

THE CONUNDRUM OF BEING A MINORITY: CHOOSING A COLLECTIVE IDENTITY IN THE ERA OF NEOLIBERAL GLOBALISM*

Doç. Dr. Aret Karademir

Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi

Felsefe Bölümü

ORCID: 0000-0003-1099-7089



Abstract

This paper argues that by portraying minority concerns primarily as cultural concerns and by discussing minority existence independently of capitalism, neoliberalism, feminism, environmentalism, globalization, and the distinction between the Right and the Left, the dominant discourse on ethno-cultural minorities, namely multiculturalism, may lead to the reduction of minority communities to cultural entities in the collective consciousness of the dominant majority. Such reductionism endangers minority existence by identifying the question of minorities with the question of culture to the point that minorities voicing their non-cultural political concerns increasingly appear unintelligible, presumptuous, or even destructive to wider society. Against this background, the paper discusses why and how ethno-cultural minorities may find their collective identity in different, not necessarily ethno-cultural, political formations in the age of neoliberal globalism, such as anti-neoliberal, anti-globalist, cosmopolitan, environmentalist, anti-capitalist, feminist, radical democratic, republican, and anti-imperialist. This discussion is based on Ernesto Laclau's and Chantal Mouffe's understanding of hegemony and social antagonism.

Keywords: Çokkültürcülük, Hegemonya, Neoliberalizm, Küreselleşme, Kimlik

Azınlık Olma Muamması: Neoliberal Küreselleşme Çağında Kolektif Kimlik Seçimi

Öz

Etno-kültürel azınlıklar literatürüne egemen söylem, başka bir deyişle çokkültürcülük, azınlık kaygılarını öncelikli olarak kültürel kaygılar addedip; "azınlık olmak" olgusunu genellikle kapitalizmden, neoliberalizmden, feminizmden, küreselleşmeden ve sağ ve sol ayrımından bağımsız bir şekilde kavramsallaştırır. Bu da azınlık cemaatlerinin toplumsal çoğunluğun kolektif hafızasında "sadece" kültürel varlıklar olarak kodlanmalarını tehlikesini doğurur. Böylesi indirgemeci bir kodlama azınlık varoluşu için tehlikelidir; çünkü azınlık sorununun kültürel sorunlarla eşlenmesine ve dolayısıyla azınlıkların "kültür dışı" siyasi taleplerinin toplumun geri kalanınca anlamsız, küstah ve hatta tehditkâr olarak algılanmasına yol açar. Bu makalede, bahsi geçen tehlike göz önünde bulundurularak, içinde yaşadığımız neoliberal küreselleşme çağında etno-kültürel azınlıkların kolektif kimliklerini nasıl tanımlayabilecekleri ve niye kimlik tanımlarının kültürel kodlara dayanmak zorunda olmadığı inceleniyor. Daha detaylı söylenecek olursa, etno-kültürel azınlıkların neoliberalizm karşıtı, küreselleşme karşıtı, kozmopolit, çevreci, anti-kapitalist, feminist, radikal demokrat, cumhuriyetçi veya anti-emperyalist gibi kimlikleri niye ve nasıl benimseyebilecekleri tartışmaya açılıyor. Bu tartışmanın teorik altyapısını ise Ernesto Laclau ve Chantal Mouffe'un hegemonya ve sosyal antagonizma kavramları oluşturuyor.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Multiculturalism, Hegemony, Neoliberalism, Globalization, Identity

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The Conundrum of Being a Minority: Choosing a Collective Identity in the Era of Neoliberal Globalism

Introduction

The world we live in is the world of neoliberal globalism. This is a world in which the distinction between the Right and the Left is challenged by “the third way” (see, e.g., Beck, 1997; Giddens, 1998). Despite this challenge, however, academic analyses of hegemony, ideology, and far-right populism abound. Moreover, this is a world in which the principles of democracy are threatened by the decline in participation in democratic processes among citizens and by the rise of nativist populism (Parvin, 2014). Finally, this is a world in which post-war welfarism is increasingly turning into an archaism, where the environmental commons are irresponsibly commodified and commercialized, and where nation-states gradually hand over their sovereignty to the economically motivated institutions of globalization (Crouch, 2004; Harvey, 2005). Nevertheless, the dominant discourse on ethno-cultural minorities, namely multiculturalism, often discusses minority existence, minority rights, and questions of ethno-cultural justice as if minority communities had no stake in, concern about, or antagonism towards capitalism, neoliberalism, globalization, the distinction between the Right and the Left, hegemony, ideology, populism, environmentalism, or what Jürgen Habermas (1987) calls the “colonization” of democracy by economic system imperatives.

Against this background, the aim of this paper is twofold. First, it argues that the dominant discourse may lead to the portrayal of minority communities as *essentially* cultural and *therefore* apolitical entities. This may endanger minority existence to the point that minorities voicing their non-cultural political concerns increasingly appear unintelligible, presumptuous, or even destructive to wider society. Second, challenging such essentialism and apoliticization, the paper discusses why and how ethno-cultural minorities may find their collective identity in different, not necessarily ethno-cultural, political formations in the world of neoliberal globalism. In so doing, it employs the anti-essentialist ontology of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe.

In the next section, I will depict the general characteristics of multicultural theory and problematize its potential to lead to the essentialization and apoliticization of minority communities. A brief description of the ontology of Laclau and Mouffe will follow. I reserve the last section for discussing why and how ethno-cultural minorities may find their collective identity in anti-neoliberal, anti-globalist, cosmopolitan, environmentalist, anti-capitalist, feminist, radical democratic, republican, and anti-imperialist political formations. I confine myself to a discussion on historical minorities and indigenous peoples and, therefore, understand by ethno-cultural minorities those groups who acquired minority status not due to immigration, but because of colonization or by staying on the “wrong side” of nation-states after the collapse of multinational empires.

1. The Discourse of Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism argues that human beings have a fundamental interest in the “recognition” of their ethnic or ethno-religious culture (Taylor, 1994). According to this view, individuals are not free-floating entities, but social and enculturated beings. The culture of an ethnic or ethno-religious community that individuals are born and socialized into functions as a fundamental context of choice and meaning in their lives. In Bhikhu Parekh’s (2006: 143) words, culture is “a system of beliefs and practices in terms of which a group of human beings understand, regulate and structure their individual and collective lives.” Such a system of beliefs and practices is embodied in an ethno-cultural community’s “proverbs, maxims, myths, rituals, symbols, collective memories, jokes, body language, modes of non-linguistic communication, customs, traditions, institutions and manners of greeting” (Parekh, 2006: 143). Thus, socialization into an ethno-cultural community is partly responsible for individuals’ acquiring “particular habits of thought and feeling, traits of temperament, inhibitions, taboos, prejudices,” and predisposition towards certain “heroes, role models, bodily gestures, values, ideals, and ways of holding and carrying themselves” (Parekh, 2006: 155-156). According to Avishai Margalit and Joseph Raz (1990: 444-450), this means that individuals’ ability to make meaningful judgments concerning what constitutes a good life, which goals and ideals are worth having, and what significance certain practices and relationships carry significantly depends on their culture. Consequently, individuals cannot genuinely exercise their freedom of choice without being socialized into the culture of an ethnic or ethno-religious community that provides them with a rich set of meaningful life options (Kymlicka, 1995: 83).

However, even though the ethno-cultural community that one was socialized into functions as a context of choice and meaning, modern societies are defined by a multiplicity of ethnic and religious cultures. Multiculturalism

argues that in the face of such multiplicity, modern states cannot help but privilege a set of cultures at the expense of marginalizing others. This is primarily because, as Wayne Norman (2006: 23-72) points out, modern societies are the historical products of nation-making policies, such as the official language policy, rules for immigration and naturalization, core curricula in schools, compulsory military service, and the adoption of national symbols and holy-days. Will Kymlicka (1995: 76) writes that such nation-making policies have historically aimed to ensure “the diffusion throughout a society of a common culture, including a standardized language, embodied in common economic, political, and educational institutions.” The common culture in question has been created out of the dialect, way of life, and religious beliefs and practices of the dominant ethno-cultural majority in society.

Moreover, modern states have to make certain decisions with cultural effects. For instance, they have to decide which languages will be official and, therefore, which languages will be used in schools and courts. Similarly, they have to decide which myths, memories, symbols, and cultural heritage will be taught in public schools. In addition, they have to decide how to draw the boundaries of legislative and administrative units, i.e., whether or not they should allow ethno-cultural minorities to have the political capability of forming a local majority in the region they call their homeland. Finally, modern states have to choose which days are to be regarded as public holy-days and which symbols are to be recognized as common symbols appearing in the national anthem, flag, or street names (Kymlicka, 1995: 4-5, 51-52; Norman, 2006: 51-53).

Such nation-making policies and politico-cultural decisions are responsible for anchoring mainstream cultural, economic, and political institutions in society in the culture of the dominant majority. This leads to socio-economic and political marginalization of minorities due to their cultural specificity. For example, Joseph Carens (2000: 260) argues that “Every [political] institution is thickly embedded in some particular cultural context with its own language, traditions of discourse, norms of behaviour, patterns of recruitment, and so on.” This makes minority ethno-political demands and commitments unintelligible to wider society. Similarly, Iris Young (1990: 133) claims that mainstream “Judgments of beauty or ugliness, attraction or aversion, cleverness or stupidity, competence or ineptness” often reflect the culture of the dominant majority, which leads to the stereotyping of minority behavior in wider society and in its marketplace as lazy, unprofessional, or unrepresentable.

Against this background, multiculturalism defends that ethno-cultural minorities should be granted group-specific cultural rights. According to Jacob Levy (2000: 122-160), these rights include self-government rights, certain exemptions from laws and regulations that are contrary to their cultural practices and beliefs, recognition of their customary laws and land rights, guaranteed

representation in the state's decision-making bodies and veto rights, and symbolic acknowledgment of the existence and worth of minority languages, history, and contributions to wider society. For Kymlicka (1995: 36), the aim of these rights is to protect the "distinct existence and identity" of minority cultures. For Tariq Modood (2013: 17), it is also to protect minority individuals against economic and political marginalization in wider society.

Due to its emphasis on the protection of minority cultures, multiculturalism has often been criticized of leading to the reification and ghettoization of cultural communities (see, e.g., Barry, 2001; Schmidt, 1997). Some have emphasized that this was especially dangerous for the basic rights of ethnic women, given that the minority cultures that were supposed to be protected through group-specific rights were more often than not illiberal, patriarchal, and heterosexist (see, e.g., Shachar, 2001; Okin, 1999; Yuval-Davis, 1997). Multiculturalists' response to such criticisms often takes the form of emphasizing the liberal aspect of contemporary multiculturalism. The liberalism of multiculturalism is formulated by referring to the fact that contemporary multiculturalism celebrates "individuals' freedom to dissent." Kymlicka (1995: 37), for example, argues that liberal multiculturalism does not endorse "internal restrictions," whose aim is to inhibit members' freedom to "question and revise traditional authorities and practices" in the name of ensuring the purity and homogeneity of minority cultures. Jeff Spinner-Halev (2000: 57-85), on the other hand, maintains that ethno-cultural minorities should be allowed to preserve their illiberal traditions and practices, but only on the condition that they respect individuals' decisions to leave their communities.

Nevertheless, regardless of the various differences within the discourse of multiculturalism, and independently of the problems of reification and ghettoization, multiculturalism may lead to the reduction of ethno-cultural minorities to cultural entities in the eyes of the dominant majority. This is because, according to multiculturalist discourse, as we have seen above, the question of minorities arises due to the fact that *culture* functions as a context of choice and meaning for its members and that modern states cannot be neutral on *questions of culture*. Therefore, justice requires either *the protection of minority cultures* or *cross-cultural dialogue*. In this scenario, the main obstacle to justice is that *some minority cultures* are illiberal and their illiberalism may be further encouraged by *cultural rights*, especially when such rights are formulated with the aim of protecting cultures without at the same time determining certain measures that would curb *the illiberalism of cultural commitments*. Thus, within the boundaries of multiculturalist discourse, the debate on the collective identity of ethno-cultural minorities seems to have already been resolved. What defines such minorities, what causes their problems, and where the solution lies is the culture of their communities. Accordingly, the question of minorities seems to

have nothing to do with the (non-cultural) questions of capitalism, neoliberalism, environmentalism, feminism, globalization, and the distinction between the Right and the Left.

It is of course true that ethno-cultural minorities do not have to be concerned with questions of capitalism or neoliberal globalism, that multiculturalists have a point when they argue that the protection of their cultures and cross-cultural dialogue may shield minority communities against various forms of injustice, and that it would be irresponsible to downgrade the cultural aspect of minority sufferings by holding on to a sort of economic reductionism. However, discussing the question of minorities independently of non-cultural political problems may lead to the essentialization and apoliticization of minority communities. Specifically, it may lead to an exclusively cultural portrayal of minorities by the members of the dominant majority, such that nothing but questions of culture are remembered the moment the question of minorities is raised. In other words, it may lead to an unquestioned assumption in the collective consciousness of the dominant majority that minorities have no political concerns, interests, or aspirations when the question at hand is not directly related to culture and cultural existence. Thus, minorities are regarded not as an integral part of the wider political community, but locked up in their cultural specificity. After all, when the word “justice” or “politics” is uttered next to the word “minority,” what wider society hears is often nothing but some academics, NGOs, or international organizations giving a discourse on culture and cultural specificity. Hence, discussing the question of minorities predominantly from the perspective of culture may lead to the identification of the question of minority existence with the question of cultural specificity to the point that minorities voicing their non-cultural political concerns increasingly appear unintelligible or even presumptuous to wider society. Alternatively, it may lead to the belief that the minority interest in questions of general concern, regarding, for example, the quality of public education, injustice in the system of taxation, increasing centralization of the state, rise of far-right populism, or aggressiveness of the state’s foreign policy, is not genuine but just a cover-up for a culturalist, parochial, or even divisive hidden agenda. This is especially dangerous for those historical minorities and indigenous peoples who cannot exercise self-government due to a lack of resources, numbers, territorial concentration, or institutional self-sufficiency and, therefore, have to live side by side with the members of the dominant majority.

It is against this background that I aim to offer an alternative conceptualization of minority existence, one that is based on the anti-essentialist ontology of Laclau and Mouffe. It is worth emphasizing that the alternative I offer does not aim to replace multiculturalism once and for all. Instead, it refers to an attempt to find a way to formulate the question of minorities in non-

culturalist terms. My aim here is to show that ethno-cultural minorities cannot be reduced to cultural entities and that their problems do not have to be primarily cultural. This is an attempt to find a way for discussing justice and politics without encouraging the dominant majority to portray minority communities as essentially cultural and therefore apolitical entities, but also without ignoring the specificity of minority existence in the contemporary world.

2. Identity and Hegemony

Laclau and Mouffe (2001) argue that “objects” of discourses, such as concepts, individual and group identities, and social actions, do not have a pre-discursive essence. Instead, they acquire their intelligible identity only in a discourse understood as a chain of significations or a context of meaning (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 107). According to this ontology, a chain of significations is not grounded in a fixed and universal substance. It rather refers to a “relational complex,” the elements of which become what they are thanks to the “differential” position they occupy with respect to other elements in the chain (Laclau, 2005: 68). Thus, “to be something is always not to be something else,” instead of reflecting a never-changing substance (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 128). In this respect, a chain of significations is “a chain of differences.”

Since each element of the chain acquires its intelligible identity thanks to its difference from the others, a chain of differences needs to be closed and, therefore, correspond to a “totality” in order for its elements not to stay infinitely ambiguous, but to be fixed and distinctly identified (Laclau, 1996: 37). This means that the boundaries of the chain need to be clearly drawn. Such enclosure, and therefore separation from what lies beyond its boundaries, gives the chain its totality and distinct identity. Hence, what lies beyond its boundaries is the chain’s “constitutive outside” (Mouffe, 2000: 12). Nevertheless, if it is true that it is the outside that gives the chain its unambiguous identity and that each element of the chain requires such unambiguity in order to acquire its distinctness, and if it is further true that no chain can *genuinely* correspond to a totality due to the fact that totality requires, paradoxically, an outside that eludes each and every attempt of totalization, then each identity, be it the identity of an individual element or that of the chain, is based on a “lack,” i.e., it is nothing but a “failed totality” (Laclau, 1996: 15; Laclau, 2005: 70). As Laclau and Mouffe (2001: 111) write, “there is no social identity fully protected from a discursive exterior that deforms it and prevents it becoming fully sutured.” This means that the relationship between a chain of significations and its constitutive outside is deforming and therefore “antagonistic” (Laclau, 1996: 37).

Furthermore, since the elements of a chain of significations acquire their intelligible identity owing to the chain’s difference from its constitutive outside,

they are characterized not only by their difference from but also their “equivalence” to one another. This is because the identity of each element is determined by what that element is not, including not being the constitutive outside. Thus, *not being the constitutive outside* is what is common to each and every element within the chain (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 127). Therefore, when it comes to representing a chain of significations as opposed to its constitutive outside, each of the chain’s elements is equivalent to one another. As a result, a chain of differences is also “a chain of equivalences.”

Laclau and Mouffe call the relation between the representing and represented elements of a chain of differences and equivalences a “*hegemonic relationship*” when an element from the chain, without losing its *particular* identity, assumes the task of representing the failed totality, namely the *universal* (Laclau, 1996: 43). Such a relationship reconstructs the identity of each element in the chain from the perspective of the representing, i.e., hegemonizing, element. It further reconstructs the identity of the constitutive outside (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 105). It is worth noting that there is no necessary relation between the hegemonizing element and the failed totality, given that each element can assume the task of representing the universal (Laclau, 2014: 86). Similarly, any “object” can be articulated into a chain of differences and equivalences, considering that no element has a completed, fixed, and “sutured” identity. It is also worth noting that the hegemonizing element may employ any signifier in order to represent the chain. After all, the chain of differences and equivalences is not grounded in a fixed substance that waits for representation. Hence, the signifier in question is an “empty signifier,” i.e., “a signifier without a signified” (Laclau, 1996: 36).

Against this background, Laclau and Mouffe (2001) conceptualize “the social [order]” as the mainstream chain of significations in society that is hegemonically constructed by a particular social force. Since every hegemony refers to a contingency in the sense of not being grounded in an extra-social substance or pre-discursive essence, the fate of the social order depends on the hegemonizing force’s success in hiding its particularity and the failed character of the totality that it contingently constructs. However, the hegemonizing force struggles in vain to present the social order as an “objective reality” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 127). This is because, as a *failed* totality, it is impossible for the social order to satisfy each and every social demand. Thus, social antagonisms arise when members experience “the limit of the social,” i.e., when they encounter “a gap which has emerged in the harmonious continuity of the social” in the form of unsatisfied demands (Laclau, 2005: 85; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 125). In such instances, the contingency, particularity, and, therefore, “lack” of what is taken to be necessary, universal, or objective may come to the fore. This opens the possibility of constructing a counter-hegemony by forming a new chain of differences and equivalences out of unsatisfied social demands and by

reconstructing the constitutive outside as “the enemy,” i.e., as that which is responsible for unsatisfied demands in the current social order (Laclau, 2005: 83-93).

Viewing the problem of minorities from the perspective of such anti-essentialism, the identity of ethno-cultural minorities cannot be reduced to a cultural essence. Instead, what defines them depends on the chain of differences and equivalences within which they find themselves. Hence, their identity and the nature of their concerns and social demands, as well as their “enemy,” are not based on a pre-discursive substance. Ethno-cultural minorities become what they are depending on which hegemony or counter-hegemony represents them, how they are articulated into a chain of differences and equivalences, what position they occupy within the chain, and which social groups and commitments accompany them against “the enemy.” In the next section, I will elaborate on this by taking my point of departure from a characterization of the contemporary social order as the hegemonic construction of neoliberal globalism.

3. Neoliberal Globalism and Ethno-Cultural Minorities

The contemporary social order has been created and condensed by the hegemony of neoliberal globalism beginning with the late 1980s. The world of neoliberal globalism is based on the free mobility of capital, technology, customs, firms, and individuals as migrant workers across national borders. Such mobility is made possible by unprecedented developments in communication technologies and by the reduced cost of virtual communication and travel (Cantle, 2012: 6-12). It is also made possible by nation-states’ commitment to deregulation policies, tax and budget cuts, the abandonment of the welfare state, and the privatization of public enterprises in order to destroy any barrier that would hinder the free mobility of capital and in order to thereby attract transnational corporations and international investments into their borders (Harvey, 2005: 19-31).

Accordingly, some of the empty signifiers employed by neoliberal globalism in order to condense its hegemony are individualism, efficiency, and global rational governance. Specifically, human beings are portrayed in this hegemony as free and responsible individuals, i.e., free to move, trade, and invest, and solely responsible for their own well-being. Individualism, along with privatization, deregulation, budget cuts, and the abandonment of the commitments of the welfare state, is advertised as serving economic efficiency and productivity. Moreover, nation-states’ willingness to avoid intervening into the functioning of the marketplace is accompanied by the rise of international organizations with immense political influence, such as the World Trade

Organization, aiming to facilitate the free mobility of capital and international trade according to the principles of (economic) reason (Harvey, 2005: 64-67).

However, like any social order, the world of neoliberal globalism cannot satisfy each and every social demand. Thus, it is not exempt from “gaps.” It struggles in vain to stop corresponding to a “failed totality.” This means that depending on the various ways such “gaps” are experienced by them, ethno-cultural minorities may find their collective identity in different social antagonisms, may become part of different counter-hegemonic chains of differences and equivalences, and may position themselves against different discursive constructions of “the enemy.” In what follows, I will explicate this point under three sub-headings, namely economy, politics, and culture.

3.1. Economy

The world of neoliberal globalism is “a world of flexible labour markets and short-term contracts, chronic job insecurities, lost social protections, and often debilitating labour” (Harvey, 2005: 170). This is because, in the world of neoliberal globalism, social welfare provisions are reduced to a bare minimum. Specifically, as states reduce corporate taxation in order to attract transnational corporations and international investments into their borders, leading to government budget cuts, and as governments increasingly hand over their public duties to the private sector by privatizing public enterprises or by contracting them out to firms in the name of efficiency and productivity, things previously regarded as public, i.e., things to which citizens are entitled owing to their citizenship status, such as education, health care, and social services, are increasingly opened up to commercialization and commodification (Crouch, 2004: 39-41, 78-83). Combined with states’ commitment to the deregulation of the marketplace, along with transnational corporations’ reliance upon labor reserves in countries where cheap labor is available, and along with migration on a massive scale leading to the formation of a reserve labor army, the minimization of the welfare state exposes citizens to socio-economic impoverishment. This makes large segments of the population desperate enough to accept short-term contracts in flexible labor markets. “The general outcome,” as David Harvey (2005: 76) writes, is “lower wages, increasing job insecurity, and in many instances loss of benefits and of job protections.” This is especially apparent in the increase in “precarious employment” in temporary jobs and in unemployment among the young in OECD countries (Crouch, 2019: 25, 28-31). As a result, not only are local markets in developing countries increasingly colonized by transnational corporations, but the welfare of low-skilled workers and the middle classes in wealthy nations is also increasingly threatened by the functioning of neoliberal globalism (Tamir, 2019: 108-118).

The impoverishment of citizens created by neoliberal globalism is also due to the commodification of environmental commons, such as land and water. Habitat degradations are particularly accelerated by the “imposition of short-term contractual logic on environmental uses” (Harvey, 2005: 172). Regardless of whether it is due to high energy-consuming suburbanization in developed countries such as the United States or due to the pressure on developing countries with external debts “to increase exports and to allow foreign ownerships and concessions,” environmental commons are commodified and contracted out to transnational corporations for specified terms (Harvey, 2005: 175). Short-term contracts drive transnational corporations to exploit the environment as much and as quickly as possible to the point of destroying environmental commons, endangering public health, and obliterating biodiversity.

Against this background, ethno-cultural minorities may find their collective identity in different political formations, may become part of various counter-hegemonic chains of differences and equivalences, and may position themselves against different discursive constructions of “the enemy.” Specifically, they may be politicized in anti-neoliberal, anti-globalist, anti-imperialist, and environmentalist as well as multiculturalist and multinationalist ways. This is because ethno-cultural minorities are often among the most impoverished citizens in society. Their impoverishment is grounded in economic discriminations against them, in their historical deprivation of civil rights, and in the confiscation of their property. It is also grounded, as multiculturalists argue, in the fact that standards of professionalism, presentableness, beauty, and communication proficiency often reflect the dominant majority’s language, social and aesthetic tastes, norms of behavior and lifestyle, and professional commitments. Moreover, minority impoverishment is aggravated by nation-states’ historical encouragement of or turning a blind eye to the exploitation of natural resources in their traditional homelands, destabilizing their lifestyle, forms of production, and living environments (Penz, 1992). As a result, many minority individuals are employed only in temporary jobs or undertake what Michael Walzer (1983: 174) calls “dirty work,” i.e., employed as workers of low-paying and unpopular jobs. This means that neoliberal policies and the minimization of the welfare state, combined with the colonization of local markets and the destruction of environmental commons by transnational corporations, and also combined with the formation of a reserve army of workers largely consisting of “needy” migrants competing with ethno-cultural minorities for the acquisition of dirty work, may further heavily impoverish ethno-cultural minorities. This also means that ethno-cultural minorities may particularly experience the “gaps” in the social order created by neoliberal globalism.

Accordingly, ethno-cultural minorities may find their collective identity in a *leftist* chain of differences and equivalences *against neoliberal capitalism*,

fighting side by side with other “losers” of the neoliberal social order against deregulation policies, budget cuts, the abandonment of the welfare state, and the privatization of public enterprises. They may also find their collective identity in a *nativist/nationalist* chain of differences and equivalences *against globalization*, contending that globalization extends capitalist exploitation by destroying welfarist barriers set by traditional nation-states and by allowing the transnational capitalist elite, having no attachment to “our” homeland and “our” solidarity, to irresponsibly pillage national resources, steal “our” future, and endanger public health. Alternatively, ethno-cultural minorities may find their collective identity in a *multinationalist* chain of differences and equivalences *against the nation-state within which they are stuck*, especially when they are alienated from the nation-state due to the latter handing over its public duties to private firms and therefore not caring about the well-being of its citizens. Thus, they may be convinced that they must exercise a sort of national sovereignty in order to protect themselves *against economic imperialism* exercised by the international, as well as the dominant majority’s national, business elite. Additionally, they may form political alliances with social groups exposed to similar socio-economic disadvantages as ethno-cultural minorities because of their identity, such as gays and lesbians, and ask for multicultural accommodations such as affirmative action. Hence, they may become part of a *multicultural* chain of differences and equivalences *against structural inequalities within the heterosexist nation-state*. Lastly, ethno-cultural minorities may organize themselves in an *environmentalist* manner and fight *against the sort of economic individualism that has no respect for nature*, especially when their lifestyle is not as industrialized as the rest of society, or when their culture is based on certain animism.

3.2. Politics

Just as the hegemony of neoliberal globalism leads to socio-economic impoverishments and therefore exposes different segments of society to an antagonistic experience of the “gaps” in the social order, it also causes a democratic deficit and an experience of the “failed totality.” Specifically, in the world of neoliberal globalism, democracy becomes less and less grounded in public deliberation and is increasingly colonized by economic system imperatives. Thus, it is reduced to elections, mass persuasion techniques, and lobbying activities (Crouch, 2004: 4).

There are several reasons behind this. First, transnational corporations challenge democratic processes owing to their ability to transcend national borders and thereby stay outside democratic control (Cantle, 2012: 5). Moreover, possessing more economic power than many governments, they have the ability

to dictate policies to states, especially by threatening to invest elsewhere if they do not like the state's labor or fiscal regime (Crouch, 2004: 29-35). In the face of such threats, states are usually more than willing to give up part of their national-democratic sovereignty in order not to drive away international investments and in order to maintain their competitiveness in the global market. This includes the state's opting out of regulating the national marketplace and strictly controlling its borders (Cantle, 2012: 9). It also includes the privatization of public assets and enterprises, and therefore their removal from the domain of democratic control. In short, it includes the "hollowing out" of the state (Freedland, 2001: 95).

Second, in the name of efficiency and productivity, the hollowed out state does not shirk from cooperating with the business elite in determining public policies and writing legislation (Harvey, 2005: 76-78). Such a non-democratic interaction between the state and the business elite is further condensed when the state contracts out public enterprises to firms and thereby encourages the business elite to stay in touch with government officials, i.e., in order to receive new contracts or renew existing ones (Crouch, 2004: 93). Accordingly, firms and corporations reserve massive resources for conducting lobbying activities for economic success (Crouch, 2004: 15-19). Since citizens cannot compete with them due to a lack of capital, democracy is threatened by business interests. After all, a sort of equality in the ability of citizens to affect political decisions is a *sine qua non* for democracy. Moreover, just as the national-democratic sovereignty is increasingly lost to the interests of the business elite, it is also lost to international organizations. That is, citizens' power to shape their lives is partially handed over to those international organizations that are responsible for ensuring the free mobility of capital and international trade but that do not function according to the principles of democratic participation (Castells, 2006: 61; Tamir, 2019: 94).

Finally, one of the pillars of democracy, namely the media, increasingly turns into a stumbling block to the well-functioning of democracy. This is because, in the world of neoliberal globalism, the media is concentrated in a small number of hands (Castells, 2006: 58; Crouch, 2004: 46-51). Furthermore, governments are often unwilling to intervene in the media and to demand it to serve the public interest. Thus, the media is mainly, if not exclusively, motivated by considerations of profit. The income of the media mostly comes from advertisers, who are driven by the desire to communicate their commercial messages to the broadest segments of the population. As Yoav Hammer (2007: 187-188) puts it, this has "constraining effects" on the media, because such dependence on advertisement makes the media embrace the principle that "content must not annoy some of the viewers or bore them," therefore rendering it unwilling "to present non-mainstream points of view or material which is of interest only to small segments of the population." This not only eliminates

diversity that could be employed in democratic deliberation, but also leads to “the debasement of political language and communication” (Crouch, 2004: 46). In other words, the media is encouraged to “adopt the style of rapid, eye-catching banality” because of market pressures (Crouch, 2004: 47), which in turn leads to the rise of what is a threat to democratic deliberation, namely “the ‘charismatic’ party leader with a populist message” (Wilson & Hainsworth, 2012: 17).

As a result, democracy is impoverished and democratic channels are narrowed in the order of neoliberal globalism. Such a “gap” in the social order is heavily experienced by ethno-cultural minorities. This is because the democratic channels through which ethno-cultural minorities voice their concerns and affect political decisions are already narrow. Specifically, ethno-cultural minorities are often outvoted in electoral processes and on public policy decisions due to their numbers. Moreover, compared to charismatic and populist leaders of the dominant majority, they are extremely disadvantaged in influencing public opinion. This is especially because the historically sedimented context of meaning in nation-states, as multiculturalists argue, has been created out of the dialect, way of life, and religious beliefs and practices of the dominant ethno-cultural majority. Thus, it reflects the latter’s beliefs and commitments regarding who “we” are as a nation, what “our” heritage is, and who “we” want to become in the future. Against this background, ethno-cultural minorities’ political concerns, demands, and problematizations are often perceived in wider society as non-national, divisive, irrational, or politically inappropriate. Hence, ethno-cultural minorities suffer what Miranda Fricker (2007) calls “epistemic injustice.” Their political concerns and arguments do not make any sense to the majority, whereas it is their appealing to majority beliefs and commitments regarding nationality, unity, and politics that is exactly what makes populist messages “meaningful.”

In addition, the opportunity of ethno-cultural minorities to contribute to the reconstruction of the mainstream context of meaning in society with the aid of media technologies is limited. The reason is that they often lack collective resources to afford media technologies to the point of competing with media tycoons. It is also because the “constraining effects” and “market pressures” cited above tend to lead minority concerns and perspectives into public invisibility. At best, “minorities who are sufficiently attractive for advertisers will benefit from media designated for them,” dragging unattractive or smaller minorities who do not accord with “popular taste” into oblivion (Hammer, 2007: 189, 194). Similarly, the opportunity of ethno-cultural minorities to play “the game” of lobbying is limited. Due to a lack of collective resources, it is often the case that ethno-cultural minorities cannot even indirectly influence politicians and political decisions by funding think tanks or by sponsoring scholars, opinion leaders, workshops and conferences in order to introduce certain issues into the

political agenda, set the terms for political debate, or simply influence the public opinion (Valadez, 2001: 177-178).

Against this background, ethno-cultural minorities may become part of different counter-hegemonic chains of differences and equivalences and may position themselves against different discursive constructions of “the enemy.” For example, they may become part of a *radical democratic* chain of differences and equivalences, struggling side by side with democrats, republicans, and leftists for what Anthony Giddens (2002: 69-73) calls “democratising democracy.” That is, they may position themselves against the colonization of democracy by economic system imperatives by struggling to cut each and every link between government officials and the business elite, to set barriers against the irresponsible commercialization of the media, and to ensure the democratization of politically influential yet economically motivated international organizations. They may do this in the name of peoples’ right to govern themselves under free and equal conditions. Ethno-cultural minorities may also form a *multicultural* chain of differences and equivalences with women, gays and lesbians, and transgender people against structural inequalities in political representation, and may ask for multicultural accommodations such as proportional representation in decision-making bodies and the media. In addition, they may form a *multinationalist* chain of differences and equivalences against the nation-state, especially when they are convinced that they require separate democratic institutions in order to protect their cultural and economic interests. Alternatively, considering that national sovereignty increasingly turns into an archaism because of transnational corporations and regional and international organizations such as the European Union, ethno-cultural minorities may find their collective identity in a *denationalizing* chain of differences and equivalences, struggling alongside *cosmopolitans* and *groups committed to the ideals of the Enlightenment* for the obliteration of nation-states and nativist sentiments.

3.3. Culture

One positive aspect of neoliberal globalism is that it leads to the emergence of “reflexive citizenries” (Giddens, 2002: 68). Specifically, the free mobility of individuals, technology, customs, ideas, and information exposes individuals in their everyday lives to different worldviews, lifestyles, ethno-cultural heritages, faiths, and languages. Moreover, it makes it impossible for traditional authorities to maintain their monopoly on the dissemination of information and to shield the traditional interpretation of national cultures against a multiplicity of reinterpretations and reinventions. This not only renders individuals capable of keeping their critical distance from what had formerly been off-limits to critical

reflection, but also gives them an opportunity to form hybrid, multiple, mixed, and fluid identities (Cantle, 2012: 47-52). However, the same process leading to a sort of *detraditionalization* may also, paradoxically, lead to a nativist *retraditionalization* (Cantle, 2012: 12-18). The reason is that the free mobility of individuals, technology, customs, ideas, and information, together with the impoverishment of traditional authorities and the formation of hybrid identities, threatens the “distinctiveness” of cultures, cultural identifications, and the traditional family. Hence, the world of traditionalism crumbles, and, as Giddens (2002: 26) writes, “Fundamentalism originates from a world of crumbling traditions” as a defensive reaction.

In the world of neoliberal globalism, and particularly in so-called developed countries, the experience of crumbling traditions is increasingly transformed into an alarmist xenophobia, especially owing to the influx of immigrants perceived by wider society as an “invasion by hordes of foreigners” (Castells, 2006: 64), not only threatening local cultures with their alien customs making one feel “a stranger in one’s own country,” but also causing unemployment or lower wages (Cuperus, 2011: 20). The xenophobia in question is condensed when local markets, long-established industries, low-skilled workers, working-class communities, and traditional forms of production are swallowed by the brands, investments, production techniques, and corporations of the “foreign” business elite, irresponsibly exploiting cheap labor power, benefiting from tax allowances and deregulation policies, and still having no attachment to “our” community; and when national-democratic sovereignty is handed over to transnational corporations and international organizations (Crouch, 2019: 60-65; Tamir, 2019: 9-10). The loss of national sovereignty and democratic power, combined with the sense of cultural and economic alienation, puts “gaps” in the social order of neoliberal globalism. One such “gap” is far-right populism.

Contrary to the empty signifiers employed by neoliberal globalism in order to condense its hegemonic social order, such as reflexivity, hybridity, and mobility, far-right populism is based on a nativist, xenophobic, and racist construction of a homogeneous “we, the people,” as opposed to “outsiders” and the “corrupt” global elite (Cuperus, 2011: 20). It claims to defend the interests of the true yet alienated and dispossessed people against what it portrays as a threat to the homogeneity and well-being of the “organic national community,” particularly immigrants (Wilson & Hainsworth, 2012: 11). What is especially worrisome is that far-right political parties in so-called developed countries have gathered a significant amount of votes for a significant amount of time. Hence, far-right populism does not refer to a mere aberration in the social order; it has “become an established political force in several European states” (Goodwin, 2001: 4). Support for far-right populism mostly comes from the “losers” of

neoliberal globalism, namely those whose employment prospects are threatened by immigrants and who cannot afford to be global like the business elite, such as blue-collar workers and the lower middle classes (Goodwin, 2001: 5).

Experiencing such a gap in the social order and threatened by the rise of fundamentalism, xenophobia, and racism, ethno-cultural minorities may increasingly find their collective identity in *liberal cosmopolitanism*. That is, they may become part of a liberal chain of differences and equivalences, comprising those who fight against xenophobic parochialism and who struggle for the entrenchment of universal human rights, liberalization of political culture and civil society, and dissemination of the ideals of humanist and critical thinking. However, they may also find their collective identity in a sort of *culturalism*. After all, minority communities are more vulnerable to the detraditionalizing effects of neoliberal globalism than the dominant majority. This is because their cultural way of life has already been decimated by the historical excesses of state nation-making, ranging from the prohibition of their language to forced resettlement and genocide (Gurr, 2000: 118, 128). It is also because they are often unable to turn their culture and language into a center of attraction for younger generations, either because they lack collective resources to accomplish this or because competence in their culture and language is not worth anything in wider society and in its marketplace. In such circumstances, ethno-cultural minorities may have the tendency to embrace what is often called “reactive culturalism” and thereby privilege the most conservative and rigid interpretation of their culture (Shachar, 2001: 35-37). It is worth noting that this reactive culturalism often leads to the suppression of women, as it is often women who are regarded as the “breeders” of younger generations. Nevertheless, it is also worth noting that the more that neoliberal globalism leads to detraditionalization, the more difficult it becomes to force traditional gender roles on women without causing intra-communal conflict and feminist backlash, and without leading to the exploitation of the gender issue by the dominant majority in order to prove the “backwardness” and “unworthiness” of minority cultures. Thus, it may be possible for ethno-cultural minorities to benefit from being exposed to the paradoxical effects of detraditionalization and retraditionalization and thereby find their collective identity in a form of *feminism*.

Conclusion

I have argued that due to its portrayal of minority concerns as mainly cultural concerns, the discourse of multiculturalism may lead to the essentialization and apoliticization of minority communities in the eyes of the dominant majority. I have claimed that this may endanger minority existence. Specifically, it may lead to the identification in the collective consciousness of

the dominant majority of the question of minority existence with the question of culture to the point that minorities voicing their non-cultural political concerns increasingly appear unintelligible, presumptuous, or even destructive to wider society. Against this background, I have attempted to formulate a non-culturalist conceptualization of minority existence.

In order to formulate why and how ethno-cultural minorities may be motivated to organize themselves against different economic, political, and cultural “gaps” in the social order and therefore find their collective identity in different, not necessarily ethno-cultural, political formations, I have employed the anti-essentialist ontology of Laclau and Mouffe. Aiming to challenge the essentialist and apolitical portrayal of ethno-cultural minorities in wider society, I have argued that the collective identity of ethno-cultural minorities may acquire several forms, such as anti-neoliberal, anti-globalist, cosmopolitan, environmentalist, anti-capitalist, feminist, radical democratic, republican, and anti-imperialist.

However, this does not mean that ethno-cultural minorities should never be considered as cultural entities or that multiculturalist policies should be categorically rejected. It only means that it is imperative to keep in mind that minorities may ask non-cultural political questions. That is, depending on the peculiarities of the national or regional context within which they find themselves, ethno-cultural minorities may face the urgency to determine which counter-hegemonic chains of differences and equivalences they can become part of. Similarly, alongside which groups and organizations can they form such chains? What position can they occupy within them, i.e., a hegemonizing or a hegemonized one? How much of their particularity can they be willing to give up in order to become part of a counter-hegemonic chain? Which empty signifiers can resolve the conflict between particularity and universality for them? Most importantly, depending on the context, which option is more useful, “self-alienating,” dangerous, or politically promising for them: to privilege their cultural concerns over the political ones or to become political to the point of downgrading the importance of cultural commitments, assuming that cultural commitments and political concerns do not *always* form a harmonious unity.

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