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and the USA and Europe's Role**

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In those countries whose governments took the pandemic seriously from the very outset and immediately set up vaccination programs for their entire populations (besides China that list would include the front-runner Israel, but also Germany, Great Britain, and – a bit later – the United States), calls have become ever more urgent to begin the opening of economies and societies once the wave of infections clearly has begun to ebb. Yet the severity of the challenge will test the patience of these countries' people. True, in many of them the debate has already begun about what government and the health-care system could and must do to be better prepared for a possible next pandemic. But meanwhile the virus we already have has returned with a vengeance, albeit in a mutated form, even to successfully vaccinated societies like Israel and Britain. Furthermore, despite some halfhearted vaccine donations nearly all the countries of the Global South remain almost entirely or only minimally immunized. From there, the virus again could infect the rich countries at any time and in an unanticipated form. This is one of the rare cases in which the merciless selfishness of the rich world might come back to haunt it directly. So, the time has come for us to launch a serious, sober post-pandemic evaluation. This much is already clear: an across-the-board deglobalization cannot be the answer, because – as the pandemic itself has demonstrated in such a striking fashion – the harsh reality is that the world is already far too intertwined to be unraveled.

Some of our contributions address the status and outlook of the global order. The »West« – or what is left of it – needs to think very carefully about how it wishes to respond to the ineluctable rise of China as a world power. Should China be brought into existing institutions and thereby be given global responsibilities, as its size warrants, or should the West pursue a policy of positive containment? A new Cold War would be pointless, for China, unlike the Soviet Union in its heyday, is not engaged in the unfriendly export of its own political system, nor is it trying to dislodge the USA from the apex of the world's political system. Rather, China aspires to attain that same apex as an equal. Of course, much must be clarified and many things rectified in the specific elements of China's foreign policy. However, broad-gauged confrontation would not benefit anyone, nor would it attract any alliance partners in political Europe. This political wisdom has already turned Willy Brandt's détente policy into a winner for all countries.



Thomas Meyer

Thomas Meyer
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Jochen Steinhilber

Back to the Drawing Board

How globalization must change after the Coronavirus

For decades now »globalization« has been celebrated euphorically, harshly criticized, and even pronounced dead on several occasions: Especially in times of crisis, it is a popular projection screen upon which pundits sort out and define our possible futures. The air is filled with speculation that COVID-19 will spell the end of globalization, and this time once and for all. Admittedly, it is not easy to say so today, but that is not likely to happen. Still, right now its critical infrastructure, which includes everything from integrated markets to free trade to just-in-time production and complex supply chains, is facing some severe challenges. The latter, ranging from border closures to export bans and lockdowns, inevitably will produce some serious consequences. But how the post-pandemic new normal will look remains an open question. Some people are hoping that in the wake of the crisis the cards will be reshuffled, and that changes which didn't happen after the financial debacle finally will get underway: a democratic, highly multilateral, socially responsible, and ecologically sustainable reconstruction of the global economy that will promote the common good. Others tend to see global heavy weather moving in and therefore see little reason for optimism. As they interpret the fallout from COVID-19, the structural weaknesses of globalization will be exacerbated. Meanwhile, »country-first« strategies, reflex responses from the great powers, and authoritarian governance will prevent joint action and further deepen inequality.

At first glance, much can be said for the argument that it was not the pandemic, but rather the financial meltdown, that marked a real break with the past, and that we already passed the acme of globalization ten years ago. Since then, partly because of Chinese-American trade disputes, the share of global merchandise trade and of multinational firms in gross domestic product (GDP) as well as foreign direct investment have declined. There is also considerable support for the claim that COVID-19 will further reinforce five trends that have led to this phase of »slowbalization« (*The Economist*).

First: Within the recent past, questions about the resilience of supply chains already had begun to look more significant. As a result of the pandemic, it is more likely that the interconnectedness of the global economy, while it may not be reduced, will change. Governments will consider radically shortening supply chains, but only for a few strategic goods in the areas of medicine and raw materials. For the majority of companies, the emphasis will be on supply chain diversification.

Second: During the 90s' wave of globalization, the state fell into general disrepute. By contrast, in the last few years it clearly has experienced a renaissance, less as an active architect of the structural environment than as a front-line crisis manager, stabilizer, and preserver wherever markets fail or other crises have to be addressed on an ad hoc basis. Within just a single decade, states have been forced to intervene in an economic and social crisis twice and on a grand scale. In many countries,

one of the most powerful collective experiences of the crisis may turn out to be the insight that very few things are politically impossible. In many places hit by the pandemic the institutions of state have thought about (or remembered) how important it is to preserve and strengthen the common good and do so even if that means defying market interests, distributing resources according to socially responsible criteria, and discarding cherished economic dogmas. This may provide a further boost to discussions about the role of the state in shaping the (global) economy.

Third: Conversely, COVID-19 made it abundantly clear once again that there are challenges that nation-states cannot handle on their own. Yet pandemics, global warming, and global economic, financial, and developmental crises are not among them. For the majority of (poorer) countries, the degree of international cooperation will be the most important factor determining how well they weather the economic and social consequences of the crisis. The pandemic has exposed the anarchy in international relations, and even the most painstaking efforts of the old global governance structures will have trouble concealing what has happened. The wrangling between America and China over their influence in the World Health Organization, the paralysis of the Security Council concerning COVID-19, the pusillanimous response of the G-20 as compared to its reaction to the financial crisis, and the foot-dragging start of the global vaccination alliance are merely pandemic-related symptoms of a multilateralism that has been groaning under the weight of its obligations for a long time and whose goals and institutions increasingly are being called into question.

Fourth: Even in the global economy there has been a tendency for countries to think more in terms of spheres of influence. When the world was in turmoil, many people still considered the highly networked global economy to be a robust glue that would hold friends and foes together. But now participants in the global economy are taking a tougher stance. That is primarily because the USA, China, and even Russia are deploying their entire arsenal of economic policy tools – punitive tariffs, sanctions, raw materials controls, investments in infrastructure and credits – to make territorial gains in the struggle for political influence. The quarrel over Chinese mobile network provider Huawei offers a clear example of this. Likewise, immediate crisis management during the pandemic was and is influenced by geopolitical considerations.

Fifth: These trends have been accompanied by a slowdown in global growth. The IMF calls it the »new mediocre,« while American economist Larry Summers refers to it as »the secular stagnation«; and in China it is known as the »new normal.« These labels all describe a new economic ice age characterized by slow (or slower) growth rates, recessions, and meager returns on capital. Even in the least developed countries, during the last ten years growth rates have remained well below the 7 % recommended in the UN's goals for sustainable development. Whatever the reasons may be – demographic trends, greater inequality, a lack of pertinacity, less need for capital to boost innovation, or burgeoning sovereign debt – the pandemic has not improved conditions for growth. Developing countries, especially, will have to cope with an economic »long COVID.«

A damning indictment

These trends will not signal the end of globalization, but it is likely that in the years to come we will witness a more limited version of global integration than before. At the same time, social insecurity about the next phase of the global economy will continue to increase, because globalization as it played out over the last few decades was not the great leveler that it was touted to be, justly distributing prosperity and market opportunities across the world. Although many countries did make a lot of progress in development, such advances were offset by the emergence of extreme inequalities, principally within societies. What Oxfam calls the »virus of inequality« makes it harder to combat poverty; hampers the construction of neutral, functional institutions; undermines democracy; exacerbates the crisis-susceptibility of the global economy; and consolidates power and opportunity structures within societies. One thing is already clear after a year of the public health crisis: everybody is affected by it, but not every economy and society suffers under the same conditions, nor do all of them suffer in equally grim ways. The worry is that the negative dynamics of the pandemic reinforce those of globalization. This is the case because the outcomes of COVID-19 also are asymmetrical and affect the weakest most severely. Labor migrants at construction sites in Qatar or in the slaughterhouses of Iowa and Gütersloh, the informally employed, as well as women and households with low incomes often have only limited access to medical and other basic services and have been affected disproportionately by the pandemic. Moreover, from a global perspective ubiquitous lockdowns have had massive impacts on the situation of job-holders. According to statistics supplied by the International Labor Organization, the decline in the number of full-time jobs in 2020 by some 255 million was nearly four times higher than it was during the global financial crisis. Tourism, not to mention the micro-sized, small, and medium-sized businesses in which many at-risk groups work, have been especially hard hit. In addition, poorly paid and low-skilled jobs were disproportionately likely to disappear. Here, too, we face the risk of an uneven recovery. While conditions have improved in the job market for highly skilled workers, this has not been the case in other sectors. The American economist Nouriel Roubini sees signs of a K-shaped rebound in the industrialized countries, i.e., one that generates winners and losers and further deepens the rift between Wall Street (big companies, big banks, and big tech) and Main Street (workers, households, small businesses).

Throughout much of the Global South, the situation also has been aggravated by the fact that the resources that could be marshalled to respond to the crisis are distributed in highly unequal ways. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, average per capita expenditures for fiscal stimuli or replacement of lost income in the developed and threshold countries have totaled around \$US 1,400 since the outbreak of the crisis. In contrast, developing countries were able to raise only \$US 76 per capita, and the very least developed countries only \$US 18. Even today a number of countries are on the brink of a new debt crisis or have already fallen over the edge. Due to growing public health expenditures, declining revenue (especially because of the crash in raw materials prices), and mas-

sive capital outflows from developing and threshold countries, the situation in many nations will worsen dramatically in the months to come, just as their maneuvering room will diminish. To be sure, the absolutely accurate saying »no one is secure as long as all are not secure« as applied to health care and global economic recovery should not be left out of any public speech. Nevertheless, the world is threatening to split into two vaccination blocs: one in which everybody gets vaccinated and the economy again is running at full tilt, and a second (in which the majority of human-kind lives) where vaccines and medications are lacking and the virus continues to make physical and social recovery impossible. Some have forecast that global poverty could start increasing again for the first time in thirty years and force an additional half billion people into destitution.

Four projects

Hard times do not always produce great insights. In the aftermath of the financial crisis the old system celebrated a »strange triumph of discredited ideas« (Paul Krugman). To make sure that we do not simply refurbish old models and retain their potential to cause crises, we need to undertake four projects: (1) a global reconstruction effort, because in the coming years the majority of humanity will have to struggle with the social and economic consequences of COVID-19. Most countries will need support to do that. (2) As part and parcel of that rebuilding scheme, we should have a world-wide and adequately funded strategy of inoculation in the framework of the COVAX initiative, which should also include the temporary suspension of patent protections, as has been demanded by a broad alliance of countries; (3) Recovery programs that primarily address small businesses as well as the special situations of the informally employed, labor migrants, and women; and (4) Finally, investments in nutritional security, basic social protections, as well as access to public medical services are needed. These have been systematically dismantled in past years under the influence of international donors, yet they are the prerequisites for successful efforts to reduce poverty. But it will not be enough merely to resume what we were doing before. We must rebuild. Hence, the fourfold reconstruction project must be linked to a long-term scheme of transformation that – above all else – must connect social issues with the grand questions of ecological sustainability and take its cues from the goals of Agenda 2030 for sustainable development. Among other things, that project should focus on using trade agreements and European supply chain laws to make »good work« a reality around the world, speeding up the exit from fossil fuels, assuming more responsibility for climate policy via increased financing of climate-friendly measures, and – as a matter of principle – putting a stronger focus on public services such as water, energy, health care, and housing and on an economy geared to the common good. And it goes without saying that the rebuilding project should be prepared to defend and finance all of these steps. In numerous countries the »acute Keynesianism« applied during the financial crisis culminated in a socially unbalanced policy of austerity which sometimes triggered protests in many countries. According to estimates by the IMF, developing countries will need additional financial aid of \$US 2.5 billion to deal with the

COVID crisis. In order to assume our share of global burdens and avoid jeopardizing the social cohesion within societies, we will need a solidarity-minded financing project. Besides bringing global financial markets under greater control, it will include a global bankruptcy procedure for high-risk, highly indebted developing countries, unitary taxation of multinational corporations, support for the construction of efficient tax systems, a battle against illegitimate financial influences, and the closing-down of tax havens, as well as provision of development aid funds and climate financing. In the end, since we live in a mistrustful world, everything will depend on bolstering political trust within and between societies. One way to do that for the other three projects is to take to heart the mission statement of Agenda 2030: »Leave no one behind.« Without dismantling extreme inequality, it will be impossible to restore trust within societies. Moreover, trust can also be generated through active diplomacy that takes responsibility and looks for common visions, interests, and »islands of cooperation,« which weave together networks of trust and consistently reinforce multilateral institutions. Even after corona the insight still holds true: trust can be won most sustainably by stabilizing and building up effective international organizations.

Under the current circumstances, these are not modest goals. But the »business as usual« approach – one that simply updates the previous economic and political model and does not go beyond crisis management – is less and less tenable for solving problems. After corona we finally need to summon up the courage to undertake a fundamental change.



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A New Cold War between China and the USA and Europe's Role

Even before Donald Trump was elected president, John Mearsheimer, one of the most renowned American experts on international relations (IR), predicted in his book, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, that the conflict between China and the United States would dominate the 21st century.

China, he argued, aspires to be a world power and will rise to that status, whereas the declared policy of the United States is to remain the sole leading power and not tolerate rivals alongside it. Hence, conflict ineluctably will arise, and it will be extremely difficult to avoid military confrontation. Under Xi Jinping the rise of China has shown some new twists. A roadmap developed by the Party leadership in 2017 foresees, among other things, that China will be the world's largest economy by

2035 as well as the leader in ten high-tech fields. By 2050 all-round modernization should be complete, and China should be the equal of the United States in any and every field, including the military. To the USA this program seemed to be not merely a challenge to its claim to hegemony, but an outright declaration of war. While the outlines of this conflict began to show up even under Barack Obama, it emerged openly under Donald Trump. Initially kindled by the United States' longstanding trade deficit with China, it arced over into the field of technology and finally led to battle lines being drawn on nearly everything.

Early in 2021 the influential U.S. think tank, the Atlantic Council, issued an expansive strategy paper on how to contain China. Its title, »The Longer Telegram« alludes to a similar paper from 1946 that formulated a strategy for containing the Soviet Union. This latest plan outlining a future China strategy again confirms that China will be the biggest challenge for the USA and the democratic world in the 21st century. It suggests that the Chinese leadership could be convinced to accept the principle that cooperation within the context of the U.S.-led international order would be in China's interest too and would have much better prospects than creation of a second, Chinese-dominated order. The paper also lays down some »red lines« in respect to U.S. security that shouldn't be overstepped. These include the use of nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons against the USA or its allies, an attack against Taiwan or Japan, and any further expansion of Beijing's territorial advances in the South China Sea. In addition, the authors define areas of national security interest concerning which agreements might be reached, and, finally, they identify other areas in which strategic cooperation should take place. Many of the proposals contained in the report resemble, at least in principle, statements already issued by the new U.S. president, Joe Biden; thus, one may assume that it indicates the direction of a future U.S.-China policy. Nevertheless, because it allows for some leeway in the fleshing-out and weighting of the specific proposals, it remains an open question whether the future strategy will be more likely to result in a Cold War or in containment and cooperation.

After President Nixon's visit to China in 1972, the resumption of diplomatic relations between the two countries, and the adoption by the People's Republic of reform and opening policies after 1978, the West hoped to see internal reforms, economic collaboration, and the inclusion of China in schemes of international cooperation. Those changes, so the thinking went, would have the medium- or long-term effect of bringing about a rapprochement with the West and ultimately a transformation of China's political system. But with the rise to power of Xi Jinping – indeed, even before that – the West has had to soberly reevaluate its hopes. Not only has Xi initiated a return to the maxim that the »party runs everything«; he also has promoted a »new great power« policy tightly oriented to Chinese national interests.

Trump tried to stop this evolution by – among other things – setting punitive tariffs, restricting the activities of Chinese technology firms in the United States, and decreeing sanctions on China due to the internment of Muslim minorities in Xinjiang and the »security law« imposed on Hong Kong. Chinese scholars and students were indiscriminately suspected of being spies, relations with Taiwan were

expanded in a confrontational manner, and the Chinese consulate in Houston was closed, provoking a tit-for-tat closure of the U.S. consulate in Chengdu. The COVID-19 pandemic and its severity in the USA as well as the mutual finger-pointing associated with its spread have poisoned relations even more.

The critical internal debate within China

In China itself the hardline Chinese policy toward the USA has been criticized by many international relations experts. They warn against a further worsening of relations and oppose so-called »wolf warrior« diplomacy, i.e., an excessively confrontational and nationalistic posture toward the West. They plead for greater restraint in foreign policy and a more nuanced conceptualization and evaluation of the world so as to avoid any further damage to China's foreign policy. For example, Shi Yinong, International Relations Professor at Renmin University, declared that China must roll back its strategic expansion in the South China Sea and Taiwan Straits, while focusing more on its domestic development. The historian Ma Yong of the Academy of Social Sciences suggested that China would be better off integrating itself into the rest of the world and not advocating a form of exceptionalism. At the same time, he criticized young internet nationalists. Wang Jisi, President of the Institute for International and Strategic Studies at Beijing University, wrote that China and the USA should make sure they act correctly on three central points: (1) avoiding a military conflict at all costs; (2) continuing their cooperation on trade and finance; (3) maintaining social and cultural exchanges.

In an interview with a Chinese internet medium, Xiang Lanxin, a popular IR expert in China who now teaches at the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, expressed his opposition to the »wolf warrior« culture, and declared that the core interest of China's foreign relations should be cultural reconciliation and civilized communication. What worries him the most is the lack of trust between the rival superpowers. Without a foundation of trust, he added, it is difficult to sustain the mechanism of peace, which means that the likelihood of a conflict between China and the USA would be heightened. Given its current upward trend, the most important thing for China will be to cultivate an international image of tolerance.

In the last analysis, China is not interested in exacerbating conflict and has responded rather moderately to the behavior of the Trump regime. It has repeatedly called upon the U.S. government to return to the bargaining table.

Will policy toward China change under Biden?

The U.S.-China relationship is unlikely to change in any fundamental way under Biden. The political style will surely differ, but Democrats and Republicans agree that China must be contained. Moreover, Biden will seek to close ranks with American allies, whereas Trump usually made policy unilaterally. Judging by its preliminary statements on China policy, Washington now seems inclined to maintain a hard line in the areas of trade and technology, especially since the trade deficit remained as high under Trump and his policy of sanctions as it was near the end of the Obama era.

In a telephone call with Xi in February, Biden criticized unfair economic practices, the crackdown in Hong Kong, human rights violations in Xinjiang, and provocative behavior toward Taiwan. At the same time, he emphasized the necessity of cooperation in resolving global problems. For his part, Xi proposed that cooperation should be the focus of relations, suggesting that the two powers should meet each other halfway and make mutual concessions. Biden wants to deal with China from a position of strength. Nevertheless, there are signs that Biden's China policy will represent a departure on many points from the confrontational policy of his predecessor. In this vein, when speaking of the U.S. policy toward China he mentioned a combination of cooperation and »extreme competition«. John Kerry, a former Secretary of State selected by Biden to be the Special Envoy on Climate, declared that he was looking forward to cooperating with China. And Linda Thomas-Greenfield, recently named U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, said that the Department of State would be investigating whether the treatment of minorities in Xinjiang really constituted »genocide«.

What should be expected of President Biden? It would undoubtedly make sense for his administration to develop a long-range American strategy toward China and find a new format for carrying on a dialogue between the two countries. Biden and Xi should meet as soon as possible and set up high-level working groups charged with identifying both sides' »red lines« and national security interests, while also seeking modes of de-escalation and potential ways to solve problems. As far as the United States is concerned, the strategy paper mentioned above already takes note of those factors. Such dialogues should focus primarily on the red lines affecting security policy. Furthermore, they should cooperate in core areas, whether on the avoidance of military conflicts (as, for example, in the South China Sea), arms control, cyber-security, or even on global issues such as the future prevention of pandemics or limiting the consequences of climate change. Finally, the United States must realize that the Iran and North Korea problems cannot be solved without China.

China will continue to be self-absorbed. So far, its military forces have caused some regional problems, but they have not threatened the United States. China does indeed want to become the largest economic power by 2035, but even then, its per capita income will still be considerably less than that of the USA. Unlike the former USSR, China does not see itself as the exporter of a political system or ideology, nor does it have any provocative soft power at its disposal. Yet it is also more stable than the Soviet Union was. Its core challenges relate to the area of technology and its intention to be a technological leader in the next fifteen years. So, at first glance the challenge it poses seems to be less about military superiority than about which state is going to be the more innovative.

On the other hand, the United States is highly dependent on China. After Canada and Mexico, China is America's third largest, but also fastest growing, export market. U.S. firms annually earn over \$US 400 billion there, while Chinese firms earn only 140 billion in the USA. Moreover, the United States depends on China for certain raw materials such as rare earths and for upstream products, particularly in electronics, telecommunications, the automobile industry, and mechanical

engineering. At the same time, Beijing is the United States' biggest creditor (\$US 1.2 trillion). China, for its part, depends on technology imported from the USA.

Will the USA close ranks with the EU?

Biden has talked about closing ranks with the EU around a multilateral China policy, but so far, his China policy is not in evidence. Besides, the EU and the USA are economic competitors and have differing geostrategic interests. Finally, the EU – and especially Germany – is far more dependent on the Chinese market. In 2020, for the first time, China became the EU's most important trading partner. Although French President Macron recently pointed out that the EU and the USA do not have the same values, we must bear in mind that the EU is not a unified actor; the individual member-states have different interests. The Visegrád countries (Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia) and the 17+1 group made up of eastern and central European countries (including 12 EU members) carry on their own dialogues with China. Those countries benefit from cooperation with China in the form of investments, the delivery of Chinese-made vaccines, or the financing of infrastructure projects. In return they tone down any criticism of China and take varied positions on everything from economic cooperation, Chinese loans, participation in the »New Silk Road,« Hong Kong, or human rights issues. Such heterogeneity makes it difficult for the EU to speak with one voice. For that reason, too, China does not perceive the EU as a united, strong force and so prefers to deal with each individual EU country on a bilateral basis.

In a recent poll of EU citizens conducted by the European Council on Foreign Relations, a clear majority of the respondents assumed that China would continue its rise while the United States' decline would persist as well. Moreover, a majority of them thought that if a conflict broke out between the two countries, Europe should take a neutral stance (in Germany two-thirds held that view) and go its own way independently of the USA. This is a clear indication that Europeans are losing trust in Washington. Those poll results simultaneously express the desire for the EU to take a middle position between the two powers. Even the »decoupling from China« demanded by many politicians seems to overlook the interests of European firms. A social-scientific study done by the EU Chamber of Commerce and the Mercator Institute for China Studies recently revealed that European corporations are boosting their investment activity in China.

The European dilemma amounts to this: Europe is highly dependent on China economically, which makes an »uncoupling« impossible in the short or even middle term, yet it also wishes to restore the transatlantic alliance. Should it opt for a U.S.-led alliance, the EU would have to pay a high economic price if conflict with China reached a crisis stage, yet it would not have derived any benefits from the arrangement. The fact is that, today, threats and a policy of isolation will no longer compel China to rethink its positions.

In May of 2020, when speaking about how to deal with China, German Chancellor Merkel remarked that it is not a matter of trade volumes, but of acknowledging how determined China is to claim its place in the international system. At the

same time, she spoke out in favor of a policy built on »embracing rather than scolding.« When it comes to issues such as climate change, environmental protection, and global health, she said, we can and must make progress together with China and need to focus on our common concerns rather than on what divides us, a comment understood to be a response to the confrontation between China and the USA under President Trump. In Africa, too, Chancellor Merkel continued, we have to coordinate our engagement better and agree on standards for the sustainable development of that continent.

At the end of December, 2020, after years-long negotiations, the EU-China Investment Agreement finally was signed. It will allow equal market access for European companies, give them an equal right to seek public procurement contracts, provide effective protection of intellectual property, abolish the joint-venture requirement as well as compulsory technology transfer, and guarantee better legal protection for EU firms. Undoubtedly, the agreement marks a first step in addressing the problems affecting economic relations between the EU and China. Yet it remains to be seen whether it will actually be put into effect. This agreement was of particular importance to China, since it seemed to underscore the fact that the EU intends to act independently of the USA, at least in economic matters.

What happens next?

China's evolution into a world power is irreversible. Internationally, China poses a challenge to the global order and is enhancing its influence in international organizations. The bottom line is that we need an understanding between the USA and China on the shape of the emerging world order. To avoid a conflict with global repercussions, both sides need to return to the negotiating table and accept that they will have to lower their sights. Marginalization, isolation, or self-isolation would be the wrong strategies in that context. The EU should take a more active part in this global process of change without abandoning its own values and agenda. A united Europe might then play the role of mediator between the superpowers, especially since the EU maintains relatively good relations with China.

Yan Xuetong, the most prominent Chinese IR expert, explained in one of his books that, in order for a country to become a true world power, economic clout is not sufficient. Beijing, he concluded, must also take on global responsibilities, build confidence in the community of nations, and become a model of moral conduct. China is still in a transitional phase toward something new and is still finding its way into a »modernity with Chinese characteristics.« Certainly, China's future foreign policy should do its best to build trust and set a moral example. That undoubtedly would contribute enormously to the reduction of the potential for global conflict.



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Daniela De Ridder

This is not a Luxury Item:

Why a gender-conscious foreign policy is necessary

It's nearly impossible to exaggerate how much skill it took for the UN Envoy to Libya, Stephanie Williams, to persuade the rival camps in the civil war between Tripoli and Tobruk to accept a compromise. Why did she succeed in achieving what so many of her colleagues had failed to do until then, even after the Berlin Libya conference? When women are involved in peace negotiations, they frequently proceed more pragmatically, and they attain quicker, and especially more lasting, success.

A clear trend is starting to emerge. As soon as genuinely, utterly unsolvable problems crop up – as soon as we, as a society, are confronted with higher-order threats, stare crises in the eye, and watch as insecurity increases – women's ability to »roll with the punches« becomes especially valued. But at the same time contradictions start to reveal themselves in this context because in conflict situations, such as the one we are currently experiencing with the corona pandemic, issues concerning equal rights and opportunities get pushed to the back burner. Thus, some observers like to tell us that worries about gender equality should be set aside for another, sunnier day. Frequently, those engaged in decision-making processes articulate their discontent only through back channels; they have to look tough and imperturbable, but at the same time empathetic, good-humored, and resilient. And they have to display all those qualities even if they have just presented an intelligent argument that drew no response at all, only to watch as a male colleague repeats the same points a bit later to great acclaim.

Most of the time, women keep quiet about such experiences in processes of negotiation and decision-making. Even if they were to claim authorship of the relevant argument, that would accomplish little except to elicit the taunt that they aren't assertive enough. When we take a second look at already-attained goals of gender equality, we apparently relapse into old, familiar patterns and – because we are so insecure – revert to role-clichés that we believed had been consigned to the ash heap of history long ago. During the crisis, even political decision-making and public discourse have been dominated by subtle, gender-specific role-expectations. Worse still, measures to contain the pandemic often completely ignore feminine perspectives and needs. The cis-male still is taken to be the measure and norm; he takes his cues from familiar models, makes policy for his own kind, and thus reinforces the gender gap in antiquated ways.

Here, we must recognize that there is a structural problem, since the world order for centuries (if not millennia) has been oriented to the needs of influential white males. Decisions are made by men for men, whether in foreign or domestic policy, health care or finance policy, or even if the issues concern zones of conflict or crisis. For the most part, women play a marginal role and are hopelessly underrepresented. It is all too obvious that socialization takes hold of the consciousness of all human

beings from birth onward and puts its stamp on their relationships and beliefs, even shaping entire societies. What is forgotten in this context is that emancipatory human rights also include women's rights, which evidently must be fought for and won time after time.

According to data supplied by the United Nations, between 1992 and 2011 of all those taking part in peace negotiations, women constituted only 9 %, which a woman might see as almost a *quantité négligeable*. Women also continue to be underrepresented in the Foreign Service, which is problematic, and not only because it violates parity guidelines. While it is self-evident that women are not better people, without female representation and gender capabilities the interests and needs of over half the world's population would be almost entirely ignored.

Anyone, regardless of gender, who perceives this as the normal state of affairs in light of the new, refreshing feminist debates and actions – for example, the »We should all be feminists« T-shirts by Dior – can't help but demand more feminist advocacy on all political levels and in every sphere of activity, especially during the corona crisis. Thus, the decision by Foreign Minister Heiko Maas to put greater emphasis on the issues of women, peace, and security should be viewed in a positive light. Considering the subtle sexism in foreign policy committees and organizations, it is in any case a novelty to see a foreign minister endorsing so unreservedly the views held by his committed female colleagues in the foreign office concerning that cluster of issues. This is particularly true because these broader issues include »hot-button« topics such as sexualized wartime violence, the use of rape as a weapon of war and women's right of self-determination in its aftermath, and ways to discourage female circumcision.

A glance at current affairs, however, quickly reveals that the demands embedded in UN Resolution 1325 (»Women-Peace-Security«), passed 20 years ago, still need to be followed up by a series of practical decisions and deeds. Above all, German and European foreign policy must bring into sharper focus the consequences of the coronavirus crisis that still have not fully revealed themselves. The Third National Action Plan, issued by the German Federal Government in the Fall of 2020 could represent a further important step toward devising a more just foreign policy. All across the world basic rights are being curtailed and democracies put to a stiff test under cover of the pandemic.

Women and girls have been hit hardest by the fallout from the pandemic. Whether we are talking about harsher laws on the termination of pregnancies or domestic violence, most of these trends touch on the inviolability of and/or the right to the female body. Our neighbor, Poland, offers a sad example of this backsliding. It is true that the passage of the anti-abortion law there brought a lot of demonstrators of both genders into the streets. But for affected women, at least for the time being, there are few options left. They can try to terminate their pregnancies in illegal and often perilous ways, or else they can flee to a neighboring country. However, even the latter option has been curtailed due to travel bans, which have been important tools in the battle against the pandemic. Meanwhile, in Belarus protests led by women against the despot Alexander Lukashenko were brutally suppressed, moth-

ers were separated from their children and jailed, and then pilloried as terrorists and supposed corona deniers. If the regime were to take women seriously, it would have to resort more to a strategy of embrace rather than one of massive repression.

Nevertheless, a glance at our domestic situation shows that the corona era in Germany almost had to set off a concert of alarm bells, for we too are facing the threat of being shunted into a gender-political wasteland. The patriarchy sends greetings and wishes to disabuse everyone who thought that the battle for gender equality had already been won. Instead of considering women's needs and how to lighten their burdens of caregiving – now rendered twice as hard due to extra child-care and homeschooling, and the increasing incidence of domestic violence – many political measures intended to contain the virus appear downright gender-blind. But who would expect anything else when the decision-making bodies are clearly dominated by men?

If the tasks associated with caregiving are re-privatized, or if the effort to combine career and family becomes a private matter once again, women will be made invisible as political actors – but not only that. Their lack of resources will again be evident: financially, because they will have to give up careers; socially, because the home office with a little child in one's lap and a schoolkid learning her ABCs has an isolating effect; and temporally, because private responsibility for caregiving consumes so many hours and nights.

Our view of women's present-day reality is already distorted because women threaten to become the victims of silencing. And here the circle closes. Women risk being drawn into a downward spiral due to their lack of participation in political and social decision-making, economic dependency, and glaring lack of resources. Their voices will be reduced to a whisper. To counteract this dangerous drift and make the consequences of the coronavirus crisis backlash less severe, radical political decisions cannot be avoided.

As early as April, 2020, UN General Secretary António Guterres made clear in his declaration on the status of women in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic that the crisis should not be allowed to exacerbate inequalities. He appealed urgently to governments to put women and girls in the center of their efforts to rebuild after COVID-19 – wise advice that should not be allowed to remain without an echo.

Moreover, the Swedish model of a gender-sensitive foreign policy could serve as a model for us: According to a manual published in Sweden in 2018, whenever a conflict is being analyzed, the perspectives of both genders have to be taken into account, and every foreign-policy initiative must take its cues from the »three R's«: rights, representation, and resources. Do we desire an efficacious approach to increasing inequality? Consider this logic: if the rights and duties of women and men in education, work, and privacy are distributed equitably, that will automatically have positive effects on equal rights in parliaments and other representative bodies and even more on funding. In Sweden this is known as »feminist foreign policy.« By contrast, in German social democratic discourses we prefer to talk about the idea of a »gender-oriented foreign policy,« since that is less polarizing. Besides, it fits into the scheme of gender mainstreaming by taking account of the interests

of all genders, especially since men and boys, too, can be the victims of sexist violence and patriarchal discrimination. There is no question that the definition of the concept is also a compromise, since the term »feminism« in many segments of the population, regardless of gender, is either rejected or treated as an attack on one's own identity. Thus, the trick is to practice linguistic inclusion if you want to gain broad acceptance.

Inclusion is also the essence of our definition of a gender-oriented foreign policy. For that reason, it leaves a flat – if not outright repellent – aftertaste when we have to remind everyone time and again, as at the Second World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993, that human rights too are at stake in women's rights. A gender-oriented foreign policy aims to make that very equation self-evident so that no one need mention it explicitly anymore; instead, it will become an integrative and obvious component of all policy (including foreign policy) decisions. The goal is a society in which rights, resources, and power are distributed fairly. After all, inequality between the sexes, now aggravated by the corona pandemic, is one of the biggest obstacles in the way of peace and sustainable development, economic prosperity, and the reduction of poverty all over the world. Neither the struggle against hunger, nor the fight for more equitable modes of production or more sustainable consumer behavior can be kept distinct from gender-specific living conditions. By the same token, when striving to protect human dignity we cannot accept gender-specific handicaps or discrimination.

For two years I have worked with various women's organizations, the foreign office, and the SPD's parliamentary delegation to produce a motion for resolution for an »equality-oriented foreign policy.« That effort ultimately failed due to the conservatism of the CDU: a disappointing outcome! The motion was intended to be a sort of »birthday present« celebrating the 20-year anniversary of UN Resolution 1325. When everything seemed to have been finalized – and despite close cooperation with a few female CDU deputies – at the last minute a pro-life clause was smuggled into the text. While it provided for consultation with women who had been victims of sexualized violence, the crucial criterion was to be »the protection of unborn life.« German Social Democracy can never allow these self-styled »guardians of life« to have the final say. To do so would cross a red line and betray the interests of women; consequently, during the home stretch toward final approval, the entire project became a political hot potato.

To be sure, its demise will not stop us from continuing the struggle. So it will likely remain the task of vigilant defenders of women's rights to put a stop to the backsliding on questions of gender equality that has been accelerated by the pandemic. And it will be a good thing for them to know that many feminist parliamentary deputies and ministers are on their side!



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Civilizations in the New World Order

Since the end of the Cold War era and its ideological confrontations, the world has grown increasingly opaque in terms of political cultures but also less secure, albeit in a new way. Misunderstandings, a lack of direction, and the mistrust provoked by such confusions stoke prejudices, anxiety, and often aggressions. The conditions for international cooperation are receding, even though it has become ever more urgent in light of old and new challenges, as the global climate crisis and, most recently, the corona pandemic have brought home to us. In past decades the global pattern seemed clear enough: Identity and difference, membership and opposition (both culturally and politically) appeared unambiguous: The »free West« was here and the authoritarian communist camp was over there. Even most of the supposedly »non-aligned« countries could be assigned to one or the other of the ideological camps. The world order operated within a US-dominated system of international institutions, which guaranteed a minimal level of reliable rules and global cooperation. At a deeper level, the entire world seemed to be caught up in an all-encompassing process of modernization that was moving toward increasing convergence of the rival political and economic systems, but with a tilt toward the American-European model due either to the logic of technological and economic progress or to the political and cultural »superiority« of the West.

When the Soviet Union began its decline following the 1989 democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe, its retreat engendered three competing interpretations of the new world situation. First, in the mid-1990s Samuel Huntington advanced the thesis that the world would have to adjust to a new age of unresolvable cultural-political conflicts among the reawakening global civilizations. The deep fault lines between them, he argued, would make consensus, mutual recognition, and trust-building impossible. As a result, the world threatened to enter a new era of implacable cultural-religious conflict (a »clash of civilizations«). Conversely, Francis Fukuyama consoled the Western world with the upbeat message that the collapse of the Soviet system would usher in the »end of history,« since it was now clear, after centuries of experimentation and struggle, that history had nothing better in store for us than the political »system of the West« with its free elections, fundamental liberal rights, and free markets. In the future, the best thing for us to do would be to disseminate those accomplishments to the rest of the world.

But the opposite has happened instead. Now, the world is experiencing a persistent Western crisis of credibility coupled with the increasing willingness of non-Western civilizations to assert themselves. Consequently, a third interpretation offered by Israeli sociologist Shmuel N. Eisenstadt has been attracting attention and importance. That thesis, in embryonic form, actually has been circulating since the end of the colonial era in countries such as India, Egypt, and China, where it inspired intellectuals of the liberation movements. Eisenstadt points out that, while modernization may indeed affect the entire world, it need not do so in the same way everywhere. Rather, it displays many different faces depending on

the cultural characteristics prevailing in a given society. The logic of modernization as understood in the West turns out to be open to a wide diversity of competing interpretations, paths, and embodiments that – within certain limits – all can claim to be legitimate. Of course, all of them continue to be constrained by the shared framework of universal norms, even when those may be contested in concrete cases, because they are applied on the basis of the specific ethics, values, and practices that reflect their respective civilizational origins. Modernization never happens in a vacuum; it unfolds only within a historically given, socio-cultural reality which, in every society, includes what Hegel called ethical life. Yet the generative impulse of the culture of modernity makes itself felt in all of them: »the equal dignity of all human beings« together with all the political, cultural, and economic baggage that accompanies it, especially good and inclusive governance. The total negation of these modern cultural values by religious-political fundamentalism has proven to be a stubborn countercurrent or »evil twin« in processes of modernization everywhere in the world.

The varieties of capitalism offer illustrations of the different paths modernity can take. The logic of capitalism has been refracted through the diversity of cultural influences to produce, in each case, a broad palette of options for combining markets, regulations, state intervention, social actors, and limitations upon the rights of private property. Besides the liberal market economy of the type found in the United States, we also encounter the social, coordinated market economy in Europe and the Chinese market economy, regulated by the state and pervaded by social networks. For decades now, none of them has displayed much of a tendency to move toward a single standard model.

Unlike Huntington's clash of civilizations, Eisenstadt's model of multiple modernities does not presuppose strict cultural relativism. Instead, it starts from the premise that there is a common core among all variants of modernization determined by civilizational differences. Because there can no longer be objective or pre-established political relationships justified purely by tradition, the only source of legitimacy left is the »autonomous participation of the members of society in establishing the social and political order and/or the autonomous access of all members of society to those orders and their center (Eisenstadt). That is the normative power at work at the heart of all processes of modernization, whereas their institutional efflorescence everywhere can only spring from the soil of the ethical values, practices, and expectations within each civilization. In the West, for example, two very different models for achieving the basic rights characteristic of modernity are competing with each other: in one corner libertarian democracy with its self-regulated markets and the denial of basic social and economic rights, and in the other corner the European model with its coordinated and social market economy built on fundamental rights, both liberal and social. Thus, the West is internally already pluralistic and, while it may indeed be able to make its own models of government accessible to the rest of the world in a dialogue, it cannot wish to turn them into an obligation for everyone else.

Previous research has shown that a fruitful dialogue between civilizations based on this concept is possible, one that may give rise to binding goals and common

political projects. The European Union must play a key role in this endeavor. It is the only global actor with the cultural and political resources to manage in a politically constructive way the conflict between the USA and China, which derives from technological and geo-strategic rivalries and is increasingly obfuscated and exacerbated by civilizational misunderstandings. A dialogue of this kind also shows that it is both possible and reasonable to work through the differences between common universal norms and particularistic social and political values, rooted as these are in the ways that different civilizations understand the world. If that effort succeeds, it is easier to acquire an appropriate comprehension of those who are culturally »other« and to establish multilateral cooperation based on that meeting of the minds. The most recent example of this practice is the well-documented dialogue among civilizations at the Institute for European Studies in Macau.*

It was no accident that Willy Brandt developed his entire pioneering and ultimately highly successful peace policy with the countries of Eastern Europe based on acknowledgement that there are some overarching common interests in the world despite unbridgeable ideological antagonisms, and that those interests make trusting cooperation possible and necessary. Above all, he said, keeping the peace and preserving the natural environment were the prerequisites for all human civilization and for the development of the countries in the Global South, without which balanced and stable conditions in global relations would not be possible. If the major conflict powers should succeed in jointly mastering challenges through reliable cooperation, they then could seek their own respective paths to good governance in domestic matters, about which they would then report in global public forums under fair and equal conditions. One of the preconditions for such cooperation is that the equal dignity of all human beings be respected and that they be allowed to participate in political decisions that affect everyone. Can the major occidental powers, by word and deed, finally overcome Western-style arrogance (the feeling that one is superior to the rest of the world), respect the dignity and autonomy of other world civilizations, and be forthright about their own deficiencies and crises? If so, their newfound humility would be a welcome catalyst for good multilateral governance in this age of diverse civilizations. The point is to carry on an »inclusive« civilizational policy.

But a warning must be issued here concerning the potential misuse of the civilizational argument as a justification for the power-political goals pursued by particular power elites under the guise of a politics of civilizations. For the EU that warning includes recognition that a White, Christian continent, such as has been demanded occasionally by the European People's Party and supported now by the Hungarian and Polish governments, would mean the very opposite of a progressive strategy for European backing of multilateral cooperation in the world. Whereas the new multilateralism can only be pluralistic, nationalists prefer to look at international relations in terms of mutually exclusive civilizations. Thus, those relations would concentrate less on universalistic issues such as freedom, democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, and much more on anti-modernization »races« and a politics of identity that would grant a privileged status to White, Christian Europe.

Progressive forces in the West and especially in Europe must oppose pan-European, anti-Muslim, anti-Chinese, »occidentalists« and fundamentalist rhetoric and politics which mobilize nationalists in the USA and Europe in pursuit of their conception of international relations, which divides countries into friends and enemies.

All of the great challenges of our time require the strengthening of the global commons and in particular the upgrading of institutionalized peace-seeking and conflict prevention, the battle against climate change, the quest for financial stability and sustainable development, the elimination of extreme poverty, regulation of trade, and the campaign against infectious diseases, terrorism and crime. But there is another reason to build up the global commons: Europe needs multilateralism like a fish needs water. The EU is committed to developing a deepened and more ambitious form of multilateral cooperation at the regional level; therefore, it is deeply interested in three structural dimensions of global governance which one might define as dimensions of a post-hegemonic and »multi-layered multilateralism.« The latter would include democratic and voluntary regional cooperation between neighboring countries on every continent, the proliferation of multi-dimensional interregional ties between the regions, and constructive interactions among regionalism, interregionalism, and multilateral organizations at the global level. A list of the latter surely would include the UN, WTO, and WHO. Greater support for those bodies would enhance their efficiency and legitimacy.

As the foundations for a new multilateralism are being laid, global cultural diplomacy will acquire greater significance. Such diplomacy remains one of the most important sources of the EU's international soft power. The EU is the sole global actor with enough cultural resources to launch a new political-cultural dialogue among civilizations. It is thus the kind of diplomacy most likely to replace misunderstandings and conflicts, now increasing ominously, by respect and consensus. We can't simply »export« our values and lifestyle to other continents. What we can do is participate in open, credibly self-critical dialogues and promote democracy and human rights through the good example we set, thereby contributing to the civilizing of international relations. That was Willy Brandt's exemplary road to success and it remains relevant to this very day.

**On this point cf. the results of the multi-year »Macau dialogue of civilizations« in which leading scholars from most continents participated: Thomas Meyer/José Luís de Sales Marques/Mario Telò (eds.): (1) Multiple Modernities and Good Governance (2018); (2) Cultures, Populism and Nationalism: New challenges to multilateralism (2019); (3) Regionalism and Multilateralism: Politics, economics, culture (2020); (4) Towards a New Multilateralism: Cultural divergence and political convergence? (2021). All London and New York, Routledge.*



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»Identity Politics«: A delicate issue

What has rendered conflicts on the new battlefield of »identity politics« so extraordinarily fierce is their very opacity, which often leaves it unclear where one's friends and opponents are located. It is actually not even clear what the outlines of the questions are that have to be asked first. The mood surrounding the entire linguistic field of identity politics by now has gotten overheated. So it may happen that even the tiniest offhand comment, clumsy choice of words, or sheer unawareness of the latest verdicts issued by the »woke« avant-garde of rule-setters may have really serious consequences. As a result, the already existing pseudo-conflicts naturally just get aggravated rather than being illuminated. Among other things, this confusion lately has led to the charge that social democracy, at least in some of the most important countries such as the USA, Great Britain, and Germany, has been forced onto the political defensive, having allowed itself to be distracted from its historic battleground of sober social class politics by the mesmerizing spectacle of identity politics. The debates on this point so far have not produced much clarity.

So, let's recall, first, that the notion of »identity politics« first appeared on the European scene in the 1990s with sharply critical implications, at least for the left. At that time, everyone was attempting to understand and categorize the unexpected revival of ethno-nationalist strategies designed to divide populations along cultural and political lines. Although we supposedly had reached the end of the »age of ideologies,« these enmities began flaring up again, especially in many parts of Eastern Europe. This new conflict-laden situation reached a low point during the bloody »ethnic-cleansing policies« in the several successor states of disintegrating, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-religious Yugoslavia. To left-wing intellectuals, scholars, and politicians, this ethno-nationalist brand of identity politics seemed like the rebirth of the extremist nationalism – or in some cases even the fascism – of the pre-war era. This kind of thinking and action exhibited extensive structural similarities with the kind of political-religious fundamentalism (and not just of Islamist provenance) that was also ascendant around the same time. Like ethno-nationalism, fundamentalism was determined to purify its self-defined, presumably untainted religious identity, turning it into an incontestable claim of legitimacy for its own political hegemony and a justification for suppressing anyone who thought differently. At the time, both of these ideological and political tendencies appeared to be contradictory epiphenomena – internal »dialectical« countercurrents – flowing against the great wave of globalization that was just then gaining power and significance all over the world. Critics from the democratic left subjected both to a withering critique, quite properly assigning them a negative valence as variants of a new type of identity politics.

Here, we have one of the sources of the new-found prominence of the notion of identity in leftist discourse, although it originated on the far right. There could have been no doubt, that this kind of exclusionary and hegemonic claim – based as it was on identity – blatantly contradicted everything that had always defined left-

wing thought: universalism, human dignity, pluralism, democracy, and fundamental rights. But around the same time a second, very different source of the »identity politics« current began to flow into European debates. This happened in two surges. Up until the late 1970s, it had not occurred to anyone to call the centuries-long struggle of African-Americans a matter of »identity politics.« But in 1977 a Black lesbian group of activists in the USA published a manifesto (*The Combahee River Collective Statement*) that brought the concept to prominence by the end of the decade. Before long, it was being applied to the efforts of all sexual identity groups as well as, eventually, to the politics of equality carried on by African-Americans and all the other ethnic minorities. Those swept up in such movements began to prefer the self-conscious expression »people of color« to the term »race,« which to them had carried a somewhat negative flavor. The goal that united all of these groups was to attain equal social and political recognition of their rights and lifeways. Identity politics did not begin to take on its highly critical connotation for »leftist« (i.e., inclusive and egalitarian) usage under the influence of this second source until the American intellectual Mark Lilla pilloried it in his influential book, *The Once and Future Liberal: After Identity Politics*, for causing the decline of the democratic left. The latter, he claimed, had lost sight of its universalistic goal – a society with equal legal and social rights for all – due to its overly ostentatious and overenthusiastic identification with projects and groups committed to identity politics. The left's traditional voter-base among the working class could no longer recognize itself in this new image. Thus, he continued, it is understandable that social democracy's appeal to its once-loyal voters would be on the wane, a problem that will continue until it renounces its fixation on identity politics.

Political circumstances in the USA certainly differ from those in this country, but not completely. That is the reason why discussions about the issue have been kindled in Germany and other European countries, as evidenced by the essays in this volume. To clarify the unresolved issues more precisely and gain a rational perspective on what actions might be most promising for social democracy, we must first address three questions.

First: Do the positions that today count as identity politics contradict the self-image of the democratic left?

Second: What are the main differences between left-wing and right-wing identity politics in respect to the basic values of democracy?

Third: Is it really true – whether for the Federal Republic or Europe – that the traditional social democratic »class politics« concerned with redistribution and democratization for all has been refracted into a palette of separate identity policies for different groups?

Left and right

As soon as identity politics starts pursuing a strategy that positions particular, self-defined identities as implicit claims to legitimate hegemony over others in cultural and political matters, it has become essentially exclusivist and exclusionary regardless of the substantive foundations on which it rests: whether these revolve around

ethnicity, religious belief, geography or sexual orientation. In the extreme case, which undoubtedly has arisen more often in recent years, such a position can be pushed even further when it is claimed that nobody has a right to judge the specific legitimization and demands of the relevant identity group except its own adherents. This is a perfect example of circular self-immunization, which inevitably culminates in isolation and sectarianism. After all, social diagnoses and the political demands based on them eventually have to be justified when presented in the political arena. But when a community of citizens enjoying equal rights is denied the opportunity to examine and judge those demands, their advocates clearly will have abandoned the democratic playing-field altogether, regardless of how justified their own claims may have been. Of course, the universalistic principle of democracy implies that we not only respect but actively protect the diversity of beliefs, convictions, idiosyncrasies, perceptions, modes of experience, and interests of the citizenry. That is what guarantees everyone's freedom as a member of society. On the other hand, the equality of citizens in the political sphere rests on the assumption that, in the processes through which they reach common decisions intended to be binding on and therefore accepted as valid by everyone, only those arguments that in principle can be understood and judged by everyone can lay claim to such validity. Any form of identity politics that sees itself as democratic and leftist must take that into account. The idea that only Blacks or, as the case may be, diverse, recently more conspicuous sexual identity groups, should be allowed to debate and decide what rights they should have amounts to a form of fundamentalism in identity politics. That position, like the frivolous put-down »old White males,« should be ignored altogether when it's possible to do so since it is at times even anti-democratic and misanthropic. Positions of that kind do not square with the ones supported by the democratic left. And, what is even more concerning, they unintentionally call into question the demands of the affected groups for equal recognition, even though the latter are quite justified on substantive grounds.

An ambiguous notion

In light of the most recent trends, »identity politics« seems like too sweeping a concept. Whereas right-wing identity politics – as opposed to the identity itself – is an inherently exclusionary project as demonstrated by the alt-right's populist dreams, any consistent version of identity politics on the democratic left must necessarily aim at inclusion. Those who had previously been denied the rights, resources, and recognition of their society, i.e., the excluded, now are to be included. In this respect identity politics on the left is always a universalistic project, since it is about equality for all. But we should not rule out the possibility that properly calibrated and temporary measures of »positive discrimination« could be taken as a way to attain the goal of equality, assuming that they can be implemented without violating the basic rights of anyone else. To be sure, there is a definite risk here: that in areas distinct from those pertaining to social equality pure and simple, positive discrimination may encourage tendencies toward quasi-permanent social separation among the identity groups involved. In this context, the Indian constitution of 1948 may pro-

vide an instructive case study. In its appendix it contains a list of more than 1,000 »scheduled« (i.e., lower) castes and »backward« classes. Their members were to have a claim on a specific percentage share of university admissions and jobs in the civil service. But in practice this scheme, rather than eliminating castes, has tended to reinforce feelings of caste membership and intensify inequality within castes as their members jostled for those always-scarce reserved slots.

As noted above, Mark Lilla argues that the left has forgotten the class question and lately has been preoccupied almost exclusively with the demands and outcomes of identity politics, symbolically encapsulated in the slogan »marriage for all.« Although his critique has risen to prominence both in the United States and in Europe within a fairly short time, it exaggerates the situation, at least as far as the Federal Republic of Germany is concerned. In this country, one actually might have noticed a certain asymmetry between the Social Democrats' jubilation over marriage for all and the pain caused by their failure to enact a really effective policy of equality, despite many steps in the right direction. Of course, all this can be corrected, both in substance and in public communications. But what skews this picture even more are society-wide debates, usually hyped by the media, over »hot button« issues like the increasing differentiation of gender ascriptions and their implications for the availability of public toilets. In fact, what would help most in such cases is to gauge more accurately the severity of the problems and whether they merit all the public attention lavished on them. There need not be any contradiction between the universalism of social democracy's fundamental values and a consistent leftist identity politics.



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Thomas Meyer, Susan Neiman

Let's Respect Differences While Preserving what we share

The debate over identity politics in the United States

Thomas Meyer interviews Susan Neiman

NG|FH: The recent discussion of identity politics is essentially an import from the USA, that is, from groups that raise claims based on the politics of identity. Mark Lilla's *The Shipwrecked Mind: On Political Reaction*, did much to trigger this discussion. He argues that the left, by concentrating so much on identity politics, essentially has gotten what it deserved: electoral debacles.

Meanwhile, this discussion has been kindled here as well. Identity politics is usually regarded as a code word for the decline of the left. At this point I would like to ask you if you could give us a brief report about what has been happening just recently in the USA? Does the discussion raise a real point or is it more or less a figment of the imagination of a few intellectuals?

Susan Neiman: Unfortunately, it is not a figment of anyone's imagination. I agree with Lilla's book to a certain extent. One problem is that he comes from the right originally and ignores quite a few things. But he is addressing a real problem. As a philosopher I am convinced that this problem has a lot to do with the dissemination of the theories of Michel Foucault. As a historian, he was an interesting figure and introduced many topics into the discussion that mainstream historical research had not considered. But philosophically he was a disaster. Foucault is always very vague, and if you read him too often and too uncritically, you get the impression that there are no more values and no more morality left, that power alone is the basis of everything. And when American students today read a philosophical work without explicitly studying philosophy, then it's usually Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*.

That Foucauldian mindset is extremely widespread. At bottom – and this is awful, because Foucault is considered a person of the left – there are many similarities between him and Carl Schmitt, who commented that »whoever invokes humanity wishes to deceive.« That is, morality and politics have nothing to do with each other and the fundamental political categories are friend and foe. Incidentally, Carl Schmitt was also read quite a bit in the 1980s and 1990s in America.

NG|FH: But what do you think of the charge that the Democratic Party, the democratic left, democratic socialists in the USA, have forgotten the important issues in the last few decades and are now only doing identity politics? Is that a fiction or is there something to it?

Neiman: There is something to it, but it is not entirely correct. For example, what I find really sad is that Black Lives Matter was a universalistic movement. More Whites than Blacks were involved in it. It really was a matter of outrage at what kept happening despite all of the protests: namely, that unarmed Black people were being shot by the police, even at night in their own beds. The movement cut across the entire society and was very energizing. Even White policemen and -women took a knee right in the street. Many Democrats in Congress also took part. They knelt for the span of time during which George Floyd was trying to breathe: 8 minutes and 46 seconds (a number now revised upward).

What happened after that is really hard to understand. It did actually begin universalistically.

NG|FH: Is there an identity politics that matches that position?

Neiman: That's a good question to which the answer actually would have to be »no,« although in the last few months Black Lives Matter has been seen by both the right and the left as practicing a form of identity politics. One of my big heroes is Paul Robeson, the American actor, singer, civil rights activist, and socialist, who was also a good friend of Albert Einstein. For great minds like him it was self-evident that one would be interested in other cultures, histories, and languages and would

learn them as far as possible, so one also could appreciate those other cultures. But the things we have in common, that we are born and die, that we are born weak and thus grow up in families, that families don't live alone and that therefore societies exist, etc. – these things are after all more fundamental than the differences that divide us. And it is absolutely possible to esteem these differences without losing the things we have in common.

Unfortunately, right now there are not enough voices, even among leftists, saying anything about this.

NG|FH: Because there are also a lot of leftists who are active and involved in various areas of identity politics, I am wondering whether we have to distinguish among different kinds of identity politics? That is, an inclusive identity politics, e.g., a feminist or African American sort that would reintegrate into that common and universal sphere those people who had been excluded from aspects of life that should be universal and shared. But in addition to that might there also be an exclusive, e.g., an ethnic version in which human beings want to keep their own turf for themselves. Does that play any role in the USA?

Neiman: That's complicated. For example, Robeson took up the cause of striking miners in Wales and of republican troops in Spain. After coming to Princeton, Einstein sided with the most radical black opponents of racism like Robeson and W.E.B. Dubois. It was a matter of course for old leftists to practice mutual solidarity.

I grew up in the South during the era of racial segregation, and my mother got involved in the civil rights movement. At that time no one doubted that the struggle was about human rights rather than identity politics. That is true even today. I was happy to see that, in my home town of Atlanta, Jon Ossoff, a Jew, and Raphael Warnock, a Black, explicitly joined forces and consciously took their cue from the history of solidarity between Black and Jewish people during the civil rights movement. So there definitely are corners of the world where people are trying to revive what you call »inclusive identity politics.«

NG|FH: Should that still be called identity politics at all, or should we refer to it as a universalistic politics of equality instead?

Neiman: Maybe too little attention was paid to that in the 1960s, but more recently people have begun to esteem different cultures more explicitly. Today, we celebrate what is called diversity, and that is a good thing. But, as I mentioned before, my heart is still with Einstein, Robeson, Martin Luther King, and my rabbi of those days in Atlanta, whose names came up again and again during those extremely important Senate elections in Georgia. All of them were universalists, and that was partly because they were able to embrace cultural and historical diversity.

NG|FH: So would you consider the concept of identity politics to be superfluous and misleading? Would you endorse the motto: We are going to stick with good old-fashioned universalism and make sure that all people, no matter what their cultural origins or gender may be, get included?

Neiman: What brought identity politics into the discussion in the first place – and Lilla is wrong on this point – was that in earlier periods universalism didn't pay enough attention to other, non-European cultures or to women. The Enlightenment

is always criticized for being all about white males who wanted to spread their own interests and culture around the world. But that's not true at all.

After all, it was those Enlightenment thinkers who brought the critique of euro-centrism to the world's attention. They were the ones who said and wrote – and this began with Montesquieu – that we should learn something from all human beings, from the Persians and Chinese as well as the Africans. And they used other cultures to criticize Europe. That is well-established. Post-colonial theory seems to have missed that entirely. And many people describe Kant as a colonialist, even though he penned a radical critique of colonialism. In his book *Perpetual Peace*, he congratulated the Chinese and Japanese for refusing to allow Europeans in.

NG|FH: If I understand you rightly, the main point is that universalism is valid, and in particular the Enlightenment version of it. That is the goal that connects us. But that doesn't mean we negate the cultural identities of others; instead, we include them in the sphere of what we have in common.

Neiman: Absolutely.

NG|FH: Could tensions arise here, perhaps because somebody says: »My cultural identity or my gender identity keeps me from being included in what you have in mind here as the European Enlightenment?«

Neiman: I'll give you two answers to that. For one thing, I am a woman, and if I refuse to engage with all the authors who have written stupid things about women at one time or another, my life would be pretty boring. I can overlook that. Second – and this is a point that Lilla failed to see and that is highly problematic: The dominant identity politics is White identity politics. You could see that with Trump, and you can see it with the AfD and many right-wing nationalist politicians. And there is a problem here. In the USA there are some very good theoretical works under the rubric of *Critical Whiteness Studies* which emphasize that we don't look at »White« as an ethnic group, and yet it is usually Whites, of all people, who foreground their identity, but they do so unconsciously.

NG|FH: What sorts of policies do you recommend to the American left, to democratic socialists? What kinds of policies could they adopt that would be better than the ones they have now, but also have some chance of gaining support in the USA?

Neiman: Here's an example from practical politics: In 2020 the Democratic Socialists of America had invited Adolph Reed, a very good Black political scientist. He is a major critic of identity politics and says that we all have forgotten about the issue of class. They then canceled his invitation because they didn't think he was going to talk enough about the race issue. How can you do something like that?

This is my suggestion, but I don't know whether it has any chance at all of being implemented. We have to go back to a universalistic discourse while simultaneously recognizing all differences. That is hard, when you consider that there is a lot of pent-up rage in the USA.

NG|FH: Rage?

Neiman: The level of rage has risen incredibly. I am not talking just about the well-known militias that support Trump. Nor am I talking about the poor people who have to hold two or three jobs at the same time so as not to end up homeless.

There are tens of millions of them. I am also talking about the middle class. You probably know that we don't have a social welfare state in the USA, but even you may not know how bad things really are.

People here know that we don't have universal health insurance, because they have been paying attention to that debate. But when the pandemic hit, I had to tell the Europeans that we don't have any right to medical leave from our jobs. Of course, that is self-destructive in terms of health, but also economically. When I tell Americans about the European notion of guaranteed medical leave, they think I am talking about heaven. In America, whether you are given days off for illness – or how many – depends on the whim of the individual employer. You get a certain number of days, five to ten, when you are allowed to be sick. When they are all used up, that is your tough luck.

Americans don't know what they don't have, but for many of them life is absurdly difficult, even for the middle class. Here is a small example: My brother and his wife belong to the middle class. They have two children, a good income, and a nice house. But they have to pay enormous sums to put their kids through college. When the children were still little, both parents had to spend a great deal of their time as chauffeurs, because there was no local public transportation available at all. And that is true of most towns in America.

So the millions of poor people, but not only they, are under pressures that they don't notice, because they don't know that things can be different. Even the middle class has a hard time.

NG|FH: And when I hear all this, I ask myself why reforms that might improve these conditions have no chance of finding support among the majority. Then I read the book *Strangers in Their Own Land* by Arlie Russel Hochschild. Even when people are having a really, really tough time, some of them just say: «We are Americans, we're cowboys, we'll get through this. After all, we are individualists and we don't want to take anything from the state.» And then the others say: »We are Christians. We want to lead a nice Christian life to the end so that we will be rewarded. And God would not be pleased if we did these communist things here.«

So, are there sentiments that can be stirred up again and again and kept alive which then ensure that when proposals like those are aired, the media and the Republican Party will say: »This is all communism. If we introduce things like that here, then you will lose your freedom and your character as Americans?«

Neiman: The longer I think about it, the more I'm inclined to believe that it's worse now than it was in the Fifties. Back then, most people at least knew a few socialists or communists. Today, that is no longer the case; nevertheless, people use the charge of socialism or communism as though it were equivalent to evil itself.

NG|FH: Evidently with great success in elections.

Neiman: I think that's the reason why Bernie Sanders lost the primary elections. Before the election in South Carolina, somebody found an interview from the 70s in which he had praised the Cuban health care system. And by the way, he also could have praised the Cuban educational system, but he didn't do that. And so right away people said: »See, he will bring in communism here.« In my view he said the right

thing: »I condemn all authoritarian governments, whether in Cuba, Saudi Arabia, or China, but the Cubans do have a good health care system.«

NG|FH: But in saying that can he break through this wall?

Neiman: That's the point! But there is a bit of hope. Among young people under 35, socialism is not a dirty word any longer; capitalism is the dirty word. They have not attained power yet, but one sees it in the Georgia elections. The unspeakable Kelly Loeffler, the Republican ex-Senator who even campaigned together with an ex-Ku Klux Klan leader, lost to Raphael Warnock, the successor to Martin Luther King. She attacked him because the church in which he once served as an assistant long ago invited Fidel Castro to give a speech when he was at the United Nations. The point of her charge – seriously! – was to prove that Warnock, too, was a communist.

NG|FH: is there a chance to break through this wall in the foreseeable future, or do we have to conclude that things in the American public sphere cannot be revised given the media system and the existing mentalities there, and that the Americans will continue voting against their own interests?

Neiman: In the meantime, I have become more hopeful, because I see how much things have changed from one generation to the next and that we have good young politicians like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. But the fact that 74 million people voted for Trump concerns me a lot, just as it does many other Americans. The only reason we didn't have a coup d'état is that Trump insulted the military for so long, that even they no longer backed him.

NG|FH: Can we expect anything better from Joe Biden?

Neiman: I know many young people who actually did not want to vote, including even one of my own children, because they simply found Biden to be far too mediocre. And he wasn't my candidate either, but then – my God! – a question of whether we will have fascism or not.

And I believe Biden will be able to stop the downward slide toward truly fascist methods, at least for the time being. Since he has a majority in the Senate, he will be able to accomplish some things. And he has made an amazingly good start. Let's hope he succeeds.



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Detlef Horster

John Rawls and the Quest for Justice

If only a single spark had flown in a slightly different direction, the pioneering work *A Theory of Justice*, published in 1971 and ever since then a focal point of discussions in moral philosophy, never would have seen the light of day. Its author, John Rawls, was spending the academic year of 1969–1970 at Stanford University in order finally to complete the book on which he had been laboring for 20 years. One night a fire broke out at his institute. Rawls had left the final version of the manuscript on his desk there. Fortunately, his office was largely spared destruction by the flames, having suffered some damage only from firefighters' efforts to extinguish them. Thus, although the manuscript was thoroughly soaked, it remained pretty much legible.

The issue of justice within the state was raised with increasing urgency in the 19th century at a time when industrial capitalism was ascendent. The obvious consequences of the ever-widening gap between rich and poor moved the topic of distributive justice, especially, onto the front burner. To be sure, it still was generally believed that the laws of the market would be able to satisfy human needs to a far greater extent than any other conceivable order; nevertheless, the unequal distribution of goods was recognized and depicted as an unintended effect of that system that could be remedied or at least mitigated by targeted measures. In the 19th century this problem was known and treated under the rubric of »the social question.« In practical terms, discussion of the social question was then associated with the name of Adolf Kolping. In the 20th century it preoccupied a broad spectrum of groups active in practical politics, ranging from social democrats to Christian organizations. But it also stimulated theoretical debates on how the unjust consequences of the free market could be regulated, in which the writings of Walter Eucken, Wilhelm Röpke, and Alfred Müller-Armack figured prominently. The latter influenced the scheme of a »social market economy« developed by the Federal Republic of Germany's first federal economics minister and later chancellor, Ludwig Erhard. The aforementioned theoreticians agreed that a just distribution could compensate for unmerited disadvantages. But philosophy too took up the question of distributive justice. On this issue no philosophical work has had broader repercussions than John Rawls' *Theory of Justice*.

Rawls was born 100 years ago on February 21, 1921, in Baltimore, Maryland. There he was well positioned to observe injustice from childhood on, in the form of racial discrimination. Even during his stint as a member of the armed forces from 1943–45 he wrestled with the question of how justice might be achieved on a worldwide scale and how wars might be prevented. To achieve justice for all human beings, there would have to be some generally acknowledged starting point – one that nobody anywhere in the world could possibly doubt – from which concrete principles could be derived. So, where does John Rawls begin to develop such a starting-point in *A Theory of Justice*?

He first postulates that all individuals are intent upon maximizing their own utility. Hence, Rawls makes the following assumption: »Thus we are to imagine that

those who engage in social cooperation choose together, in one joint act, the principles which are to assign basic rights and duties and to determine the division of social benefits. Men are to decide in advance how they are to regulate their claims against one another and what is to be the foundational charter of their society. Just as each person must decide by rational reflection what constitutes his good, that is, the system of ends which it is rational for him to pursue, so a group of persons must decide once and for all what is to count among them as just and unjust. The choice which rational men would make in this hypothetical situation of equal liberty ... determines the principles of justice.« (§ 3). According to Rawls, people are not permitted to have any knowledge of the position they will occupy in society prior to deciding what is to count as just. Rawls calls this theoretical condition the »veil of ignorance« (§ 24). Thus, individuals are not allowed to know anything about the personal or social situations they will enjoy in the real, empirical society, for If they did know that, as utility-maximizers they would demand advantages for themselves or the group to which they belong. Thus, human selfishness figured into Rawls' calculations. The ignorance principle also must apply to others; otherwise, people would demand advantages or handicaps for certain groups, depending on their emotional disposition toward them. In short, perfect justice is only achievable if one assumes complete ignorance. This is the only way in which the articulation of the concept of justice can be exempted from self-interested calculation. This initial situation is the renowned »original position« so closely associated with Rawls, in which people don't know what their eventual social position will be and therefore can reach neutral decisions about how they someday will settle their claims against one another.

The first of the two principles of justice that would be adopted in the fictitious original position pertains to liberty: »Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.« The second principle pertains to equality: »Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle, and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity« (§ 46). Rawls argues that equality must be unconditional when it comes to the rights that have been won through political struggles. By contrast, under certain circumstances unequal economic treatment may be permissible. This is the case if and when the less advantaged also derive benefits from economic inequalities. Keeping in mind the theoreticians of the social market economy cited earlier, one could call the latter point the »social welfare state« principle. Incidentally, Ernst Tugendhat has argued in a similar way, pointing out that »asymmetrical distribution is possible, but it must be justified. If that is not the case, then the default position is for symmetrical distribution, which in turn does not require any further justification.« Tugendhat provides an example that might make Rawls' second principle of justice, the difference principle, appear plausible: »For example, because they bear the burden of pregnancy, etc., women deserve additional rights as compensation, for instance in the labor market. Men can readily understand this, so it functions as a justification for everyone.«

For Rawls, social conditions are not God-given facts; they can be changed. And the two principles of justice must be the criteria for determining how such changes are to be made. Thus, Rawls has found what he wanted to find in his *Theory of Justice*: an initial situation for every moral, political, or other decision supposed to be just to which nobody would object. But there has been no lack of criticism leveled against this conception. One of the most prominent critics has been Jürgen Habermas who takes aim at Rawls' stated intention of developing an incontrovertible principle in order »to avoid having to depend on controversial points.« Near the beginning of his *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls wrote that »a group of persons [must] decide once and for all what is to count among them as just and unjust (§ 3).« Their decision would then constitute an unshakeable basis for all future arrangements. That must have annoyed Habermas, who holds the view that all moral and legal principles should have to be made accessible to public discourse so they can be examined. From that vantage-point, it is certainly possible that a previous consensus might be undone and a new agreement reached. That holds true for the originally recognized principles of justice which, according to Habermas, cannot claim eternal validity. Even Rawls' principles of justice could be called into question in a public discourse, an argument that Rawls obviously would contest, as we have already seen. According to Habermas, the participants in a political discourse themselves would have to find such a common basis. Against that point Rawls objects that Habermasian procedural rules of discourse would be just as unshakeable as his own principles of justice.

Rawls took his critics seriously until the end of his life and was willing to debate them, as we can see from his discussion with Habermas. His 700-page *History of Political Philosophy* was published posthumously. In it one notices that he was interested in more than just contemporary philosophers; he paid close attention to classical writers too, such as Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Rousseau, Mill, and Marx. He lectured regularly on the history of political philosophy until his retirement in 1975.

John Rawls, who taught philosophy at Harvard beginning in 1962, died in 2002 at the age of 81.



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