idea of conflicting interests and wishes is perceived as a result of a mistake, deviation or sometimes conspiracy. The natural order is harmonious. That was at the outset a major reason to object to parliamentary democracy, and class politics.

In conclusion, the definitions of the global order's 'injustices' in radical right ideologies are closely connected to their rejection of individual liberty and of pluralism on an individual basis. The general and long-standing opposition of the far right to individual liberty and pluralism provides the grounds and justifications, in the arguments of the far rights, to claim that the current global order is 'unjust', and to point at the specific phenomena mentioned above as forms of injustice. The far right's reasoning assumes that people are political entities within groups that are different from each other, and that their political institutions are there to express and preserve this difference. They cannot or should not be confined to universal political ethics of any sort. This general rejection of the concepts of the individual and of ethical universalism explains the specific arguments for exclusion and inequality in the positions of the far right. This interpretation may well indicate that the rejection of these basic concepts is essential for the exclusionary and anti-egalitarian positions of the radical right. This, however, still does not mean that one must endorse individual liberty, ethical universalism or pluralism of individuals to set an egalitarian (political and socio-economic) global agenda. The following section addresses this latter problem. To be sure, in the world of political ideas there are hardly relationships of causality and entailment between some positions and others. Yet, I will argue that these ideas are in all probability a much more solid ground for an egalitarian agenda. I will show that group difference based viewpoints that have been put forward as *egalitarian* alternatives do not, in fact, give ground and justifications for political and socio-economic equalities.

### **Egalitarianism and its discontent**

Speculative capitalism, the hegemony of the economy and of the United States, standardization and homogenization, and imperialism and war, are all recurrent themes in left critiques of globalization. Before jumping to the (wrong) conclusion that all critiques of the global order are one and the same, a closer look is required at the positions and arguments behind these catch words. Two lines of argument can be identified in left critiques of globalization and pleas for global justice. One line highlights the importance of access to, and redistribution of, resources, and participation in decision making processes. This line gives central position to the wrongs of severe socio-economic inequalities between the global north and the global south. In this set of arguments, human rights are very often invoked as universal standards.<sup>33</sup> The other set of arguments begins with the ideals of difference and otherness of cultures, ethnic groups and so forth. It

33. It should be noted that the rhetoric of human rights is also diverse.



identifies homogenization, standardization and cultural imperialism as central harms of the new global order. In discussing the positions of the right, we saw that that adherence to cultural self-determination or collective difference is easily dissociated from favouring democratic participation and equality. In critiques from the left, too, these ideas are often thought of as an opposition to the liberal positions. The objection to liberal positions in these arguments from the left is meant in principle to support *more* inclusion and socio-economic equality, and thus draws from a political imagination opposite to the ideologies of the right discussed above. Nonetheless, this latter line of left-critique of globalization lacks the means to undermine the ‘ethno-pluralist’ notions of the right. It makes sense and possibly legitimizes them, even if unwittingly. This point could be regarded as a problem of strategy only: how to promote certain ideas without helping political rivals who compete for these ideas, too. The interpretation proposed here, however, indicates that the problem is in fact the outcome of a conceptual flaw, which I now turn to explain.

It is a much debated question how culture-based claims relate to justice and to political emancipation. I do not give here an exhaustive review of the debate. Instead, I present briefly a position, which is sceptical towards culture-based claims, and I show how it applies to the discourse on global justice.<sup>34</sup> The central claim here is that there is nothing in the ideals of cultural difference that entails or even favours the aspiration for liberty and equality (political or socio-economic) of human beings. In practice, the proponents of cultural difference on the left also believe in equality and liberty. Whatever their grounds are for wishing equality and freedom, the ideal of cultural diversity is not the source of these egalitarian notions.<sup>35</sup> Preserving cultural difference as an *ideal* in culture-based claims entails the following assumptions. First, human beings belong to collectives by birth or by inherited characteristics. Second, each collective contains a clearly defined content that is shared by all its members, and which can be identified and preserved.

In theory, ‘culture’ could apply to non-inherited group characteristics, such as a profession, a hobby and so forth. However, in the justice claims, domestic and international, ‘cultures’ usually refer to ethnic, national, religious and linguistic groups. Different cultures are supposed to lead different ways of life, which the ideal of difference calls to preserve. In fact, this cultural heritage is thought of as a political program for the group, and, thus, the source of rules that should govern it. That these assumptions are far from being accurate in describing cultures as we have known them in recorded human history is a problem that I will not address here, since the discussion is concerned with the normative value of the claims. In

---

34. The term ‘culture-based’ claim is used here in a narrow sense. It applies only to claims that meet the two following conditions: (1) it is a claim for different treatment (by law and institutionalised authority) for people of different ‘cultures’ (when cultures refer to ascriptive identities); and (2) the different treatment is meant to *preserve* difference. It is meant here in the sense defined in Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), p. 13. I do not include in ‘culture-based claims’ instances in which a claim against oppressive cultural practice identifies the practice as an infringement on a universal right or good.

35. This position on culture-based claims is by no means a position on cultural diversity in politics and society as such. In fact it is basic assumption that under a ‘difference-blind’ political framework human diversity would thrive.

these assumptions there is no reason to institute rights - political, social or other. There is no reason to develop a political aspiration for equality. There is not even a reason to think that individuals are or should be of any significance.

To ground the support of human rights, for liberty of human beings and equality between them, there is a need to summon a rather different set of assumptions. The notions of universalism and individualism that I have mentioned above are two central ones in this set. I called them here liberal, but they are shared with a number of other political theories that we know under other names (while not shared by all that we classify at present as liberal). Prominent examples are the discursive ethics that underlies deliberative democracy, and partly what is known as radical democracy.<sup>36</sup> To justify group-based claims, the ideas of the individual and of the universality of political ethics were very often attacked by left-proponents of culture-based justice. In the realm of political theory, Iris Marion Young addressed directly the question of how oppressed groups should relate to 'old' progressive principles in their conceptions of emancipatory politics. Addressing this problem she urged 'proponents of contemporary emancipatory politics to break away with modernism rather than recover suppressed possibilities in modern political ideals'.<sup>37</sup> 'Modern political ideals', as Young noted in her article, are a rather complex and diverse matter. In the case of women's emancipation, the ideals to break away from are, for example: the 'ideals of liberalism and contract theory such as formal equality and universal rationality';<sup>38</sup> and 'Kantian-like' ethics of rights, due to 'the deontological tradition's assumption of normative reason as impartial and universal'.<sup>39</sup> Another 'old' political idea that inspired the cause of women's emancipation and now seems mistaken was the fact that 'excluding women from modern public and political life contradicts the liberal democratic promise of universal emancipation and equality'.<sup>40</sup>

This theoretical position was not articulated in the context of global justice issues, but in relation to the struggle of feminism in the United States. The dilemma in this position becomes acute when the discussion moves to the global context. If the philosophical foundations of rights, individual liberty and formal equality are harmful, then why support the politics based on them? Why support political and social rights and equality before the law? The implicit answer found in this framework can be called 'liberalism by default'. Since civil liberties are there, we need not to justify our support of them. Indeed, before explaining the immanent exclusion in these universalist notions, Young had asserted that some modern political ideas are plausible: 'no contemporary emancipatory politics wishes to reject the rule of law as opposed to whim or custom, or fails to embrace a commitment to preserving and deepening civil liberties'.<sup>41</sup> Why are those ideas

36. I would like to stress once more that I do not mean to argue that those political theories are liberal in a general sense.

37. Iris Marion Young, 'Impartiality and the Civic Public', in Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell (eds.), *Feminism as Critique*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 57-76, p. 58.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 58

39. *Ibid.*, p. 59

40. *Ibid.*, p. 58

41. *Ibid.*, p. 57

plausible if they are founded on flawed assumptions that entail exclusion and oppression? In the global arena, civil liberties are not always the norm and surely far from being regularly practiced. Why should we wish to institute them, after having learned in the experience of liberal democracy that in the interest of emancipatory politics it is wise to break away from them?<sup>42</sup>

In the realm of popular political discourse the dilemma is rather similar. At least since Karl Marx, the idea of rights became theoretically devalued in left-radical thought. Without coming to terms with this theoretical issue, radicals of the left very often appeal to rights and see their violation as an urgent problem. In leftist green<sup>43</sup> thinking the same kind of dilemma can be found, where since the 1990s rights have been endorsed more explicitly. It is telling that this move ‘cost’ green parties their radical image and made them seem from the left as giving in to the mainstream.<sup>44</sup> In their ‘Western’ liberal polities, radicals of the left can appeal to instituted rights simply because they are there with no need to clearly adhere to them as a political aspiration. In the global arena such rights are not established. Thus, the decision is necessary whether or not liberal rights are a desirable political cause and how important they are for other causes. In light of this dilemma the conceptual conflict between the two types of left critiques of the global order becomes clear. One line of argument necessitates political and social rights, while the other strongly undermines their credibility and desirability. At present, these two lines of critique are intertwined in the political discourse of the Greens and of the movement for global justice. This is due to the assumption that the variety of problems seen from the two perspectives are the different faces of one problem, and that struggling against problems of the second kind means helping with injustices of the first type. In the following pages I will bring examples from the left critiques of the global order to indicate that this is not the case.

### **A green example**

Leftist green parties strongly support global institutions and the application of human rights and standards of environmental protection. International solidarity and political inclusion are also elements of green political ideologies that justify arguments against the current global order. There are however, three important elements in the green political thought that make the idea of universal standards of political socio-economic equality undesirable. First, is the environmental constraint. The scarcity of resources is relevant for the issue of material inequality. If standards of living in the global South will rise to even be comparable to those

42. In this paper, I am interested in the positions in public political discourse, rather than in the debate among philosophers in academia. Therefore, exploring the ‘liberal’ (in the sense defined here) assumptions in Young’s conception of injustice as oppression and domination is beyond the paper’s scope. See Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: PUP, 1990), Ch. 2. Indeed, in the article cited here, I am not entirely sure that Young’s propositions break away from ‘modern political theory’.

43. I use the term ‘leftist green’ because not all green parties are clearly on the left.

44. Marcel Wissenburg and Yoram Levy (eds.) *Liberal Democracy and Environmentalism: The End of Environmentalism?* (London: Routledge, 2003). For the ideological transformation of the Greens in Germany, see Gayil Talshir, ‘Threefold Ideological analysis of Die Grünen’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 8/2 (2003), 157-184, pp. 173-176.

45. As put in a recent manifesto of the French Green party: ‘the day that every Chinese person buys a motorcycle will be a disaster’. See: Les Verts, *Le Nouveau livre des verts*, (Paris : Éditions du Félin, 1999), p.53.

in the global North, it would lead to an environmental disaster.<sup>45</sup> Second, is the environmental moral position of biodiversity as a *normative* principle for human beings, politics and society. Biodiversity in nature is translated to cultural diversity among human beings. This position too, more often than not, leads to the idea that 'others' are others, and that their otherness is due to ascriptive characteristics.<sup>46</sup> Finally, the ideas of the green left were first developed in the early 1970s as a comprehensive objection to the political, social, economic and moral order in the industrial world, i.e. Western democracies.<sup>47</sup> This critical position included the ideas of rights or individualism, which were perceived as foundational in the undesirable political order.

The Greens in France present the hegemony of markets and the economy as the major problem of globalization. The hegemony of the market leads to standardization and a worldwide uniformity of tastes,<sup>48</sup> and human beings in this world are 'neither people, nor citizens, but consumers'.<sup>49</sup> The domination of the economy that subordinates politics, society and culture is the central grievance in globalization,<sup>50</sup> to the effect that the markets dictate uniformity and consumerism. The inequality problem together with poverty is one of the harms of the market among others. There is no indication that poverty and inequalities are more urgent problems than the so called homogenization of cultures and ways of living. The growing gap between rich and poor countries is linked here to the growing gap between rich and poor within societies.<sup>51</sup> The dominant position of the United States as a global superpower is clearly identified as an important element in both aspects of the problem (i.e. uniformity and market hegemony). International relations, in this view, is determined by the weight of the United States as it tries to impose its model on the rest of the world. This model is identified with a number of problems: development based on permanent growth, war and violence, as well as competition and aggression.<sup>52</sup>

Objecting to homogenization, consumerism and the 'American model' for the reasons explained above does not necessarily require urgently fighting political and socio-economic inequality. Indeed, as an alternative, the Greens have put a lot of faith in state-sovereignty and state-based institutions - namely the United Nations (UN). The green alternative refers to the idea of global governance by making the World Trade Organisation (WTO) operate democratically, strengthening the UN and enforcing environmental regulations globally. The proposed reforms are state based. In the case of the UN, more states should be

---

46. Note that the argument that I make here is factual and its validity depends on whether or not this is a reasonable understanding of the green position. I will not engage here with the value or validity of the green position.

47. Tad Shull, *Redefining Red and Green*, (Albany: State University of New York, 1999); Gayil Talshir, *The Political Ideologies of Green Parties* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

48. Les Verts (1999) p. 62-63.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

50. Les Verts, 2002, *Reconstruire l'espoir! En Vert et à Gauche; L'écologie, l'égalité, la citoyenneté*, (éditions de l'aube, 2002), p. 233.

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 233-5.

52. Les Verts (1999) p. 69.

allowed into in the security-council, and in the case of the WTO, representatives of national parliaments should negotiate the interests of their constituencies.<sup>53</sup>

The vocation and ethical standing of states in this view is noteworthy. They are associated with expressing the will of peoples, together with the thriving and affirmation of cultures. To be sure, the green documents assert their disapproval of the ideas of autarky and nationalist reflexes.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, in the context of the understanding of globalization as homogenisation and standardisation, the reasoning and the logic of the disliked collectivist notions are reinforced, and a new ranking of urgency and importance of problems is formulated. In this ranking, the first dichotomy is between the uniform standard of the global market on the one hand, and on the other, the particular and local which are associated with peoples and cultures embodied in states. Only then, at the second stage, come the questions of how to understand the notions of *peoples* and *cultures*, and what does it mean in terms of immigration and naturalisation policies. Here the Greens completely oppose the currents of globalization critics on the right. Additionally, there is no account of how green aspirations for democracy and diversity, informed especially by states, is to be tackled. This problem is ranked less important in the context of a globalization critique that classifies the global market as the threat, and associates states as we know them with the solution and the desirable alternative.

### **The movement for global justice**

Within the left in Europe, *Attac* is the organization most identified with the grassroots struggle against global injustices. The association was founded in France in December 1998, and took part in initiating and organizing the first World Social Forum (WSF) in Brazil in 2001. *Attac* also seems to be a hopeful example of the intellectual's role in politics. The remarkable success of this organization has been, according to a recent study, 'directly linked to the place of intellectuals within it, who hold positions of power and influence within political, media and university circles'.<sup>55</sup> It is impossible to speak about a coherent political position of the immense variety of organizations, movements and individuals that have been taking part in this network. It is, however, possible to see how the various issues are articulated as a common agenda that explains why there is cooperation, and what all these different struggles have in common.

The founding declaration of *Attac* speaks about the rising inequality both between and within societies, coupled with diminishing democratic participation. It tells us that global speculative capitalism is a central cause for this deterioration, and declares three goals for the struggle: hamper speculative capitalism, oppose any undermining of state sovereignty in the pretext of business rights, and create a democratic space at the global level.<sup>56</sup> In relation to the issues examined here

53. Les Verts (2002) pp. 237, 249.

54. Ibid, p. 237.

55. Sarah Waters, 'Mobilization against Globalization: *Attac* and the French Intellectuals', in *West European Politics*, 27/5 (2004), 854-874, p. 855.

56. *Attac* 1998, *Platform of the international movement Attac* <<http://www.attac.org/indexen/index.html>> (accessed 25/07/05).

- economic inequality and political rights - we find a confused position on this agenda. On the one hand, the basis for a universal ethical framework seems to be a high priority. The idea of taxing financial transactions is meant precisely to help the global poor, and global democratic space is supposed to make global commerce fair to worse-off states. Yet on the other hand, according to this view, we are all in one global problem of neo-liberal globalization. This means that the injustices which impoverish the global South are not the problems of some distant others, but are 'ours' in the global North too. This point, however, is tricky inasmuch as it makes the citizens of Western European countries also victims of globalization. In this framework, struggling for welfare rights or agricultural subsidies in France, for example, appears to be in the interest of the global poor, because the struggle against neo-liberal globalization is one and the same everywhere.

In a publication that followed the second WSF in 2002 and collected the main positions of speakers and participants, the common cause was articulated. According to the introduction, by William Fisher and Thomas Ponniah, The 'liberation of difference', is central in understanding the novelty of the new movements, vis-à-vis the 'old left'. The text specified that previous social movements which opposed neo-liberalism in the 1970s and 1980s were based on socialist ideology and on struggles for national liberation, and were dominated by the universalistic dreams of 1917; de-colonisation and development. During the past two decades, new forms of social struggle appeared: ecologists, feminists, homosexuals and anti-racists. These movements are occupied with questions of identity, culture and modernity. Contrary to the universalism of the old left, the new movements advance the liberation of difference.<sup>57</sup>

The importance of the notion of liberation of difference is clarified by the specific understanding of globalization - as it is presented by the authors - that brings together the different groups, movements and organisations. This understanding is based on the idea that different forms of oppression are the faces and manifestations of the same phenomenon of neo-liberal globalization. This insight does not only encompasses different issues (oppression of women, minorities, poor etc.), but also geographical areas. In Latin America, Africa the Middle East or Europe neo-liberal globalization is one and the same problem in various manifestations. According to the editors' introduction, the expansion of the global market involves much more than economic domination over the world. Neo-liberal globalization is the enforcement of a way of thinking that consolidates a hierarchy of cultures, gender and races. The text states that capitalism, imperialism, mono-culturalism, patriarchy, white supremacy and control over bio-diversity coalesce in the current format of globalization and constitute the primary objective of the struggle of the movement represented in the WSF.<sup>58</sup> In this varied agenda, the specific problems of severe global poverty and political

57. William Fisher and Thomas Ponniah, 'Introduction: Le Forum social mondial et la réinvention de la démocratie', in William Fisher, and Thomas Ponniah, (eds.) *Un autre monde est possible*, (Paris: L'Aventurine, 2003), p. 16.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

inequality are not always high on the priority list.

The case of the war in Iraq exposed the perils of this choice of a common ground. In their contribution to the publication, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argued that it would be wrong to cooperate with moderate social democrats that supported the war in Iraq, even if they share a redistributive agenda. In general, the war in Iraq occupied a lot of mobilization resources and energy in *Attac* circles in 2002-2003. The direct relevance and influence of this war for global poverty and on political liberties was not clear.<sup>59</sup> In the heated debates on the invasion of Iraq, important speakers of left anti-globalization stuck to the view that whatever is against the United States is good by definition, thereby defending nationalisms, dictatorships and religious fundamentalism.<sup>60</sup> During the anti-war campaigns in Europe, similar arguments to those of the rightwing opposition to the war were put forward in left globalization-critiques.<sup>61</sup> This position, in light of the interpretation here, was the outcome of the flawed articulation of the common cause of left critiques of globalization. When the war became the top priority, the arguments against it used by left globalization-critiques resorted to national self-determination, independence of Europe and cultural difference. It was lucidly shown that in opposition to imperialism, American hegemony and the interests of the oil industry as such, there is nothing that by definition, or by default, favours an aspiration for liberty or equality.

### Conclusion

Since the end of the Cold War, left critiques of globalization have been successful in politicizing and mobilizing against the massive inequalities and patterns of political oppression in the international order. At the same time they have been highly critical of the set of liberal ideas that could support and justify the institution of democratic mechanisms and rights at a global level. At first sight, it seems to make no sense from a left radical perspective to consider the merit of liberal ideas. The political-intellectual traditions that have led the mobilization against global injustices (e.g. the Greens, anarchists, post-Marxists and identity-groups) have stressed for decades the inadequacy of liberalism for the cause of justice and freedom. Against this position, I have presented two arguments. First, central egalitarian aspirations in left critiques of global injustice actually depend on liberal assumptions, reasoning and justifications. This point is particularly apparent in the frequent calls for the protection and enhancement

59. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, 2003, 'Préface' in Fisher and Thomas, pp. 8-9. This is not to say that there were no important reasons to object to the invasion of Iraq, just that poverty was not necessarily one of them.

60. See for example, Walden Bello, *Militarism: Empire and Resistance Today*, (A Chancellor's Distinguished Fellow speech, delivered by at the University of California, June 2004). Available at <[http://www.world-crisis.com/analysis\\_comments/460\\_o\\_15\\_o\\_c38](http://www.world-crisis.com/analysis_comments/460_o_15_o_c38)>. Bello, *A Milestone in the Global Struggle against Injustice and War*, (A speech at the Beirut international assemble of the anti-war and anti-globalization movements, September 2004). Available at <<http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=1&ItemID=6289>>. Arundhati Roy, *Do Turkeys Enjoy Thanksgiving?* (Presentation at the World Social Forum, January 16 2004). Available at <<http://www.hindu.com/2004/01/18/stories/2004011800181400.htm>> (All accessed on 25/07/05).

61. For details on the campaigns against the war see: Ayelet Banai, 'Between "Post-materialism" and "Anti-materialism"', a paper presented at the ECPR Joint Sessions, Uppsala, April 2004, pp. 16-21.

of rights, which are often made in demands for global justice on the left. Second, I examined the positions of proponents of identity politics, as an alternative for liberal justice. The culture-based claims put forward in identity politics discourse do not necessitate egalitarian positions and aspirations. Looking at rightwing critiques of the international order, I have shown how cultural pluralism can be, and often is, the basis for anti-egalitarian and exclusionary positions.

Left proponents of identity politics do aspire to political and socio-economic equality and thus endorse the protection and enhancement of rights. Rights, however, are justified by the set of liberal ideas that culture-based claims have harshly criticized. New left theories and claims of justice have had a complex relationship with the liberal ideas that they have aimed to replace within their liberal democracies. Within liberal democracies it is arguably possible to call for the protection of rights that have already been instituted. No further justification is needed. This complexity turns into an outright contradiction in the global arena. At the global level, rights are neither established nor protected by sovereign political institutions. If left-critiques of global injustice require rights as part of the desirable alternative, they need to state their position in support of such rights. The position at the moment in left critiques of globalization seems to be self-undermining: on the one hand they appeal to rights, while on the other hand they regularly discredit the justifications for instituting and protecting them.

---

AYELET BANAI  
Lady Somerville College  
University of Oxford  
[ayelet.banai@somerville.oxford.ac.uk](mailto:ayelet.banai@somerville.oxford.ac.uk)

