

From Community to Coalition

The Politics of Recognition as the Handmaiden of the Politics of Equality in an Era of Globalization

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LASH (1996B) HAS rightly argued in his debate with Bauman (1996) that there is a need to go beyond the polarities of individualism and communitarianism. There is a need to ground analysis in a presumption of social bonding, in the face of the relentless over-preoccupation of much contemporary theory with difference, while rejecting the hierarchy which is integral to communitarianism. In the introduction to this volume, Featherstone and Lash (2001) argue that ‘recognition’ is a useful concept in the analysis of political culture which opens up the space limited by the assumptions involved in either ‘community’ or ‘difference’. I am going to argue here that, while the problems they identify are real, the concept of ‘recognition’ is not the solution. This is because ‘recognition’ is still too rooted in the present order of things and speaks insufficiently to issues of change. It is situated at a level of abstraction which makes it hard to analyse the empirical realities of political cultures which are always riddled with complexity, cross-cutting relations with other political cultures, coalitions and alliances. Most particularly, the idiom and metaphor of ‘community’ on which it draws so heavily is too limited a conceptualization of the ‘social’. Rather we need to draw more deeply upon the larger sociological vocabulary of concepts of the social.

The debate that Lash (2001) foregrounds has a long history in moral and political philosophy. It is time to turn to Sociology for some answers (Calhoun, 1995). Rather than abstractly ponder the basis of ethical and political claims, there is much to be learnt from analyses of how people actually do make

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ethical and political claims. Sociological analysis of the practical reasoning that people make, the frames of reference they utilize when making judgments, their practical juggling of various and competing identity claims, the various ways that these political cultures are historically sedimented in surviving social institutions, and the competition and contestation between social institutions with rival claims has much to offer to ground and resolve or by-pass many of these philosophical debates. There are two key issues here, one is the use of the weak conceptualization of the social, especially the use of the concept of community as if it signified the social, but which is actually too narrow and specific an operationalization of the concept of the social. Second, and relatedly, there is an absence of discussion of how people actually do theorize their political cultures, just how and with what use of universal as opposed to contextual frames of reference.

The global is becoming the defining horizon for some political projects (Benhabib, 1999; Castells, 1996, 1997, 1998; Standing, 1999). Globalization today re-frames the notion of the universal. Yet the global is not the same as the abstract universal. Rather, the global is a practical, special and time-specific realm, even as it can be purported to encompass the totality of contemporary human life. The global and the universal have an uneasy and ambiguous relationship in many contemporary analyses. This is because many political projects today make claims to justice on the basis of an ambiguously defined conception of the global/universal. This is a different trend from the practice within some political projects towards a focus on ever more tightly and narrowly defined social groupings, which occurred especially in the projects at the intersection of gender/ethnic concerns (Felski, 1997; Mohanty, 1991; Spellman, 1988).

I shall situate my analysis within presumptions about modernity, reflexivity (Beck et al., 1994), complex globalization (Castells, 1996, 1997, 1998) and the challenge of difference (Calhoun, 1995). I start by engaging with some of the theoretical debates on recognition and redistribution. I use substantive examples of political coalitions in contemporary global politics. Throughout, I discuss the elements which need to be included in an analysis of political culture and which are insufficiently dealt with in accounts of recognition: complexity and sociological concepts of the social beyond community; the relationship between equality and recognition; the separation of ethos and polis; the relationship between the global and the universal.

The Community and the Universal

The central dilemmas articulated by philosophers and social theorists here centre on the nature of the grounding of the rules by which the justice of political and ethical claims may be judged. This alterity between community and individualism/universalism is a key theme in the social philosophy recently discussed in *Theory, Culture & Society* (Bauman, 1996; Gardiner, 1996; Hutchings, 1997; Lash, 1996a, 1996b). On the one hand, liberalism and universalism appear to offer a plea to a free-floating form of reason which is universal, drawing on a Kantian heritage. There is a claim to universally

valid truth, which usually assumes a coherent individual as the seeker/knower. On the other hand, communitarianism appears to offer a grounding in the particular standards of a specific community (Sandel, 1998; Taylor et al., 1994). There is the notion that truth is always partial and situated, that we are limited by the communities in which we are located. Of course, in practice, most contemporary writers reject the polar extremes as untenable. Some simultaneously reject both poles and with them the search for certain foundations for contemporary ethics and political projects (Bauman, 1991, 1993, 1996, 1997). Bauman's rejection of both these choices follows his earlier rejection of the morality of modernity because of its association with the holocaust (Bauman, 1989). Others seek a resolution or compromise, either by refining the procedures for assessment of justice claims (Benhabib, 1992; Habermas, 1989, 1991), or by integrating the concerns of the individual and the community (Kymlicka, 1991, 1995).

There have been many attempts to find a resolution to this debate. Habermas (1989, 1991) seeks a resolution by attempting to establish universally valid procedures by which truth may be established, utilizing the dynamics within an assumed desire to communicate to drive the process, and locating it within an idealized situation of equality of contribution. However, by such a location, Habermas, despite his intentions, situates rather than universalizes the conditions for truth, since the conditions of free and equal contribution are actually socially specific, not least in their presumption of the implications of democratic involvement. Benhabib's (1992) attempt at overcoming the same dualism by demanding a focus on the other has similar strengths and weaknesses to that of Habermas despite her attempt to move beyond (Hutchings, 1997). Benhabib seeks to avoid commitment to the communitarian stance, by making an appeal to the ostensibly universally valid criteria of judgement of recognizing the standpoint of the other. But the process of recognizing the standpoint of the other is not natural and automatic, but depends upon socially variable conditions. Thus Benhabib merely displaces the problem of universalism on to these new procedures for judgement which are not sufficiently universal to be adequate to the task demanded of them. The act of 'recognition' requires a social process of assessment as to what constitutes the same or different from oneself. The abstractions of social philosophy constitute a serious limitation here, since they neglect the complex social dimensions of the processes involved.

Kymlicka (1991, 1995) attempts a way forward by softening the polarities of the debate through grounding them in a comparative analysis of practical attempts at their resolution. By including substantive analysis he is able to provide a more nuanced conceptualization of the groups involved and of the bases of the claims to justice that they make. Kymlicka's (1991) analysis focuses on minority groups in North America, especially those which pre-dated white settlement: the Indian, Inuit and Metis aboriginal peoples. He discusses in detail both the foundations and the working of the

provisions which were introduced into the Canadian Constitution to give special rights to these aboriginal minorities in order to protect their cultural heritage, and how they might appear to cut across individual rights of Canadian citizenship. He notes the need to exclude non-Indians from rights of voting and property ownership if the cultural rights of the Indians are to be maintained, thus grounding his analysis in a sociological understanding of power. He also notes that in so compromising conventional liberal individual rights there is a potential to undermine the rights of other groups, such as women seeking protection from gender discrimination through the use of the liberal principles enshrined in law. His aim is to reconcile principles of justice so as to sustain both cultural communities such as aboriginal life-styles, while leaving intact liberal principles which protect other social groups from discrimination. He seeks to achieve this by a reconsideration of the theory of the self within liberal theory, effectively seeking a more social, more sociologically grounded, conception of the self than is customary within abstract philosophy. Kymlicka argues that core to liberalism is the right to choose one's way of life, and that in order to achieve this, there needs to be respect for collective cultural membership. Kymlicka argues that, in practice, liberalism has respected collective rights of minority communities and has understood this as part of a liberal respect for freedom to choose one's own way of life, which involves recognition of communities as a whole within a larger polity, and that this can be articulated theoretically within his modified account of liberal philosophy.

Kymlicka's work is strongest when he is engaging with communities which are defined in terms of ethnicity or nation, in which there is a fully rounded and cohesive culture. It is weakest in relation to cross-cutting forms of difference, such as gender. When forms of difference are not coincident with holistic communities, Kymlicka, while empirically noting the issues involved, does not have concepts adequate to incorporating this complexity within his theoretical schema. Thus, while empirically Kymlicka sensitively notes the significance of gender divisions within a community when he discusses the politics of pornography, he does not integrate this insight into his conclusions. This is because of his use of the notion of 'community' as his dominant conceptualization of the social. His analysis is strong when the forms of difference are articulated through cohesive communities. But he is unable to offer solutions to the reality of the complexity of modern social life where there are divisions and social fractures which cross-cut ethnic and national groups, such as gender. The reason for this lack of integration into his theory of the full range of differences that he notes empirically is due to his choice of the concept of 'community' as a metaphor for the social. The use of 'community' pulls him back into the simplicities which he has tried so hard to escape. In the end, Kymlicka's analysis can deal with one set of differences, but not with the diverse range of cross-cutting and multiple differences that actually exist in the world. Cohesive 'communities' devoid of internal divisions of gender, class and further minority ethnic and religious groups do not exist in the modern world. The concept of 'community' does

not capture the nature of the social as it is actually riddled with diverse cross-cutting differences.

I seek to build on the strengths of Kymlicka's approach, in advancing philosophical debates on justice through grounded social analysis and developing his as yet incomplete project more adequately, capturing the diversity of social life.

Recognition Politics?

Fraser (1995) has produced one of the clearest statements on recognition politics and attempts both to engage with theory and to ground it in practice. She makes critical distinctions not only between the politics of recognition and the politics of redistribution but also introduces a third category of the politics of transformation. She suggests that the politics of redistribution is bound up with notions of equality and is focused substantively on economic issues while, in contrast, the politics of recognition is bound up with notions of difference and is focused substantively on cultural issues. While Fraser notes that both redistribution and recognition are needed, she suggests that there has been a shift from the politics of redistribution to the politics of recognition, by which she means a double shift involving a movement from socio-economic politics to cultural politics and from the goal of equality to that of recognition. 'Cultural recognition displaces socio-economic redistribution as the remedy for injustice and the goal of political struggle' (Fraser, 1997: 11). Further, in relation to the politics of gender, Fraser argues normatively for the politics of transformative redistribution by the liberal welfare state together with the cultural politics of deconstructive politics.

There are three main limitations to Fraser's analysis. First, I think she is empirically incorrect to suggest that the politics of economic redistribution have given way to the politics of cultural recognition. Second, she underestimates the rise of coalition building as a method of organizing which engages with difference within feminist and other politics, which is not dependent on the communities which are the basis of the politics of recognition. Third, she insufficiently addresses the relationship between redistribution and recognition and produces an abstract account which is at odds with the empirical evidence. Her abstract account of the role of a liberal welfare state and cultural feminism is that they affirm women's position, yet the gender regime is currently undergoing a radical transformation.

The first of these problems with Fraser's work is with her claim that the politics of recognition is replacing the politics of equality and that the recognition of ethnicities and genders is replacing class-based projects for equality. This is unfounded, notwithstanding the frequency with which this assertion is made (see also Featherstone and Lash, 2001; Maffesoli, 1996; Phillips, 1999). This is a sociological claim, not merely one of ethics or high theory. However, Fraser provides no evidence to support her assertions. While it is the case that feminist and anti-racist politics have become more vibrant and more deeply rooted than politics ostensibly based on class alone,

it is a mistake to see this as a triumph of the politics of recognition over the politics of equality. The politics of equality is thriving in both feminist and anti-racist politics (Charles, 2000; Lovenduski and Randall, 1993; Rees, 1992). There has been a decline in the politics in which largely white men made claims which they legitimated by an appeal to class, but these were often claims which privileged their own ethnic and gender specific interests, not those of their class alone. There is a reconfiguration of the cross-cutting alliances around gender, ethnicity and class, but that is not the same as the demise of the politics of equality. Rather we have seen its re-birth within a new political project in which class, gender and race interests are differently balanced. This is a complex networked and coalition-based politics in which claims to recognition are made in order to have the capacity to make effective claims for equality more effectively (Ledwith and Colgan, 2000). In the UK and other Western countries there has been an increased involvement of women in the politics of economic redistribution, as they increasingly participated in the labour market and the institutions associated with it, such as trade unions and professional associations (Gagnon and Ledwith, 2000; Ledwith and Colgan, 1996). As women have entered the labour market in larger numbers over the last few decades, they have become increasingly involved in the politics of economic redistribution (Acker, 1989; Evans and Nelson, 1989; Shaw and Perrons, 1995).

While men's membership of trade unions has been falling significantly, data from the Labour Force Survey and the Certification Officer for 1999 show that there has been a near convergence with women's rates of unionization. Young educated women, in particular, are joining trade unions. Among people under 40 the rate of unionization of women and men is the same, though there is a gender gap among older people. Among those with degrees women are significantly more likely than men to be in trade unions, 45 percent as compared with 30 percent (Hicks, 2000). Trade unions are now more likely to engage with issues of concern to women workers than they used to, constructing an agenda of equality issues (Ellis and Ferns, 2000). The proportion of women in decision-making positions in unions, while not yet reflecting their membership proportions, has significantly increased. In UNISON, the largest union in the UK, the proportion of members who are women rose from 68 percent in 1994 to 72 percent in 1999/2000, while over the same time period the proportion of women who were members of the national executive rose from 42 percent to 62 percent, as a proportion of conference attendees from 46 percent to 58 percent, as a proportion of national full-time officers from 20 percent to 21 percent (Ledwith and Colgan, 2000). Women are increasingly, not decreasingly, engaged in the politics of economic distribution.

In both the US and the EU there has been pressure to introduce legislation to provide equal treatment for women at work, the implementation of which often depends on worker and other organizations (Acker, 1989; Evans and Nelson, 1989; Rees, 1998). The European Union has passed a plethora of legally binding Directives as well as advisory Recommendations which

require the equal treatment of women and men in employment and in employment-related activities (European Commission, 1999; European Parliament, 1994; Hantrais, 1995; Pillinger, 1992). These Directives were passed not merely as a result of the interest of the European Commission, but as a result of political pressure from women activists (Hoskyns, 1996; Rees, 1998). The implementation of these is uneven across the EU, generating more activity in support of them in the UK (and Ireland) as compared with many other member states (European Commission, 1994). This was a result not only of women's willingness to take cases to national tribunals and courts, but also due to financial and moral support from the EOC and trade unions. Without trade union support, it is unlikely these cases would be fought. There is increased representation of women and their interests in trade union activities at both national and EU levels (Pascual and Behning, 2000). In the USA there has also been a series of attempts to use the law to improve the position of women in employment, from the pay equity movement (Acker, 1989) to the development of maternity leave policies (Kelly and Dobbin, 1999). Again, this is an arena of significant political activity by women in pursuit of their economic interests, the politics of redistribution. Women are demanding economic equality at work as never before, in new and complex alliances.

Further, there is an intensified struggle over the distribution of the world's resources between North and South, including contestation over the economic policies and priorities of the World Bank, World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund. These are quintessentially about the politics of power and distribution of resources between the First and Third Worlds, the rich North and the poor South (Moghadam, 1996b; UNDP, 1999).

A further area of politics which has developed over the last 30 years is that of campaigns to stop violence against women. Again this is about power, the unequal power between men and women. The feminist demand is to de-legitimize, to criminalize, to punish men's use of coercive force against women. They want the priorities of the criminal justice system re-ordered so that police resources are used to hunt down and arrest violent men. They demand financial resources from the state to support refuges and rape crisis centres to help women who have been abused by men (Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Hague and Malos, 1993). Insofar as these politics include a politics of recognition, it is as a handmaiden to the politics of equality. There is a demand for the recognition of the problem and the recognition of the voices speaking out on the topic. But the goal is the reduction and elimination of men's violence in order to curtail men's power over women – this is the politics of equality.

Second, Fraser neglects the actual development of coalition rather than recognition politics. She suggests that coalition-building might be a good idea, thus significantly underestimating the extent to which it is already a typical rather than exceptional practice within contemporary feminist politics. Rather, we have seen the development of the politics of coalition instead of

the politics of community become the dominant mode of organizing within at least feminist politics in the West and global feminist coalitions.

The use of networks and coalitions has been an increasingly important mode of organizing, especially when this crosses national frontiers (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Jakobsen (1998) argues that the analysis and practice of political cultures which focuses on recognizing difference underestimate complexity. In a world with many political cultures, there are overlaps which means that it is always impossible to identify a 'pure' instance of one of the political communities which are to be recognized. They are always already complex, with each individual subject to cross-cutting claims. Her empirical analysis is on the nature of politics among the US left, especially in anti-racist and feminist politics since the 1960s. She notes that there is never a pure 'African-American' group which can be recognized, because of cross-cutting political communities around at least 'class', 'feminism' and 'locality'. As a consequence of this complexity, there is never a pure political culture available to be recognized. Indeed, Jakobsen argues that awareness of this has in fact lain behind the practice of much political organizing since the 1960s. It is the theorists who have been slow to develop concepts to catch up with the world. She describes movement-based texts from the 1960s and 1970s which engaged with complex cross-cutting inequalities within their political practice. And how wave after wave of theorists kept discovering difference as if it was a theoretical discovery. The theorists, in their focus on difference, have tended to miss the way that practical politics in the modern world has always engaged with complexity. In practice, coalition rather than community is the key to understanding contemporary political movements. The awareness of this complexity has given rise to coalition rather than community-based politics.

Third, the relationship between the role of recognition and redistribution politics is not that of alternates, in which recognition is replacing redistribution, as Fraser argues, but is actually one in which the politics of recognition is the handmaiden of the politics of redistribution. Fraser suggests that the liberal welfare state and cultural feminism represent a politics of affirmation of existing gender identities. However, the empirical evidence suggests rather that the USA, with a liberal welfare state and cultural feminism, is currently undergoing a major transformation of the gender regime as women increasingly participate in employment (ILO, 1999), even when they are the mothers of young children, changing traditional family practices (South and Spitze, 1994) and cultural conceptions of femininity and masculinity as a consequence. The deep structures of gender relations are currently changing in the USA, not being affirmed, alongside a liberal welfare state (Bergmann, 1986). Additionally, her abstract account of cultural feminism as affirming femininity is also mistaken. Cultural feminism seeks to encourage women to experiment with a greater diversity of gender practices, especially sexual ones, not affirming old ones (Franklin et al., 1991). In short, Fraser's abstract philosophizing is not supported by the evidence.

Fraser has addressed an important issue in her account of the role of the welfare state in contemporary gender and class relations. However, the gender regime is in transition from a domestic to a public form in most industrialized countries, whatever the kind of welfare state. By ‘gender regime’ I mean the system of gender relations, which is constituted by several structures or domains, especially those of paid work, housework, the state, male violence against women, sexuality and culture, together with a set of associated practices. The domestic form of gender regime is one in which women are primarily located in the home and dominated and exploited by their husband or father and restricted from entry into the public sphere of employment and the state. In the transition to the public form of the gender regime, the restrictions on women’s entry to the public sphere are eliminated and women enter employment and the state, though they still suffer from forms of disadvantage associated with segregation (Walby, 1990, 1997).

A key issue in welfare politics is that of the reference group to which voters relate. Women here are divided as much by age as any other social indicator, in both the US and the UK, in that younger women are more likely to support the policies which facilitate women’s waged employment than are older women (Fawcett Society, 2000; Manza and Brooks, 1998). The gender gap in US voting intentions is significantly structured by women’s employment status in that women in employment are significantly more likely to vote for the party which will provide social service spending (Manza and Brooks, 1998). This social division of age/gender is not captured by the concept of ‘community’, yet this divide is key to the explanation of women’s interests and political preferences.

The Global and Castells

Contemporary politics cannot be understood without an analysis of the global framing of issues. The nature of this global framing is especially important given the ease with which an elision between the global and the universal can be made. The global is no more than a specific social construction situated in a specific time. In this way it is quite different from the universal which is usually seen as timeless as well as lacking spatial specificity. I am going to argue that the appeal to the global/universal is becoming an increasingly common feature of contemporary politics, especially radical politics.

However, many writers have seen globalization as a process against which people protest, rather than as endorsing a set of political claims. In particular, Castells (1996, 1997, 1998) provides accounts of political movements which mostly, though not always, object to globalization, which is perceived as undermining their community’s conditions of existence. Castells sees three different kinds of political identity in relation to globalization: legitimizing, resistance and project. Castells uses ‘identity’ as his core concept to engage simultaneously with difference and community. Today ‘meaning is organized around a primary identity, one identity which frames the others’ (1997: 7). Legitimizing identity is bound up with an integrated

society, but such legitimizing identities are disappearing along with civil society, democracy and nation-states as a result of globalization. Castells is dismissive of this first set of political projects, those which engage in 'legitimizing', since he considers that globalization undermines the political units he considers necessary for such projects, that is, nation-states. Resistance identities, the second type, are defensive identities and are the main basis of the various forms of resistance to globalization. Examples include religious fundamentalism, Islamic and Christian among others, nationalism, for instance in the post-Soviet republics and Catalunya, and local territorial identity, for instance urban social movements. The third type of identity, project identity, is less well developed, even though it is crucial. This seeks transformation rather than retrenchment. However, it is only considered to be viable if a core set of values can be identified. Castells does not find many examples of this. He considers whether the European Union might be an example, but concludes that the project is doubtful. This is because, although there are some potential common values, such as those of universal human rights and of a notion of political culture as rooted in political democracy and participation, nevertheless, primary identity in this part of the world is still lodged in nation-states.

Castells is thus sceptical of the likelihood of success of existing instances of rights-based politics, as a result of his dismissal of both legitimizing and project-based identities. I think this is a mistake for two reasons. First, he underestimates the extent to which the 'global' level, in its guise as the 'universal', could be used to legitimate political projects, especially those utilizing a conception of rights couched within the discourse of universal human rights. Despite his path-breaking work on politics beyond the nation-state, he curiously underestimates the extent to which the global itself can act as a frame for positive political action. While rightly pointing to some of the ways in which the nation-state is undermined as a focus for democratically inspired politics by globalization, he underestimates the way in which alternative frames could be found for this type of politics. In particular, he underestimates the extent to which the global itself, when re-invented as the universal, could provide an alternative frame of reference for democratically inspired politics. Second, Castells is limited by his utilization of the concept of 'identity' as core to his notion of politics. He uses the concept of identity despite his powerful deployment of the concept of network to describe the transmission of power in a global age. It is a limitation of his work that he does not extend the use of this concept of network to his analysis of political projects. Instead his utilization of the concept of 'identity' to underpin political projects is a relatively weak part of his analysis, despite the rich empirical detail. This is because of his misleading assumption that a primary identity must underlie each political project if it is to be successful. But the world is not like this. Most people simultaneously hold several, if not many, identities. This concern with a primary identity is contradicted by the evidence. For instance, the European Union is a powerful and successful polity which has a very limited common ethos and is instead built on political

coalitions. A common ethos is not necessary for polis, nor for a political project. The complexity of the many overlapping and cross-cutting ‘communities’ in the contemporary social world is not adequately grasped by a notion of ‘identity’ which rests on a presumption of coherence. Castells does not have a concept which adequately addresses the complexity and inter-connecting and overlapping forms of ‘community’ which exist. This is related to a tendency to conflate the concepts of ‘politics’ and ‘culture’ in a way which can be misleading in that it overly simplifies the social world. For instance, the European Union contains many cultures yet functions as a polity and as a political project. The easy equation of ‘ethos’ and ‘polis’ needs to be disrupted. There can be political coalitions between groups with quite different ‘cultures’ which can nonetheless be effective, as the EU demonstrates.

Nevertheless, despite these weaknesses, Castells has ensured that the significance of politics focused on the global level is taken seriously. He is right to argue that globalization has altered the political choices and prospects available. His concepts of networked forms of power have added to our conceptual vocabulary. My argument is that he did not push the innovations he made in parts of his analysis far enough. The concept of network which he used in relation to power should also be applied to politics, so that political networks rather than identities are the key concept. The utilization of the new framing of the global by progressive social movements should be considered, not merely when it is used by those resisting these changes. The example of the movement to stop violence against women analysed below is an instance of this.

From ‘Community’ to ‘Social’: Sociological Conceptions of the Self and ‘Other’

Ironically, for all the invocation of ‘the other’ in the politics of recognition, there is a tendency to reduce the complexity of the social world too far. This is because insufficient attention is given to the variety of social institutions. There is more to social life than the individual, the universal and communities. The development of social philosophy, while illuminating in its own field, underestimates the complexity of the social, reducing it to ‘community’, and could usefully integrate a wider range of concepts of the social from Sociology. There are more divisions within social life than can be expressed by the concept of community. There are cross-cutting divisions of gender, age, religion, language, sexual orientation and many more. Sociology has a rich conceptual vocabulary to grasp a wide range of types of social divisions, which is insufficiently utilized by philosophers and social theorists. Instead we have the reduction of the complexity of the social world to the simplicities of the very specific social form of ‘community’.

We need a better developed set of concepts for the diversity of the social, which goes beyond the simplicities of ‘community’. We need to analyse a range of social institutions and a range of levels of abstraction, from system and structure to practices. One starting point for this is the

reconsideration of the sociology of reference groups, which was developed several decades ago to address the issue why social groups chose some standards rather than others as constitutive of their interests and chose others as the focus of their aspirations.

The selection of which 'other' is to be chosen to be recognized is treated in much of the social philosophy literature as obvious, whether it is presumed to be everyone else, or merely the person or 'community' one is engaging with. However, there are many options of which 'other' is to be the focus and many complex reasons why one is chosen and not another. There is a vast sociological literature on this topic, much, though not all, focused around the concept of reference group. This literature has sophisticated discussions of at least two key processes. First, the identification of the group with which one identifies or draws one's normative values from. This is not obviously a group which is the 'same' as oneself, since there is a question as to the selection of the issues on which likeness is to be ascertained. In complex societies there will be many possibilities. Second, there is the identification of the group with which one compares oneself. In complex modern societies there is likely to be a wide choice of groups from which a choice of comparator can be made. Reference group theory debated the conditions under which people chose one group or another as the one to which they referred for their own norms and those to which they aspired (Runciman, 1966; Urry, 1973).

The development of reference group theory depended upon the prior development of a sociological theory of the self. A key figure here was Mead (1934), who developed a theory of the self as composed of an internal relationship between the 'I' which acted and the 'me' which was the product of the complex and deeply sedimented memory of the experience of social life. This internal complexity went radically beyond the notion of the self as a fixed essential coherent unity, and posited it rather as always in a state of becoming in relationship to the social. Symbolic interactionist theorists, such as Blumer (1969) developed this further, considering three processes as key: interaction, negotiation and meaning. Such theoretical development underpinned the work of Goffman (1963, 1969) on the presentation of the self in everyday life, and his development of a series of theatrical metaphors, including that of performance, front stage and back stage. Such work was applied to substantive topics such as that of becoming homosexual by Plummer (1975). This is a more developed theory of the self and performance than we see in social philosophers such as Butler (1990), who, despite being widely credited with inventing the concept of performativity, uses a concept which is simpler and does not draw on the earlier sociological work of Mead, Blumer and Goffman.

In order to understand the reasoning behind the selection of one social group as the basis for one's own self-definition and another one as a point of comparison, it is necessary to have an understanding of the historical processes which have led these social groups to be positioned in this way. Yet political cultures are always changing. We are always out of date as to the

characteristics of the political culture that we are intending to recognize. Likewise, the divisions within political cultures and the relations with other political cultures are always changing. We are always out of date in relation to this. For instance, groups in the diaspora will often ‘freeze’ their political culture, while that of those in their place of origin, which may be looked upon as their authentic reference point, is actually changing (Medaglia, 2001). Which is the ‘real’ political culture to be recognized – the practice of the diaspora population, the previous practice of those in the ‘homeland’ or the current practice of those in the ‘homeland’? The analysis of the selection of the groups for identification and for comparison thus requires a historical sociological analysis, not merely a description of the present. Political cultures are usually the outcome of complex processes of development with historic compromises between different political forces which shape the pathways of development. Too great a concern for the present can lead to an unfortunate voluntarism and lack of depth of understanding of the nature of constraints resulting from prior historic events.

The process of selection of points of comparison brings into question some of the easy polarities which have been perceived between the politics of equality and the politics of recognition (Meehan and Sevenhuijsen, 1991). The different political cultures in which equality and difference are rooted have been seen as irreconcilable, based on different ethics and principles of justice. However, there have been attempts at a reconciliation, which are based on a deconstruction of the concept of equality (Holli, 1997; Scott, 1988). The core issue is that of which equalities matter (Phillips, 1999), and what we mean by equality (Holli, 1997; Lorber, 2000). As Holli shows, in a grounded empirical analysis of equality politics in Scandinavia (1997), the definition and substantive content of equality are open to considerable debate and contestation. There is not an *a priori* given of what aspects of social life we intend to refer to when we speak of equality. In some circumstances, the goal of ‘equality’ might be construed as ‘equal pay’, in others as ‘equal treatment’, in others as ‘equal respect’. In order to be able to judge something to be equal or unequal we must agree on the standard against which we are judging. Equality politics presumes a prior agreement on the identification of the issue at stake.

The issue of which comparisons matter lies at the heart of debates on globalization. To what extent are frames of reference being shifted in a global direction? To what extent is the notion of the particular becoming simultaneously that of the global?

The Global and the Universal

The appeal to the global level is often presented as if it were an appeal to a timeless universal. This is an increasingly common feature of feminist (Peters and Wolper, 1995), environmental (Beck, 1992), development (UNDP, 1999) and labour movement politics (Valticos, 1969), as well as extending into the treatment of international war crimes and other issues. This appeal to a global level is especially occurring in the case of the appeal

to 'universal' human rights. A successful elision between the global and the universal is an important move in contemporary politics. The ability to claim access to a universal standard of justice has been used by an increasing number of political projects as a powerful form of legitimation.

The appeal to the notion of universal human rights has been a continuing strand in political life for centuries (Held, 1995; Paine, 1984), although subject to criticism, not only by communitarians, as discussed above, but also by socialists and feminists seeking radical transformations (Young, 2000). My argument here is that the appeal to universal human rights is newly re-invigorated by the development of global institutions and perspectives. The appeal to universal human rights depends not only upon a philosophy and commonly accepted rhetoric, but also upon a set of institutional practices which give it practical expression. This set of institutional practices is increasing with globalization. There are at least three elements here. First, increased global communications which shrink the distance in time and space between events, so that live news footage of a conflict can be beamed to millions around the world. This increases awareness of quite general publics about incidents beyond their own country. Second, increased global communications which facilitate interconnections between political activists, especially cheaper air travel, faster trains and the development of cheaper and more reliable phone, fax and email. These facilitate the exchange of ideas and practices between people located in different countries and regions of the world. Third, the development of global institutions, events and conferences has increased the number of spaces where international interactions, dialogues and networking between activists can take place. These include international conferences and agencies, the increased salience of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Fourth, the increased salience of the UN, as custodian of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, through its global conferences (such as Rio on the environment, Beijing on women), and UN agencies.

The elision of the 'universal' with the 'global' lies at the heart of this development. It is implied that if all the world agrees to something through open debating in forums of persons selected in a representative manner from each country then the Habermas-type conditions of procedure have been met, which in turn means that truth is approached as closely as is humanly possible. Simultaneously, there is an appeal to the liberal principle of universal individual human rights, as if this is above time-bound and space-bound calculations of interest. In these developing global fora, political activists devise and change those principles of justice understood as human rights. They successfully treat the global as if it is the same as the universal, the better to claim authority for their actions.

An example of such a move from the global to the universal can be found in the work of Amartya Sen. This influential economist and philosopher has constantly scoured philosophical literature for justifications of distributive justice whilst also being an economist with impeccable credentials (Sen, 1984, 1987, 1992, 1999). Sen (1999) has re-described the project of

development as one which increases freedom. This shifts the focus from a needs-based to a rights-based justification of this project and enables a claim to justice which is expressed in terms of universal human rights. By this move Sen has shifted the project from being ‘merely’ global, to one which is justified by ‘universal’ standards.

Sen’s philosophy has underpinned the attempt by the United Nations Development Project (UNDP, 1999) to insert values of distributive justice into the indicators of global progress to be used by national governments, the UN and other global economic bodies. The UNDP has created performance indicators of human development (which include education, literacy and longevity as well as income). By setting global standards it was hoped to influence the nature of national development projects, which already address a global frame of reference, not least because of their partial dependence for credit and capital on global financial bodies. This was a deliberate attempt to construct an alternative global standard to the narrowly focused performance indicator of economic growth used by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and many national governments. It was a self-conscious move to change the goals of national and global financial bodies by making appeals to improve human capacities and capabilities understood in terms of the broader demands of justice and need, as well as economic efficiency. It was an attempt to set global standards, in a context of developing global governance, in which access to credit by developing countries is affected by their willingness to conform to global standards.

There are many examples of political projects newly using universal human rights as the basis of their politics. In a second example below I will examine feminist politics in relation to violence against women.

Women’s Rights as Human Rights

Contemporary feminist politics is framed by the global, even as it is simultaneously deeply engaged with difference (Benhabib, 1999; Felski, 1997). Political activists constantly balance and re-balance priorities and practices in response to the changing tensions involved. Feminist political activists endeavour to reach beyond the particularism of any grouping with which they might appear to be identified. This occurs in two main ways. First, there is an increasing tendency to legitimate claims by reference to universal rights. This is articulated through the notion that women’s rights are human rights which are universal human rights. Second, there is the use of coalitions rather than democratic centralist forms of organization in order to deal constructively with issues of difference.

The claim to universal human rights has a long history in feminism and is now undergoing a resurgence. It was a key, though not sole, legitimating principle during suffrage struggles over the last hundred years (Banks, 1981; Jayawardena, 1986; Ramirez et al., 1997). It was present in claims to equal worth, equal pay and equal treatment at work in the reconstruction of the European Union in the 1980s and 1990s (European Commission, 1999; European Parliament, 1994; Pillinger, 1992), in Japan (Yoko et al., 1994)

and elsewhere around the world (Nelson and Chowdhury, 1994). This claim to universalism is often knowing, by which I mean that the protagonists know that the 'universal' is but a contingent social construct (Bunch, 1995). Indeed, much feminist activity is devoted to redefining and reconstructing what constitutes 'universal' human rights (Peters and Wolper, 1995; UNIFEM, 2000a, 2000c). This occurs in UN conferences, which attract a massive attendance of feminist activists from around the world, both North and South, who supplement and influence the official delegations (UNIFEM, 2000e).

In 1993 in a UN conference in Vienna, violence against women was constructed for the first time as a violation of women's human rights and thus of human rights (Bunch, 1995; UNIFEM, 2000d). This UN conference concluded with a statement that violence against women is a violation of human rights and thus that national governments must strengthen the response of their criminal justice systems in support of women. This is done as if this was an always already existing universal human right, even as many activists know that it was recently constructed through struggle. This involves a major reconceptualization of the issue of male violence against women. It involves a shift away from constructing men as the beneficiaries of this form of power, instead seeing such violence as a minority form of socially unacceptable conduct. Since this conduct is now held to violate women's human rights, which are newly considered human rights, it makes it an issue on which progressive men can stand as allies with women in a human rights struggle, rather than uncomfortably on the margins. This reconfiguration makes it harder to reject action against violence against women on the grounds that the analysis is extreme; rather, all humanity is considered to have an interest in the elimination of such violent conduct (Bunch, 1995; Davies, 1993; Heise, 1996; Peters and Wolper, 1995).

There is much exchange of information, ideas and practices about politics against violence against women around the world. This takes place not only at conferences, but through the Internet, letters, phone calls, books, journals, magazines and other publications (Counts et al., 1992; Heise, 1996; Keck and Sikkink, 1998). There is the use of modern technologies, as in the use of web sites and video-conferences (UNIFEM, 2000b, 2000d). There is effectively a global feminist civil society in existence. The discussion of difference is a constant feature of this politics. The policies and practices used in response are reflexively monitored and adapted to particular circumstances. The use of coalitions as a method of organizing across difference is now taken for granted. Such transnational feminist coalitions have worked hard to engage constructively with issues of difference within the overall project (Friedman, 1995; Mayer, 1995; Rao, 1995).

The movement against violence against women, in its aim to reduce and eliminate men's violent power over women, has always been a politics seeking equality rather than mere recognition. There has been a major shift in tactics involved in the adoption of a human rights discourse instead of the earlier more confrontational strategy which named men as the

oppressive ‘other’. Nevertheless, this is still a politics about power and inequality. While this has involved an attempt to get women’s voices recognized as legitimate on the global political stage, this has only been as a handmaiden to the politics of equality. It is a politics which is more actively seeking coalitions and alliances, which is itself made easier by the creative and innovative re-working of the discourse of universal human rights using global institutions.

By this example, I want to suggest that some of the polarities in philosophy, while ostensibly having analytic purchase, are far behind existing social and political practice. There is a universalist framing, but it is known to be contingent and constructed. Differences are treated seriously, but not essentialized. They are addressed through coalitions, rather than being for ever obstacles to action. Identities are as much constituted through actions as they are the basis of actions.

Conclusions

The alterity between liberalism and communitarianism has provided not a dead end, but a creative tension, in political thought, once it is recognized that both polar positions are untenable. The route through this philosophical dilemma is via sociological analysis. The concept of community is a poor and overly narrow operationalization of the social which is unable to articulate sufficiently the complexities of cross-cutting differences. Rather, we should invoke a wider range of sociological concepts of social divisions, accepting that they cross-cut in complex ways.

Some modern political actors have already found a way through the dilemmas of difference and the desire for a less particularistic conception of justice. This has been through the utilization of networks and coalitions, and the overt abandonment of the assumption that political projects are to be based on culturally cohesive communities. In particular, we need to abandon any notion that ethos and polis do or should map onto each other. The purity demanded by such a project is unachievable in the modern world.

The reframing of contemporary politics by globalization has given rise, not only to politics opposed to this change, but also to the creative and innovative adaptation and expansion of the notion of universal human rights. This new framing elides the distinction between the global and the universal as part of its legitimation strategy. The attempted reference group for these politics is that of a common humanity. This opens up a new round of political struggles in the construction of such rights, even as they are held up as timeless and universal (Walby, 2002).

The politics of equality is still vibrant in the modern world, in both the North and the South. While emergent political voices will seek recognition in political institutions and fora, this is usually merely in order to achieve their goals of redistribution of resources. The politics of recognition is but the handmaiden of the politics of redistribution.

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