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## QUO VADIS, HUMANITY? REFLECTIONS ON CONTEMPORARY GEOPOLITICAL AND SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATIONS

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### I. INTRODUCTION

It was almost forty years ago when, as a young academic at Moscow University, I met an even younger scholar from Mexico —Manuel Becerra Ramirez—. He had just become a Ph.D. student of the most famous soviet specialist on international law —professor Grigory Ivanovitch Tunkin—. I know from my personal experience how difficult is the russian language for those for whom it is not a native tongue. However, I had mastered the language of Pushkin well before I started my legal studies. Therefore, for Manuel, it was all even more difficult. However, due to his intelligence and hard work, he not only became fluent in russian but also excelled as an international lawyer, successfully defending his Ph.D. thesis. Since then, I have followed his progress by reading his works and even contributing to the excellent *Mexican Yearbook of International Law*, so ably edited already for years by professor Becerra. Several years ago, it was my great pleasure to meet him personally in UNAM and see with my own eyes the high respect bestowed to Manuel Becerra Ramirez by his colleagues as well as students. I am extremely happy to contribute my following reflections, that are not only and even not so much on international law as on the

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causes that prevent the law prevail over politics, as we expected when we were young, to the book that celebrates high achievements of my mexican friend.

## II. ON CURRENT GEOPOLITICAL CONFIGURATIONS

Since the end of the 1980s the world is passing through two interrelated revolutionary processes, one of which is global, affecting all the nations in the world, the other being specific, though not limited, to western nations. Or maybe it would be better to say that if decades ago it plagued mainly non-western countries, today it has become mostly a western phenomenon. Revolutionary processes, by definition, put pressure on all kinds of normative systems, including law and morality, since, as being *normative* phenomena, they function well in circumstances that could be called *normal*. In revolutionary periods in any society —be it, say, in France at the end of the Eighteenth century, or in Russia at the beginning of the Twentieth, when normalcy was an exception and expediency ruled, law broke down, and even morality often lost its guiding force—. In that respect, the international society is not an exception.

The first revolutionary change is geopolitical. Starting from about the end of the 1980s, the world entered into a period of radical geopolitical re-configuration, whose results cannot be predicted with any certainty even today. This process started with the collapse of the rather stable bipolar system, going then through a unipolar moment of the long 1990s, and has today a tendency of moving with jolts and jerks towards some kind of multipolarity. While the West, led by Washington, tries to perpetuate its absolute dominance acquired after the collapse of its erstwhile rival (the USSR), those belonging to the rest, led by China, Russia, India, Mexico, and other nations, use different means to put an end to western hegemony. The war in Ukraine epitomises the relentlessness of this geopolitical transformation of the world, unfortunate victims of which are mostly people in Ukraine. In this country, the collective west, notwithstanding Russia's illegal use of military force against its neighbour that was provoked by the movement of NATO to the frontiers of Russia, is using Ukrainian territory and ukrainian people to bring down Russia as one of the nations that has openly disobeyed the american hegemony. Until the "revolutionary dust" settles down, one way or other, and new "normalcy" emerges (*or the old* returns, though less plausible scenario), it is difficult to expect that international law could function "normally".

The second revolutionary transformation, not unrelated to the first, is the crisis of liberal democracy that was meant, and for a while even seemed, to triumph when the failure of its main ideological rival at the end of the

1980s had become obvious. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the bipolar world, it seemed to many that it was exactly liberal democracy that had prevailed, and it would continue to flourish until the whole world would become the same. However, the disappearance of the main enemy, combined with a wave of globalisation, started revealing, though not immediately, internal contradictions of liberal democracy.

Modern democracy, originating in western european societies, has had dialectical relationships (*i.e.* situations, where different phenomena, depending on concrete circumstances, have a kind of friend/enemy relationships) with three other phenomena that have, on the one hand, supported democracy's emergence and growth while also putting limits on its expansion and deepening. These three phenomena are nationalism, capitalism, and liberalism. As in the post-WWII, the last two have been considered almost inseparable (*i.e.* individual liberties and market freedoms have been often seen as two sides of the same coin), the controversial (*i.e.* dialectical) relationship of democracy with capitalism and liberalism can be dealt with as one dialectical controversy, notwithstanding that there have been societies and periods where and when free market has coexisted (or still coexists) with conservative, even authoritarian and anti-liberal, social policies.

In this article, I will not dwell at length on an important and controversial issue of the relationship between democracy and nationalism since I have dealt with it elsewhere, in detail particularly in one of my recent articles.<sup>1</sup> The process of globalisation has revealed and made acute the contradiction between democracy and nationalism, whose ideal had become enshrined in the concept of the nation-state and where modern democracy emerged and evolved (the nation-state and democracy as a kind of twin brothers though not always in best terms). Without nationalism there wouldn't have been nation-states, without nation-states there would not have been democracy, at least in its current form. Therefore, I conclude in the aforementioned article that without and beyond nation-states (even if they are multi-ethnic) there could hardly exist democracy, though nationalism may also undermine democracy, especially in multi-ethnic or multi-confessional societies. Besides the revolutionary situation in international relations, where the existing balance of powers was broken and competing visions of future—a unipolarity with one centre of power and refashioned multipolarity with different centres of power—are competing, there is also a revolutionary situation in countries that have been most stable and have served as examples for others. This is the crisis of liberal democracy that is also related to, and even conditioned by,

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<sup>1</sup> Müllerson, R., “The Nation-State: Not Yet Ready for the Dustbin of History?”, *The Chinese Journal of International Law*, vol. 20, núm. 4, 2021, pp. 699-725.

processes of globalisation. Below, therefore, I will concentrate on this controversial, *i.e.* dialectical, relationship between democracy and liberalism.

### III. LIBERALISM VERSUS DEMOCRACY

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the positive aspects of the relationship between democracy and liberalism, which for decades had prevailed in the post-Second World War west, have become overwhelmed by negative features. Democracy and liberalism, which had rather peacefully and with mutual benefits coexisted for many decades, are now undermining each other's potentials. The main reason for such a turnaround lies in the negative aspects or consequences of the processes of globalisation, which the french call *la mondialisation malheureuse* in contradistinction to that of *heureuse*.<sup>2</sup> As Harvard economist Dani Rodrik has argued, there is a fundamental incompatibility between hyper-globalization, on the one hand, and democracy and national sovereignty, on the other.<sup>3</sup> You cannot have all of them at the same time.

The spread of market economy and democracy —the concepts that are considered by many to be as obvious goods as God, motherhood and apple pie— have in practice turned out to be a mixed blessing. If the planned economy of the soviet type left everybody, and society as a whole, poor and market freedoms may indeed be one of the preconditions for political freedoms and personal liberties —the shock introduction of markets, especially unbridled markets, make a few extremely rich while many become even poorer than they were under the previous system—. As one of the central tenets of democracy (with some important qualifications of course) is that the voice, interests or values of the many count more than those of the few, it should be clear that economic “shock therapy” and political democracy are incompatible and one either has a shock or democracy, not both. Cambridge economist Ha-Joon Chang goes even further writing that “free market and democracy are not natural partners”,<sup>4</sup> though it must be emphasised that professor Chang is speaking rather of “unbridled markets”, as advocated by Milton Friedman or Alissa Zinovievna Rosenbaum (alias Ayn Rand) and their followers.

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<sup>2</sup> See, *e.g.*, Guénolé, Thomas, *La Mondialisation Malheureuse: Inégalité-pillage-oligarchie*, First, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Rodrik, D., “The Inescapable Trilemma of the World Economy”, June, 27 2007, available at: [https://rodrik.typepad.com/dani\\_rodriks\\_weblog/2007/06/the-inescapable.html](https://rodrik.typepad.com/dani_rodriks_weblog/2007/06/the-inescapable.html).

<sup>4</sup> Chang, H. J., *Bad Samaritans. Rich Nations, Poor Policies & the Threat to the Developing World*, Random House Business Books, 2007, p. 18.

However, already more than half a century ago one of the most persistent market-friendly advocates of political freedoms, Karl Popper, incisively wrote:

Even if the state protects its citizens from being bullied by physical violence (as it does in principle, under the system of unrestrained capitalism), it may defeat our ends by its failure to protect them from the misuse of economic power. In such a state, the economically strong is still free to bully one who is economically weak, and to rob of his freedom. Under these circumstances, unlimited economic freedom can be just as self-defeating as unlimited physical freedom, and economic power may be nearly as dangerous as physical violence.<sup>5</sup>

Free market (capitalism) and liberal democracy, phenomena that, on the one hand, presume each other, are at the same time also in constant rivalry. The freer is a market, the greater is the economic inequality; the greater inequality, the less would there be democracy, and *vice versa*. Strong democracy attained by curbing inequality almost inevitably also bridles market freedoms. Economic inequality *de facto* and inevitably also increases political inequality, while political equality puts breaks on the widening economic inequality. Democracy tries to make a society more equal, while unbridled market increases inequality. The result of such constant balancing has been that in Western European liberal democratic societies these two spheres —political and economic— while supporting each other have also constantly tempered each other, softened each other's excesses.

However, this balance has not withstood the impact of the latest wave of globalisation. John Dunn has observed that within the liberal democratic movement “the partisans of the order of egoism”, *i.e.* capitalists, have defeated “the partisans of equality”,<sup>6</sup> *i.e.* democrats. One of the important causes of equality's defeat in the hands of economic egoism has been that, in the long run, the uncompromising instruments for attempting to realize equality and the rigidities inherent in its pursuit have blunted equality's appeal as a goal.<sup>7</sup> Both the french and especially the russian revolutions, where contrary to the american revolution, the aim was not, as Hannah Arendt wrote, the “freedom from oppression” but “freedom from want”, and one of the main requirements, therefore was *égalité* (equality), have contributed to such a misbalance within today's liberal-democracy. Hannah Arendt observes that the inescapable fact was that liberation from tyranny spelled freedom only for

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<sup>5</sup> Popper, K., *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Routledge, 1996, vol. 2 “Hegel & Marx”, p. 124.

<sup>6</sup> Dunn, J., *Setting the People Free. The Story of Democracy*, Atlantic Books, 2005, p. 134.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 129.

a few and was hardly felt by the many who remained loaded down by their misery. These had to be liberated once more and compared to this liberation from the yoke of necessity, the original liberation from tyranny must have looked like child's play.<sup>8</sup> Excesses of radical attempts to get rid of the “yoke of necessity”, be it as a result of the french or the russian or the cuban revolutions, have always led to radical suppression of individual liberties. These facts, in turn, have been used by proponents of liberalism or neoliberalism to suppress calls for more equality and also more democracy, while equality has often been defined only as an equality of opportunity—you have the right but cannot.

The process of globalisation has revealed and made acute not only the contradiction between democracy and nationalism, whose ideal had become enshrined in the concept of the nation-state and where modern democracy emerged and evolved, but also between democracy and liberalism—both economic and social—. Moreover, there is a bundle of interlinks that cannot be unravelled without irreparably damaging at least some, if not all, of them. Contemporary democracy, *i.e.* the government by the people and for the people, emerged and evolved within nation-states and seems inseparable from it. Yet, economic liberalism with global uncontrolled world financial markets, together with social liberalism, putting the primacy of the individual with her interests and desires above the interests of society, are destroying social bonds that have helped hold societies together, and are, as a result, also undermining nation-states—the cradles of democracy.

As it often happens, rare early warnings usually remain unheard. It was more than twenty years ago when Richard Rorty published a small book, *Achieving our Country*, where he wrote that the american liberal left, concentrating on the rights of ethnic, racial, religious, cultural, and sexual minorities, had neglected the widening gap between the rich and the poor. At some point, Rorty warned

...something will crack. The nonsuburban electorate will decide that the system has failed and start looking around for a strongman to vote for someone willing to assure them that, once he is elected, the smug bureaucrats, tricky lawyers, overpaid bond salesmen, and postmodern professors will no longer be calling the shots.<sup>9</sup>

Sounds eerily familiar and up to date, doesn't it? Rorty considered himself to belong to the category of liberal left, though as one of the brightest

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<sup>8</sup> Arendt, H., *On Revolution*, Penguin Books, 1965, p. 74.

<sup>9</sup> Rorty, R., *Achieving Our Country*, Harvard, Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 90.

representatives of american pragmatism, he hardly be branded as a post-modern professor. And differently from many, if not from most, he did not ridicule, deplore or detest those who were different, but tried to understand them, which doesn't necessarily mean to justify.<sup>10</sup>

#### IV. ON THE ADAPTABILITY TO RAPID CHANGE

The recent wave of globalisation has also exponentially increased the rapidity of alterations in technology, economy, politics and in ways of life generally. This speed of changes is exacerbating the rift between the elites and the masses since they have different adaptabilities to multiple challenges coming all together as a row of roaring cars too long been held stationary by the red light. French philosopher Barbara Stiegler, in her excellent study with a emblematic title *Il faut s'adapter (It is Necessary to Adapt)*,<sup>11</sup> has shown how, at the beginning of the twentieth century, two prominent american philosophers Walter Lippmann and John Dewey had offered different answers to the question of the adaptability to the rapid societal change caused by the industrial revolution that has significant parallels with the current revolutionary period. She writes about the 1920s:

For the first time in the evolution of life and living beings, one species —our human species— finds itself in the situation, where it is not adapted to the new environment. For Lippmann, it was the situation where there was a huge gap between the natural inclination of the human species to remain as they are, inherited from the long and slow history of biological and societal evolution, and the demands of the rapid adaptability to the new environment, brutally imposed by the industrial revolution. Hence, the central theme of Lippmann's political studies: how to adapt human species to constantly and rapidly changing environment... The fundamental question for Lippmann was how to avoid that this tension between the change and stasis, openness and closing, do not lead the masses to choose nationalism, fascism and generally all forms of isolationisms, in their effort to oppose to the rapid change, to restore the stasis and isolation.<sup>12</sup>

So, it was this abyss between slow historical and biological evolution of human species and the rapidly changing physical and social environment, caused by the industrial revolution, that worried Walter Lippmann. If at the

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<sup>10</sup> In my opinion, Baruch Spinoza's "*non ridere, non lugere, neque detestere, sed intelligere*" (don't ridicule, don't deplore, don't detest, but try to understand) is the best approach in social sciences.

<sup>11</sup> Stiegler, B., *Il faut s'adapter: sur un nouvel impératif politique*, Paris, Gallimard, 2019.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 14.



turn of the twentieth century it was the industrial revolution, also combined with economic globalisation, at the turn of the twenty first century it is the revolution in information technology and whipped up hyper-globalisation of economic, and particularly, financial markets that have, once again, uprooted masses of people in different countries, where only those who are adaptable to the change can survive. This is a bio-social experiment of the survival of the fittest and the fittest are the rationally thinking experts and managers and impartial judges using rational laws, who know in which direction the humankind must and will evolve. The masses should be taught to suppress their irrational impulses and follow the lead of enlightened experts, who have been able to adapt and readapt to the constantly changing environment. One of the main aims of public education should be “the manufacture of the consent” of the masses with the policies manufactured by the experts. As to the role of politicians, Lippmann writes that, “though he (the statesman) cannot himself keep the life of the nation as a whole in his mind, he can at least make sure that he is taking counsel from those who know”.<sup>13</sup> A politician has to be only an expert in the choice of experts. While Lippmann, and all the neoliberals after him, saw the solution to the gap between rapidly changing environment and the inability of the masses to adapt to the new environment, in the combination of expertise of specialists and the application of rational laws, Dewey would rely more on the collective intelligence of masses. Dewey was also the first detractor of neoliberal thinking. He wrote:

A class of experts is inevitably cut off from the common interests to such an extent that it becomes a class with its own private interests. Every governance by experts where masses are unable to inform the experts of their needs cannot be anything else than an oligarchy that rules in the interest of some. And enlightened information has to force the specialists to take account of the needs of masses. The world has suffered more from leaders and authorities than from masses.<sup>14</sup>

We see that this almost a century old intellectual confrontation that had influenced policies of western governments for decades, has acquired today a new acuteness. It is a conflict between elites and masses, between self-proclaimed progressives and those who are denigrated as populists. We see also that due to the spread of the Internet and social media governments, be they democratic or autocratic, are losing their ability to “manufacture of the con-

<sup>13</sup> Lippmann, W., *A Preface to Politics*, New York-London, Mitchell Kennerley, 1914, p. 98.

<sup>14</sup> Dewey, J., *The Public and Its Problems* in *The Later Works of John Dewey 1925-1953*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1984, vol. 2, pp. 364 and 365.

sent” of the masses with policies of the elites. It should not be forgotten what Edward Bernays wrote in 1928:

The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country... We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of. This is a logical result of the way in which our democratic society is organized. Vast numbers of human beings must cooperate in this manner if they are to live together as a smoothly functioning society... In almost every act of our daily lives, whether in the sphere of politics or business, in our social conduct or our ethical thinking, we are dominated by the relatively small number of persons... who understand the mental processes and social patterns of the masses. It is they who pull the wires which control the public mind.<sup>15</sup>

Although Bernays writes about manipulation of public consciousness in democracies, it goes without saying that autocracies do the same. The more advanced a country, the more sophisticated the manipulation, the more difficult to feel like being manipulated.

## V. POPULISM AS AN INADEQUATE RESPONSE TO THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE ÉLITES AND THE MASSES

One of the most visible aspects or results of the aforementioned bundle of controversies is the phenomenon of so-called populism. Already in 2008, in my lectures at the Hague Academy of International Law, I spoke about the dialectical contradictions between nationalism, liberalism and democracy and the rise of populism.<sup>16</sup> However, then these contradictions hadn't yet reached their today's acuteness, while populism was still a marginal phenomenon, not worthy of lengthy discussion. Those, who were accused of being populists where primarily leftist leaders of some third-world countries like Hugo Chavez of Venezuela or Rafael Correa of Ecuador.

Today, populism has become more and more also a western phenomenon. French writer and journalist Alexandre Devecchio writes that notwith-

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<sup>15</sup> Bernays, E. L., *Propaganda*, Routledge, 1928, pp. 9 and 10. Later this book was published in French with the title: *Propaganda: comment manipuler l'opinion en démocratie* (Zones, 2007), i.e. how to manipulate public opinion in democracy.

<sup>16</sup> Müllerson, R., "Democracy Promotion: Institutions, International Law and Politics", *Collected Courses of the Hague Academy of International Law*, vol. 333, 2008.

tanding variances between populisms in different societies there is in them something important in common: “a desire to defend national sovereignty and identity against globalisation, to significantly limit immigration, certain hostility towards multiculturalism and support of programmes of social protection that benefit only citizens of the country”.<sup>17</sup> This is indeed what unites politicians such as Donald Trump, Boris Johnson, Matteo Salvini, Victor Orban, Marine Le Pen and others. One more important thing in common between populisms is that differently from so-called (self-defined) progressists, who, like president Emmanuel Macron of France, are leaders of cosmopolitan political, economic and intellectual elites, populist leaders find support mainly among those who are left behind or have suffered because of the processes of globalisation.

The rise of populism, besides the negative effects of globalisation, has been boosted also by the revolution in information technology. Alexander Devecchio compares the effect of the spread of the Internet to that of the invention in 1454 of the printing press by Gutenberg. The latter undermined the power and position of the Roman Church and the clergy, which had controlled the peoples’ minds, and had led to the emergence of the Protestantism, as well as religious wars. Devecchio asks:

But if the invention of the web is going to provoke a similar fracture? This time not between catholics and protestants, but between traditional elites, who are in the process of losing their monopoly, which they have so far had over the mass media and the spread of information, and a new elite that can convey their populist message through the non-traditional means of communication.<sup>18</sup>

Yascha Mounk observes that “the social media networks have closed the gap between the people and the elites, between those who have the power and those who don’t”.<sup>19</sup>

Traditional media has been considered, already for some time and with some justification, as the “fourth power” of the State, together with legislative, executive and judicial powers, though somewhat independent, but nevertheless in the service of the economic, political and intellectual elites, similar to the other three powers. For decades this separation of powers has been relative, all of them served interests and reflected the values of economic, political and intellectual elites. We have seen the real separation of

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<sup>17</sup> Devecchio, A., *Recomposition: Le nouveau monde populiste*, Les éditions du Serf, 2019, Loc. 724.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, Loc. 1581.

<sup>19</sup> Mounk, Y., *The People vs. Democracy: Why our Freedom is in Danger and How to Save It*, Harvard University Press, 2018.

powers, for example, in the conflicts between president Donald Trump and the American Congress and between Boris Johnson and the British Parliament on the issue of Brexit.

The dialectical controversy between democracy and liberalism has been like a ticking bomb (*une bombe à retardement*) waiting for its time to explode. Though these two phenomena —liberalism and democracy— have often been supportive of each other, there has also been, as if by necessity, a constant balancing necessary between them. Most western, especially western european societies have until recently managed this controversy relatively well. In some, democracy has had an upper hand (*e.g.*, in scandinavian social democracies), while in others liberalism has prevailed (*e.g.*, in the United States), but there has not been an open conflict between these phenomena. However, already for decades, due, first, to the rapid globalisation of the world and later also to the changing balance of power in the international system, this controversial friend/enemy relationship between democracy and liberalism has become less friendly and more inimical. It is reflected, *inter alia*, in the fact that liberal elites in most western countries have started labelling those democrats, whose policies and ideas (or/and personalities) they do not like, as populists (let us recall that Ralf Dahrendorf has noted that, “*one man’s populism is another’s democracy, and vice versa*”, though he has also qualified this statement by claiming that “while populism is simple, democracy is complicated”).<sup>20</sup> At the same time, democrats (or populists) have started considering liberals to be arrogant elitists who have become alienated from the people, from their needs and ways of thinking, believing them to be losers and ill-informed (let’s recall Hillary Clinton’s characterisation, though later hypocritically retracted, of Donald Trump’s supporters as “racist, sexist, homophobic deplorables”).

British author David Goodhart distinguishes between those Europeans whom he calls *Anywheres* and those who according to him are *Somewheres*.<sup>21</sup> If the members of the first category (no more than 20-25% of the population in the West and much less in the Rest) belong to the cosmopolitan elite that has profited from globalisation and feels at home in different places in the world, the majority (more than 50% in the West) feels a need to maintain solid links to their country, to its history, traditions and language. To the latter category belong, naturally, not only those who believe that globalisation has by-passed them.

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<sup>20</sup> Dahrendorf, R., “Acht Anmerkungen zum Populismus”, *Transit-Europäische Revue*, vol. 25, 2003, pp. 156-163.

<sup>21</sup> Goodhart, D., *The Road to Somewhere: The New Tribes Shaping British Politics*, Penguin, 2017.

Tensions between solidarity and diversity, between the welfare state and mass immigration have worsened, giving way to a growing divide between the “people from anywhere” and “people of somewhere” or as Alexander Devecchio puts it, between “sedentaries” and “nomads”.<sup>22</sup> It is a conflict between those who care for their “rootedness” or entrenchment in a definitive place, be it a local village, a town or a nation-state and cosmopolitans, *i.e.*, those who feel at home in different places. There have always been a minority those who see the whole world, or Europe as the case may be, as their home, and a majority of those who feel at home only there, where they were born and among those who speak the same language and profess the same religion. For centuries, the first category was a relatively small minority, while most of the people were born, lived and died in the same place, except for mass movements of population that have several times occurred in the history of humankind.

In the globalised world these are not only authoritarian regimes that suppress democratic impulses in their countries and may constitute a threat to democracy elsewhere. The spread and liberalisation of global, particularly financial, markets are curbing democracy everywhere. Increasing the overall GDP of many countries, unbridled liberal markets make a few extremely rich while the majority of people are left behind. The wealth gaps are increasing practically in all countries. If in autocracies people are powerless *vis-à-vis* their own rulers, in the globalised world people are powerless *vis-à-vis* global markets, even if they live in so-called liberal democracies, even if they belong to the so-called middle class. This is how economic liberalism is undermining democracy. At the same time, the rise in importance of individual rights and rights of a multitude of minorities, who aggressively promote their —often newly-found— identity, is undermining social cohesion and common values. This is how social liberalism undermines democracy. Societies that become “atomized”, to use the English title of Michel Houellebecq’s novel *Les Particules élémentaires*, become non-societies, where there is no place for democracy. That is why today liberalism and democracy have become less and less supportive of each other and often even more antagonistic.

There seems to be a disturbing parallel between the struggle for decolonialisation with its mixed results and negative effects of the current (at least before the COVID-19 hit the world) wave of globalisation. Those who fought against colonial imperialism in Africa or elsewhere were considered and revered as freedom-fighters, though it would be more correct to qualify them as independence-fighters since the end result was usually independence from colonial masters and not at all freedom for the people. Many of

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<sup>22</sup> Devecchio, A., *op. cit.*, p. 1798.

such leaders of national liberation movements were populists and quite a few (e.g., Gamal Abdel Nasser, Fidel Castro and Robert Mugabe) of them ended up as genuine dictators. However, when they fought against imperial forces, they were seen by many, particularly in countries which they led to independence, as real heroes. They were fighting against colonialism as a specific form of previous centuries globalisation. Today's western populists are considered by cosmopolitan elites (and not only by those in their own countries since one of the characteristics of current western elites is that they are generally cosmopolitan) to be narrow-minded, inward-looking protectionists, at best, or xenophobic nationalists, at worst. Yet, aren't the effects of the forces, today's populists are against, similar or sometimes even identical to the forces that the anticolonial freedom-fighters were struggling against. Globalisation, global markets, particularly financial markets, deprive peoples of any say on their future. These impersonal forces that have become uncontrollable make democratic decision-making meaningless. These are not only masses of people in small or underdeveloped countries, who become voiceless. Therefore, populists can be seen as freedom fighters against excesses of globalisation, against the rules established, say, by GAFA's, pharmaceutical companies, military-industrial and military-intellectual complexes<sup>23</sup> or governments which they control or influence. This tendency exists almost everywhere. Only small groups of those belonging to cosmopolitan elites benefit from surfing on the waves of globalisation, though quite a few of them also fall and drown in the process. One of the few, but significant exceptions in that respect may be China, where the central authorities have retained and even strengthened, with the coming to power president Xi Jinping, control over processes globalisation, but China has its own problems.

Globalisation and the current migration tide, as one of its manifestations, are exacerbating today's crisis of the European Union, where those who can be *anywhere* do not understand those who want to be *somewhere*. The first category, being dominant in politics, economy and media, are behaving like liberal autocrats *vis-à-vis* those whom they consider belonging to the mob. Such myopic arrogance carries a heavy political price-tag. Without resolving this contradiction between the aspiration of European peoples to be somewhere (to feel at home in France, in Germany, in Italy, in Estonia, in Hungary) and ambitions of transnational elites to be anywhere, Europe will not come out unscathed from the current crisis.

Populists are accused of dividing societies with their criticism of democratically elected governments and by-passing traditional media, which has

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<sup>23</sup> See, Conesa, Pierre, *Vendre la guerre: Le complexe militaro-intellectuel*, De l'Aube, 2022. Where he analyses the role of intellectuals and think-tanks in paving the road to armed conflicts.

been and remain generally supportive of authorities, being critical only of some aspects or excesses of the authorities. But this is confusing the cause and the effect. The populist parties and leaders have become prominent namely because Western societies have become more and more unequal and divided. There is quite a lot of truth in the accusations from both sides —from the side of self-declared progressists as well as from the side of those whom their critics call populists. In a way and simplifying a bit, both Brexit and Trump’s victory have been triumphs of populism over elitism (or if you like, democracy over liberalism). Personally, I don’t like Boris Johnson because of his rude manners and being too often, even for a politician, economical with the truth; as an estonian national living in London with his family, who are all estonian passport holders, I don’t like Brexit either. Yet, this doesn’t mean that I cannot see genuine concerns of Brexiteers. As canadian essayist Mathieu Bock-Coté writes, “there are, no doubt, among populist politicians extreme rights who nurture crazy and repulsive ideas, but it would be wrong to confuse ideological obsessions of such politicians and those real issues that form the basis of a significant part of the electorate and public concerns that have been censured by the dominant ideology”.<sup>24</sup> These are the faults of so-called mainstream political parties, be they of centre-right or centre-left, which have neglected these real issues. Populist leaders can exploit only what is exploitable.

Populist parties or movements may face setbacks in coming elections and their popularity ratings may suffer. However, the phenomenon is not going away, as its sources persist. Moreover, so-called mainstream parties are more and more using populist slogans and policies. The clearest example of this tendency is the metamorphoses of the British Tories, who under Boris Johnson were not any more a traditional conservative party, as we had known it. Having used some traditional Labour Party precepts and slogans as well as Nigel Farage’s Brexit Party ideas, luring voters from both of them, the Tories have become a populist party —partly left-wing, partly right-wing.

## VI. “ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACY”, “UNDEMOCRATIC LIBERALISM” AND “LIBERAL IMPERIALISM”

After Fareed Zakaria published, a quarter of a century ago, an article on “illiberal democracy”,<sup>25</sup> the term, reflecting various degrees of reality, has become

<sup>24</sup> Bock-Coté, M., *Le Multiculturalisme comme Religion Politique*, Cerf, 2019, pp. 291-292.

<sup>25</sup> Zakaria, F., “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy”, *Foreign Affairs*, november-december 1997.

firmly anchored in both academic as well as in political discourse. Agreeing with Zakaria that there are democracies where liberal values are not in high esteem, I have always wondered whether the reverse can be also true? Could there exist political regimes that may be defined as liberal but undemocratic? Of course, there have been authoritarian regimes that have been economically liberal, but socially conservative, like Chile under General Pinochet or South Korea under military rulers. However, in Western democracies these two sides of liberalism —economics and social affairs— have been, more or less, like the two sides of the same coin.

If in illiberal democracy it is democracy that trumps liberalism, under undemocratic liberalism it is liberalism that has the upper hand and puts constraints on democracy. And my answer is that there can be, and in practice there are, political regimes that may be defined as “liberal”, but which have serious deficit of democracy. Undemocratic liberalism could be defined as a political regime, where out of the triptych —the government of the people, by the people and for the people— only the first still fully stands, *i.e.* where the participation of the people in the governance is both formal and ineffective and where the governance is exercised not in the interest of the majority of the people. Leaving aside societies where there is neither democracy nor liberalism, like Saudi Arabia or North Korea, and concentrating attention on societies where these phenomena —democracy and liberalism— have existed for some time and still exist, it seems that many, if not most, Western societies have been infested with the germ of “undemocratic liberalism”. While liberal ideas are prevalent among European elites, values of democracy are today often expressed by populist parties and movements. There is a lot of truth in Chantal Delsol’s observation that “the he populists, contrary to what some may say, are really democrats, but they are not liberals. At the same time, universalist elites, like those in Brussels, are really liberals, who are not any more democrats since they don’t like when people vote to limit some liberties”.<sup>26</sup> Using sanctions against “illiberal democracies”, be they members of the EU, like Hungary or Poland, or beyond, “undemocratic liberals” (the prime example of them being the European Union itself) are imposing their will and vision (values) on those who from their point of view are on the wrong side of history.

Therefore, there exists not only undemocratic (or authoritarian) liberalism, but we are also facing the rise of liberal imperialism, euphemistically described as “liberal international order”, giving additional impetus to the rise of nationalistic populism. Liberal imperialism, *i.e.* attempts to impose liberal values, either by persuasion or by force, as universal values to all and

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<sup>26</sup> Delsol, C., “Populiste, c’est un adjectif pour injurier ses adversaires”, *Le Figaro Vox*, 2018.



everybody, is a wake-up call for those for whom, say, collectivistic values, historical traditions, stability or national independence are more, or at least not less, important than individual liberties. Many influential liberal authors, be they philosophers or economists, have been campaigners for liberal imperial order. Friedrich Hayek, one of the most important theoreticians of liberalism of the last century, believed that the idea of interstate federation would be “the consistent development of liberal point of view”,<sup>27</sup> while Ludwig von Mises advocated the end of nation-states and creation of a “world super-state”.<sup>28</sup>

In an interesting, though controversial (often these two adjectives are necessarily interlinked), book Israeli author Yoram Hazony writes that when the struggle against communism ended

...the Western minds became preoccupied with two great imperialist projects: the European Union, which has progressively relieved member nations of many of the powers usually associated with political independence; and the project of establishing an American “world order”, in which nations that do not abide by international law will be coerced into doing so, principally by means of American military might. These are imperialist projects, even though their proponents do not like to call them like that.<sup>29</sup>

In defence of international law it should be said that it is not this rather noble normative system, which willy-nilly worked even during the Cold War, that Washington tries to impose by its military might and financial domination, but so-called “rules-based liberal international order”, *i.e.* the order based on rules determined in Washington that has nothing to do with international law. And it is not accidental that the only aspiring global empire is accusing those opposing its imperial ambitions, especially China and Russia, of building, or restoring, their own empires.

It would be unfair, in my opinion, to accuse the European Union of being an imperial project, though one may agree that promising (and acting on this promise) to create an “ever-closer union”, a kind of federal Europe, European political elites gradually became more and more detached from the aspirations of their peoples. It is becoming increasingly obvious that European societies, in contradistinction to political elites, are not (not yet, at least) ready to throw the nation-state into the dustbin of history. Both the liberal lefts and the conservative rights have become concerned about their

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<sup>27</sup> Hayek, F., *The Economic Conditions of Interstate Federalism*, available at: <https://fee.org/articles/the-economic-conditions-of-interstate-federalism>.

<sup>28</sup> Mises, L. von, *Liberalism in the Classical Tradition*, Cobden Press, 1985, p. 150.

<sup>29</sup> Hazony, Y., *The Virtue of Nationalism*, Basic Books, 2018, pp. 3 and 4.

identity. However, if the first try to find their identity in the belongingness to a multitude of small, often marginalized, groups (depending on sexual orientation, specific interests or ways of life), the second usually try to find or restore their affinity within bigger communities, like nations, nation-states or traditional religions. However, even if the EU in itself is not an imperial project, the ongoing war of the collective West against Russia —the war that dare not speak its name— after the Kremlin’s reckless invasion of Ukraine, shows that the European Union has become a part of the American imperial project. Moreover, joining against their own best interest Washington’s anti-Chinese policies, European nations have lost the remnants of independent decision-making in world politics. Therefore, Yoram Hazon is right when asserting that:

...[f]or all their bickering, proponents of the liberal construction are united in endorsing a single imperialist vision: They wish to see a world in which liberal principles are codified as universal law and imposed on the nations, if necessary by force. This, they agree, is what will bring us universal peace and prosperity.<sup>30</sup>

## VII. IS “*E PLURIBUS UNUM*” INDEED REPLACING “*EX UNO PLURES*”?

The motto *E Pluribus Unum*, written on the US dollar in Latin, reads in plain English: “out of many-one”. It symbolises not only the union between the thirteen states forming in 1776 a Federation, but also the melting pot idea of the American political system, aimed at making the Americans out of various migrants of European, mostly Anglo-Saxon, extraction. Now, two and a half centuries later, Washington is in the vanguard of spreading American way of life, including the melting pot experience, all over the world. The greenback itself has been since the end of WWII the reserve currency of the world serving as an instrument of American domination. Attempts by Russia, China and some other nations, who suffer or potentially may suffer from American “sanctions”, to dedollarise the world economy and thereby undermining the foundations of American dominance, is one of the underlying causes of Washington’s efforts to aggressively push back Russia and contain China.

However, tens of thousands of years before anybody used Latin, or any other known language for that matter, another, an opposite process had begun that could be called “out of one-many” (*ex uno plures*). It began (allegedly,

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 45.

since new discoveries may further change the dates and locations) more than 50 000 years ago when the Homo Sapiens started his journey from an East African village to all over the world. During that pilgrimage, our forefathers and foremothers, who at the beginning of this migration obviously did not differ much from each other as to the colour of their skin, slant of their eyes or the ways in which they communicated between themselves, acquired visible physical and profound cultural differences, though remaining members of the same species of Homo Sapiens. This process of the colonisation of the planet Earth, during which “out of one emerged many”, was slow; it took tens of thousands of years until foot-and fingerprints of Homo Sapiens could be found in all hospitable, and today even inhospitable, places on Earth. Being always genetically very similar, humans became visibly (superficially), depending mostly of their physical environment, rather different (some blue-eyed, others dark-eyed, some tall while others much shorter and so on). However, in contradistinction to these superficial (therefore easily visible) differences, groups of Homo Sapiens, gradually forming tribes, ethnic groups, nations and civilisations, became profoundly different from each other in terms of their cultures, religions, mores and languages spoken. As American philosopher Michael Walzer once aptly put it: “[e]very human society is universal because it is human, particular because it is a society”.<sup>31</sup> Cultural differences between peoples, be they historical, religious or ethical, that may or may not be immediately visible, over the millennia became huge and they still remain profound. As physical or biological beings we are rather similar, as social animals we may be worlds apart.

American social psychologist Jonathan Haidt has persuasively demonstrated that even in today’s world there still coexist at least three different categories of societies: those with the ethics of autonomy, those with the ethics of community and those with the ethics of divinity. In the first category, the individual with her wants, needs and preferences runs prime; in the second, concepts such as duty, hierarchy, respect, reputation and patriotism are predominant, while in the third prevails the idea that people are, first and foremost, only temporary vessels within which a divine soul has been implanted.<sup>32</sup> Professor Haidt concludes his essay with a warning against moral monists: “[b]eware of anyone who insists that there is one true morality for all people, times, and places —particularly if that morality is founded upon

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<sup>31</sup> Walzer, M., *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1994, p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> Haidt, J., *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*, Penguin, 2013, p. 116.

a single moral foundation”.<sup>33</sup> However, notwithstanding such learned voices and warnings, there have been, and still are, those who in their provincial ignorance of the complexities and societal differences existing in the world try not only to unify the world but also make it uniform, be it, say, communist, liberal democratic or Muslim. Such worldviews have their roots in the Judeo-Christian and Enlightenment’s belief in a universal history and in constant progress leading inexorably towards some specific goal where history ends. Those who don’t recognise this truth, it is argued, are “on the wrong side of history”. If the communist experiment of the realisation of universal history has, at least for the time being, miserably failed, then liberal democratic projects for the whole world are, notwithstanding all the red lights blinking here and there, still actively promoted. Even Islamists have joined the ranks of such “practical utopians” by their attempts to Islamise the globe, beginning with the Middle East. All these movements contain a mixture of determinism and voluntarism: the belief in an unavoidable unilineal course of history (*i.e.* determinism) and, the burning desire to accelerate the coming of inevitable bright future in one or another form (*i.e.* voluntarism).

One may, of course, reasonably argue that the process of global heterogenisation, expressed in *Ex Uno Plures*, has by now if not come to an end then at least considerably slowed down. Indeed, there are many signs of global homogenisation, as articulated in the formula *E Pluribus Unum*. Within the general process of globalisation, we can distinguish global homogenisation combined with the heterogenisation within individual societies, *i.e.* if societies become a bit more similar to each other, there is more diversity within most of them. To an extent, these are natural processes. It is to be expected that different societies interacting, rubbing shoulders and borrowing from those with whom they interact, may become, at least in some respects, more similar to each other. It may indeed be that instead of *Ex Uno Plures* humankind has already begun a reverse journey towards *E Pluribus Unum*. However, the processes of heterogenisation that went on for tens of thousands of years, if not longer, cannot be undone within decades and probably even within centuries, if ever. Even if some individuals from different societies can cross the boundaries of their cultural and ethical communities, to step, so to say, outside of their “moral matrix”, or sometimes even straddle and enjoy more than one of them, communities themselves change much more slowly, and changes that are instigated and forced on them, either from above or from the outside, may have lasting negative effects. Yet, there are those who seek to artificially accelerate the processes of global homogenisation, using, *inter alia*, human rights discourse, exportation of democracy and

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 368.

liberal values, carrying out operations of regime change, sometimes using military force for that purpose. Such “one size fits all” policies foreseeably spread chaos and destruction instead of democracy and human rights. The much advertised and enthusiastically welcomed by the West “Arab spring” led to the collapse of statehood in Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen, while in other Middle East nations the authorities, to avoid likely implosion, returned to authoritarian rule (e.g., Egypt, Tunisia). Even admitting that the process of “out of one-many” has ended, and the tendency of “out of many-one” is manifesting itself in the processes of globalisation, it would be irresponsible to try to artificially accelerate this movement. Moreover, the end of history, be it either à la Karl Marx or à la Francis Fukuyama, would also be the end of social experimentation. The uniformity of social, economic or political systems would also mark the end of societal progress. Diversity between societies is no less important than biodiversity or diversity within societies organised as States. Moreover, the world is simply too big, complex and diverse to have its rich tapestry to be flattened into a carpet where only one pattern, be it a Judeo-Christian, Anglo-Saxon, Confucian, Muslim or even secular liberal-democratic, dominates.

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