

RESETTING THE LEFT IN EUROPE
CHALLENGES, ATTEMPTS AND OBSTACLES

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Irena Ristić



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Challenges for the Left to go global: The disparity between centre and periphery¹

Abstract

Conflicting narratives of resistance exist within the contemporary European Left. One of the obstacles for the consolidation of contemporary European movements, which identify themselves with leftist traditions and/or goals is that the definition of 'Left' is not only blurred, but is furthermore divided into factions, which are continuously growing apart. These narratives are not necessarily conflicting, but they do emphasize different values and garner support from different groups. They also exhibit highly divergent levels of concern for rights of the growing refugee and immigrant population in Europe, women's rights, LGBT rights and minority rights in their respective countries. The growing aggressiveness of corporate capitalism leaves neither little room for the consolidation of those narratives, nor much chance for their separate success. In order for such narratives to become international, there needs to be an increased openness towards global cohesion, since the current dismissal of the periphery with all its immanent difficulties makes it impossible for peripheral movements and experiences to be perceived as internationally relevant.

Keywords: left, internationalism, inequality, periphery

■ The periphery is vulnerable to the loss of common ideas, markets and goods. Nationalism grows strong in the periphery as a result of deprivation and isolation. New nationalism is about restrictions and strengthening of borders around the centre, i.e. the EU in the case of the European periphery, especially in favour of the 'inner circle' of powerful founding states, thereby fuelling the destruction of common property and increasing levels of isolation.

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New forms of nationalism, xenophobia and national identity are manipulated as replacements for, for example, professional and class identity, and, in so-called 'culture wars', two kinds of identity are emphasized: racial, national, ethnic, regional and tribal at the group level, and sexual, political and cultural at the individual, as opposed to class and/or professional identity. We see this becoming more prominent on the periphery, which is already cut off from the 'normalcy' of civilization, with inequality being felt in the geographical and historical, as well as the social, dimension. Nationalism's strongest divisive properties act to feed both inequality and instability. It provides for enemies, within and without, to enable calls for sacrifices needed to overcome the danger, to punish the lazy, and to exclude those who could possibly coexist in solidarity.

Inequality is integral to disintegration on the global level; disintegration of communities, institutions and ideas, and provides fertile ground for nationalism. The loss of the very concept of common property is the loss of the ideal of humanity. We need common ground for survival and for dignity as human beings.

When looking into the contemporary works grappling with inequality it is clear that, although significant insights are being made into the specificities of the destructiveness of modern-day inequality, it remains difficult to see how the division between centres and peripheries will be overcome, even as centres, and peripheries with them, move and change place. It is as if the scarcity of resources is just a token in the game of dominance.

The very notion of 'centre' is presumptive; it is often the heritage of dominance and exploitation. On the level of self-perception, the importance of one's place in the world, one being a person, a gender, a profession, a nation, or any other group, is tied to the perception of others. If I am greeted with dismay or disdain at the very mention of my origins being from the Balkans, I would be more inclined to react in self-loathing ("nowhere else is such criminality possible", for example) or anger and self-aggrandizement ("we ate with gold forks when they were eating with their hands" type of nonsense). As objective as we as researchers aim to be, it is difficult to remain impassive to the careless insults hurled unthinkingly from the 'more civilized' places. Therefore, the notion of centre is important in geopolitical decisions (manifest destiny of

leaders of the Free World), and the notion of periphery is important in taking seriously anything, including theories and movements, emanating from there.

The Slovenian sociologist Rastko Močnik has searched for connections between socialism and nationalism: "However, contrary to the liberal nationalisms of the 19th century, and in even starker opposition to the anti-colonial nationalisms of the 20th century mostly inspired by socialism, contemporary 'nationalisms' require, and often succeed at imposing a quasi-authoritarian discipline upon their followers. If they come to power, they attempt an ideological *Gleichschaltung*, aligning of the whole society. [...] Ideological elements are mostly old, but their collage is new, and the present nations and real functioning of their states differs from the working of nationalisms in anti-imperial struggles of the 19th century and in anti-colonial endeavours of the 20th century. We may surmise that the operations of the ruling class alliances in the nation states, their political economy and ideology, are new and specific" (Močnik 2019, 24).

Indeed, when leaders of superpowers talk about 'national interests', the very interests of which they speak may be oceans apart, overwhelming and swallowing the interests of small nations. This is only natural in the geopolitical game of risk. This perspective gives their voters a sense of national pride in greatness, and if any lingering tendencies to real classical leftist thinking remain, including considerations of equality and human rights, they are easily externalized. The middle-class voters of Western Europe, North America, Japan and Australia (let us call it the West) feel extremely conscientious and generous when they participate in rallies against injustices in those sad places they cannot find on the map. Issues that may seem of lesser importance to someone threatened with poverty, or, at the very least, the endless drudgery of living in humble circumstances, take up a lot of energy. Bathrooms assigned to gender fluid people, national holidays in honour of minorities and such may look like true achievements. An extra euro for a 'fair trade' coffee in a Council of Europe canteen is all the sacrifice it takes to feel that we have helped the poor, exploited coffee growers in Africa and South America. Finer nuances of judicial process are discussed.

In contrast, in the countries of Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa and South America (let us term this the 'East', although obviously, this is not geographically correct) that are not blessed with long and continued established legal and democratic procedures, with long histories of poverty and/or colonization of different types, 'Western' concerns are often seen as frivolous, or even wrong-headed, and people instead feel virtuous for contributing to democratic struggles and attempts to bring about social and economic justice only by being directly involved in initiatives that can result in beatings and even jail time. They concern themselves with the right to vote and survival, being paid a living wage, and having access to and opportunities for education. Popular causes involve fair elections and the right to work, introducing fairer labour laws and such.

That is how it used to be for a time, but, as I mentioned earlier, times can change, centre and periphery are in a dialectical relationship, and, in every region, there are pockets of poverty and affluence, highly educated and ignorant people, violations of rights and abuse of privileges. The large-scale democratization of information, not supported by any kind of filing system that would make it readily obvious what is important and/or plausible, combined with a widespread misunderstanding of the right to an opinion and critical thinking, has produced fertile ground for populism as a global phenomenon sweeping all continents and types of government.

However, this has not given rise to an internationalization of problems, unless we count certain narrow influential groups. The problems of poverty are traditionally exported to a different neighbourhood, and, on a bigger scale, to a different continent. The sharp turn of capitalism towards financialization has produced dysfunction and inequality on a large scale, and the ubiquity of all kinds of news has made this even more obvious. The narrative of centre and periphery is once again being framed in moral terms. If one is at the centre (e.g. Washington or Paris, or Belgrade, in the case of Serbia), then the troubles of periphery (the rest of the world, inner city, Peripherique, Africa, the Sandžak) are often, even on reflex, viewed as provincial and too basic and 'uncool' to become involved in, or, conversely, also a deterrent, too intricate and

in need of local expertise. That is why it is so hopeful to see local initiatives achieve a modicum of success and connect to larger issues, as in the old environmentalist slogan “Think globally, act locally”.

Močnik traces the elements of modern-day populist tendencies, mostly in Europe, and even more pronounced on its periphery, to the history of those parts, with modern twists and ‘improvements’: “The features that suggest the analogy between the contemporary populism and historical fascism are the weakness of national bourgeoisie and its class re-composition by compensational reliance on state apparatuses, political mobilization of dissatisfied lower middle classes, and class de-composition of the working masses” (Močnik 2016, 3). But, of course, a lot of the old imagery that evoked nationalist goals is outdated, and the goals of the exploiters have evolved too.

Populism is not an ideology. It is a political methodology that can be used for different ideological goals. The problem, which is now being solved with populism, is how to make people less interested in the common problems of humanity. That is done by persuading them that their specific group (mostly the ‘nation’, but there are other forms of identity politics) is under constant threat from ‘others’. In addition, prosperity is moved into the future by establishing an understanding of reality as a maze of different groups that are involved in some sort of survival game. Hence, refugees are (illegally, according to international declarations) redefined as ‘migrants’, implying that they are in competition with the resident population. They are not even called immigrants, to avoid any suggestion that they might stay.

Močnik sees a problem with identity ideology: “Identity community is monistic and inwardly oppressive. [...] Identity ideology is also an efficient mechanism of domination, as it supports spontaneous survival strategies employed in working people’s households, and reproduces their position of the oppressed and exploited” (Močnik 2016, 13).

It is all the more effective at the periphery, because it is difficult to be removed from financial and decision-making centres and still compete in the best capitalist tradition. The explanation comes from the paranoia of proximity of intruders: “Therefore, we can see

more and more borders on the periphery, borders are getting more impermeable for people, and more porous for capital. When globalization reaches every village on the periphery, then every fence becomes a border" (Močnik 2016, 60).

It is necessary to make many borders in order to better exert control in what is accepted as universal (capital) and what is to be managed as separate (people). In order to justify those delineations, we often use intolerance: "Intolerance is a power ploy of marking territory and delineating borders through marking other things as stupid, bad, crazy, ugly, intolerable, insufferable, unbearable. Not to tolerate is to exclude, isolate, define, mark. Dogs piss on the ground for that purpose, we often put a flag up" (Mićunović 1999, 289).

The Left will never be successful without internationalism. True internationalism is not possible without respect for different places, nations and ethnicities. The very concept of 'centre', of 'free world' is detrimental to the respect for those who live, and create – whether they thrive or survive – on the periphery. It is necessary to problematize the centre/periphery dialectic in order to make room for diversity and understanding. Equality of possibilities can only be striven for in those circumstances, and that is why those circumstances are the prerequisite of the successful movement for equality and for international understanding (let us give up the lofty and hollow dreams of 'international order' and 'international community'). Lenin defined communism as soviet rule and electrification. The new Left should include in the definition of the Green New Deal components addressing equality and international understanding. For this, we need to do more than just tolerate others, the different. There is plenty of mention of 'inclusion' in the corporate documents of transnational institutions, but very little understanding.

As Močnik says: "Ideology of tolerance is only an addition from the other side to the intolerance on this side, so it is to be expected that 'liberal-democratic' politics will in practice be intolerant, although tolerant in their programs" (Močnik 2016, 189). That is so because it is not the true aim of those policies for there to be tolerance, but to present the game as fair, and then rig it. "[...] Parties that work on restoration of capitalism do not do anything else,

except use state (repressive, ideological) violence to bring about *new relations of oppression and exploitation*" (Močnik 2016, 190). The primary identity therefore becomes national, and economic relations are not called into question, making it even more difficult for leftist politics to cross borders, or even gain footing in one country or across one nation.

It is not possible to export all of the problems of the centre(s) to the periphery. The very core of European ideals is corrupted by the management of the 'migrant' crisis (unwillingness of rich European countries to honour their obligations to refugees according to the international documents that they themselves created), management of the health crisis (the 'pirate rules' suddenly in effect when medical supplies are insufficient), management of the economic crisis (considerable societal resources used to protect corporate entities, to the detriment of resources allocated for citizens); and "the centre doesn't hold, all that is solid melts into air". The periphery is ill-equipped to absorb the fallout ('migrants' on the 'Balkan Route', the American-Chinese battle for digital supremacy, swift financialization of the remnants of the economy). The constant bickering (sometimes with fatalities) at the edges of old empires is corroding any progress ever made in making those peripheral places in the image of the central powers.

It is corroding even the centre, as Varoufakis has commented, in regard to the disintegration processes in Europe: "Grexit, in short, was the weapon the EU forged and used to force successive Greek governments into accepting their country's incarceration in the neoliberal equivalent of a Victorian workhouse. Brexit, by contrast, was a home-grown aspiration, rooted in the structural incompatibility between laissez-faire Anglo-Saxon capitalism and continental corporatism, and invoked by a coalition comprising sections of Britain's aristocracy that successfully co-opted working-class communities wrecked by Margaret Thatcher's industrial vandalism. These voters desperately wanted to punish the cosmopolitan London elites for treating them like long-devalued livestock" (Varoufakis 2019). It is even more corrosive on the periphery, where there is less confidence and fewer resources, and our role models are leading us astray.

Why is it so difficult for the Left to use the growing inequality politically?

The Left is different in the West, traditionally defined as the capitalist world centred around Western Europe and its most successful colonies; the USA, Canada and Australia. In the French and Anglo-Saxon political tradition, there is a feeling of being 'at home' in democratic practices and 'caught up' with history, and disturbances in the force are seen as aberrations, while the 'normal standard' of living, doing business, legal matters and democratic procedures are taken for granted. On the contrary, there is a feeling in the periphery (obviously including the Balkans) that we are going backward, there is a confusion of thinking that we somehow first have to catch up with all those civilizational developments in order to start complaining about our situation. Indeed, 'leftist leanings', understood as striving for greater rights, come from the top of the educated classes, education having not been long enough connected to economic upward mobility to solidify into class.

Nevertheless, the following issues should be confronted:

- 1) There is a profound global crisis of environment, equality and democracy.
- 2) The forces of 'whatever this is, if you're unwilling to call it neoliberalism' are getting stronger.
- 3) The answers come from different – some even dangerous – places.
- 4) The Left is dissociated from identity, nationalism, political ambition, lack of understanding and inner conflicts.
- 5) The inevitable resolution of the crisis as it spirals out of control, unless the Left (using the term broadly) can consolidate, will be dark and backward, stemming from the extreme Right.
- 6) In order to claim the solution, the Left must unite.
- 7) Unification cannot come through negotiation, but through claiming a true international idea.
- 8) Internationalism is ultimately a leftist idea, with the main difference between Right and Left in dealing with globalization being the difference between imperialistic/capitalistic

bargaining between nations and/or companies, and holding true to an idea that can be understood across all nations (let us avoid the term 'universal' for the time being).

- 9) Therefore, the only way for the Left to create a field of possible resistance through giving it a widely acceptable context is through embracing the idea of a new international, at least in spirit.

In order to forge an international alliance, or even something on a smaller scale, it is necessary to bear in mind the 'common property', for which citizens need to understand why they, individually or collectively, belong there. In order to 'own' a universal, international, humanistic ideal or identity, it is necessary to be clear on *who* they are, and *what* are their goals, interests and values. That is hindered by the constant onslaught of false, imposed, or at least suggested identity and loyalty, to the state, company and ethnic group. "It is important for the hegemonic liberal project to have people have an indeterminate identity, so people are in a state of constant profound confusion, incapacitating them for any revolutionary action" (Mićunović 2018, 13).

Unfortunately, the identity chosen as important for the expression of dissatisfaction is rarely a class identity, which in itself is a term derided by nationalists and liberals as old-fashioned and irrelevant. We would understand more about this 'striving for status' and not necessarily deem irrational every non-material goal if we were to use some old-fashioned economic terms to define it. The exchange value *is* the use value because status is something we *use* to enhance our sense of value, to make up for things that we might actually need. But capitalism at this stage cannot function if we become aware of our true needs and interests and if we come to value solidarity and humanistic ideals. It wages a modernized class warfare, because it is no longer acceptable for the masses to be modestly comfortable, there are simply too many people, plundering the majority of them in a race to the bottom is a necessity of making profit at this stage.

As Varoufakis (2018) observed: "[...] independently of establishment politicians' aims and their ideological smokescreens, capitalism has been evolving. The vast majority of economic decisions

have long ceased to be shaped by market forces and are now taken within a strictly hierarchical, though fairly loose, hyper-cartel of global corporations. Its managers fix prices, determine quantities, manage expectations, manufacture desires, and collude with politicians to fashion pseudo-markets that subsidize their services. The first casualty was the New Deal-era aim of full employment, which was duly replaced by an obsession with growth. [...] Austerity's pervasiveness thus reflects an overarching dynamic that, under the guise of free-market capitalism, is creating a cartel-based, hierarchical, financialized global economic system. [...] The result is not only unnecessary hardship for vast segments of humanity. It also heralds a global doom loop of deepening inequality and chronic instability".

The vast segments of humanity Varoufakis mentions are disproportionately from the periphery. Anything happening at the local scale, especially if the locality is at the periphery, is easily dismissed as an unimportant aberration.

The problems of consolidation of contemporary movements that identify with leftist traditions and/or goals is that the definition of the Left is not only blurred, but is also divided into factions that continuously grow further apart. The major goals of any leftist political movement are oriented toward solving the problems of humanity, specifically the lack of equality, freedom, solidarity and connectedness. Contemporary problems of humanity are vast and varied. We may sometimes not be compatible in our understanding of them, nor in our attempts at solutions. One of the problems of the traditional Left is that it was over-dependent on equality implemented on an equal footing, not taking into account individual beneficiaries' different, sometimes even incompatible, interests.

The necessity of renewal of an international for the Left-oriented resistance

In the words of Naomi Klein, we missed a step in keeping up with progress, our societies developed at a different pace to technology, production, population and globalization: "This is a story about bad timing. [...] And little wonder: just when we needed to gather, our public sphere was disintegrating; just

when we needed to consume less, consumerism took over virtually every aspect of our lives; just when we needed to slow down and notice, we sped up; and just when we needed longer time horizons, we were able to see only the immediate present” (Klein 2014).

Articulating a resistance movement as a leftist one, now that the targets have moved and converged while, at the same time, the goals of the Left seem to have become more diverse, is a difficult task. Diversity in the Left is not a bad thing; it has shown that the Left has evolved to include things that were either on the margins or non-existent in the ‘glory days’ of the 1960s, when we were all internationalists and equated patriotism with imperialism, which it is. This does not mean that participants need to be homogenized, or debatable subjects restricted. It means that articulation of action informed by solidarity and shared values needs to evolve in order not to lag behind the Right and ideologically neutral populist politics, which have both adapted well to the new scene and are gaining ground. ‘Leftist’ cannot mean exactly the same what it did historically; it has to be more flexible and more encompassing. But that should not impede clarity and intensity of purpose. Once again, as always, it is a question of life and death. Life and death of ethnic and cultural minorities, refugees, wage slaves, and the abandoned children, women and men trapped in war zones of arms and of scarcity.

There is a possibility of a ‘velvet revolution’ that could be a sort of cultural revolution (which is certainly needed and necessary before we can even think of any change), in which we would again address, with more vigour than in the 1960s, questions about our values of hard work and stability. It is possible that, after all this experience, like a person entering middle age, with any luck, our civilization will stop taking itself so seriously and embrace a floating kind of destiny, instead of curling up in fear of a new and (setting aside the question of whether certainty is an illusion) uncertain one.

These major narratives can be recognized: 1) civil rights and political liberties are not fully realized, as emphasized by unequal access to justice addressed by #BlackLivesMatter and

similar movements; 2) sexual harassment and other manifestations of gender inequality addressed in, for example, the #Me-Too movement, are rampant; 3) there is a growing rebellion against increasing inequality, as exemplified by #OccupyWall-Street; 4) there is an urge to protect what is left of the heritage of indigenous peoples as in #PipeLine; 5) the rights of immigrants are to be protected, as in #freeChildren.

There are many more, and that gives us hope that the philosophy of profit didn't envelop all social interactions. There is often criticism that these movements contribute to the 'culture wars' through their delineation of different groups by their stark differences and seemingly competing narratives of marginalization. These narratives are not of necessity conflicting, but they do emphasize different values and gain support from different groups. They also have a different level of concern for rights of the growing refugee and immigrant populations, women's rights, LGBT rights and minority rights in their respective countries. It is almost as the 'Think globally, act locally' slogan has gone awry, and it is now increasingly difficult to find commonalities in the very unequal and diverse world.

The 'new' problems facing humanity are: a) climate and environment; b) (over-)population and disease; c) a lack of political and economic influence for the lower 90%; d) diminishing tolerance for diversity; e) fake news and general lack of education; f) diminishing resources; and g) the spreading of conflicts. We are talking about these as if they are 'new' problems because the narrative of possible never-ending progress laid aside worries of our inherent limitations and contradictions as a species. It was considered pessimistic to dwell on disasters with a bright future within grasp. Humble realism is more present in the first generation that is going to live with less comfort and abundance than their parents, and values of humanity emerge again in a new guise that encompasses the living world. This does not occur, however, without intergenerational tensions in understanding what humanistic goals should be.

We should not forget the importance of vast generational gaps in values, income, expectations and influence. Looking at a demographic chart recently, I was shocked to discover that,

while being born in 1957, I am considered a baby boomer. I am fairly certain that is an expansive definition of that generation. Researchers and policy makers need those charts; they have to delineate different groups in order to determine who gets which incentive, opportunity or restriction. They remind us of, but poorly describe, the vast changes in the socio-economic landscape over the past 50 years. "The generational gap between baby boomer parents, co-conspirators of greed and privilege who still admit no wrong and their millennial or whatever offspring who are given no hope and doomsday clocks of all kinds are looming over their heads is heightened by the illusion that there ever was a better future. The future in question and the struggle of recreating the world of their parents puts young people in the less fortunate position even when there are privileges granted to them, they will not sustain their status and wellbeing in the dystopian society in the making" (Mićunović 2019, 72).

This is an important, often downplayed, divide. Our 'prisoner's dilemma' can be articulated in this way: *Why should I care how other people's children will live in years to come, when I will no longer be around, since they do not care for the elderly, and I feel alone in my old age?* That dilemma cannot be resolved within the confines of self-interest. We must include some values of humanity as a species, and, even more, as a project. It is important that we make significant progress in that area soon. Social progress has been slow, but circumstances, natural and technological alike, have caught up with it, and are threatening our very survival. We need to find common ground in the foreseeable future.

The lack of sheer understanding of what might be 'in common' for different sexes, generations, classes and nations is fuelling the divisions that are becoming dangerous. Obviously, it is not the same if one is 30 or 60, but should it make for an almost adversarial relationship? Intergenerational solidarity is a difficult thing to achieve, but should we not at least try? The struggle for gender equality is in a stage of constantly embattled progress and growing backlash. Interracial and interethnic harmonies seem as far away as in the last century.

Internationalism is essential in any attempt to solve any problem, yet, the divisiveness of nationalism stands in the way. Transnationalism failed because transnational institutions became either dominated by their stronger participants, or became a landscape for permanently contested negotiation. For example, if the IMF advocates privatization, that identifies them as a contrary force to transnationalism, or, at least, any true internationalism, and shows the Fund's true nature as a multinational corporation as opposed to a transnational institution. "In contrast to internationalism and with the constraints imposed on international relations by the transnational institutions, there is an expected turn to nativism as the policy of protecting the interests of native-born or established inhabitants against those of immigrants, similar to local eating, and general flaky resistance to globalization" (Mićunović 2019, 72). It is difficult to forge alliances when there is so much diversity and so little inclusion, but we can build them on the basis of internationalism.

The main idea of the Left, especially in its origins as an international(ist) movement, was equality, something that is possibly more needed now than ever before. In the relationships between different countries, different social groups and different proximities to actual decision-making, there is growing inequality. Inequality is closely tied to all other problems; it is redefined by the importance of access to new technologies, new democratic practices, relevant and reliable information, and resources that are becoming scarce. The justifications of inequality by appealing to merit are redefined by what merit *is*, and arguably even more so, by sources of income, property, inheritance, privilege or influence.

Inequality cannot be fought only at the local scale, and that is why the essence of the Left must include true internationalism, one that recognizes diversity but also recognizes the universal goal of equality. That is something that has been promised, and not only by the Left, that is also something that is not just a special interest, but necessary for the sustainability of human society as we know it. Transnational organizations were entrusted with developing that internationalism, but their success in that area has been extremely limited.

The role of transnational organizations in the cartelization of the global economy and its dominance over all other aspects of livelihoods is rooted in their integration of proposed standards into the system in such a way that the products of transnational organizations (treaties, recommendations, development projects) are incorporated into the dominance of the managed delivery of all resources and their outputs to the global economy, which in turn has come to be dominated by increasingly financialized cartels. The values inherent in internationalism are reinterpreted as outputs of projects geared towards dominance and the plunder of resources. "Inequality is integral to disintegration on the global level, disintegration of communities, institutions and ideas, and it's breeding nationalism. The loss of the very concept of commons is the loss of the ideal of humanity, without which, belonging reverts to race, gender, religious affiliation or something even less tangible, like a sports club" (Mićunović 2019, 74). Commons, or common properties/goods, are important for our notion of ourselves as members of society. Of course, we can side with Margaret Thatcher, and state that there is no such thing as 'society', but rather only individuals, but in any kind of belonging we need not only recognition of ourselves and others, we also need that common ground, and, in a very real way, we need commons as grounds for survival. If the Earth is not a place for all of its inhabitants, if the economy is not a system in which we can all survive with dignity, the perpetual sense of danger, something regularly presented to us in the media, will eventually completely replace our feeling of belonging to any community.

We are also regularly kept from knowing about and understanding, let alone participating in, decisions about our physical, economic and social environment. The constant spin about a supposed battle for world domination, making secrets necessary, insinuating lurking dangers, and the separation of the financial sector from the real economy make us all dependent on decisions made without our understanding or influence. For this to change, it is necessary to revive participatory democracy, that is, true involvement of citizens in governance. This would require the redefinition of democratic procedures, of economic

relations and of educational goals. Internationalism and the balance between centre and periphery could foster the necessary changes. Leftist movements, if working in solidarity, could contribute to an optimistic refashioning of the humanity project in such a way.

It is important to distinguish the hope that is inherent in the vision of international solidarity, sometimes still glimpsed in the event of a global catastrophe, solidarity and humanist ideals best represented in the spontaneous protests, sometimes achieving global attention, and the 'international community' residing in transnational organizations, which keep their importance in play through negotiations into which they factor their particular interests. There is a great potential for the renewal of the true leftist ideals of equality and internationalism. We must look for it in initiatives born of struggle. Established institutions tend to solidify around a stance that is no longer appropriate. In order for a leftist movement to be accountable, it must be owned by the people and not by corporations, as can happen with established parties and international institutions.

In order to maintain hope for a change that can benefit humanity, restore potential and diminish inequality, we have to give a chance to the existing leftist movements. The European leftist movements are struggling: 1) The British Labour Party and the DiEM25 (Democracy in Europe Movement 2025) pan-European movement are yet to be tested. Pan-Europeanism is not really internationalism, but at least it is an attempt to transcend both the nationalisms so present in Europe and the corporate agenda of European transnational institutions. It is about political and civil rights, political and decision-making equality; 2) The Yellow Vests movement in France is about workers' rights, economic equality, end of corporate greed (theirs is the demand for caps on salaries at 15,000 euros per month); 3) The Green Party of Germany, coexisting with a variety of interest groups but insistent on environmental rights (a province of the Left, because the Right, as exemplified by Trump, is not keen on any impediment to exhausting natural resources); 4) *Omas Gegen Rechts* "Grannies Against the Right" is an Austrian movement founded by older women in order to preserve what they see as true

European values of inclusion, equality, tolerance and solidarity, against the tide of the Right, which they see as manipulating masses and democratic procedures to erode those values. These are examples of initiatives that may fail, but yet show that dissent to the prevailing narrative is commonplace and widespread.

Nationalism is one of the issues that will inevitably be entangled with inequality, because of the dominance of certain races and ethnic groups over others. There is the question of 'good' nationalism. Colonialism is bad, and decolonization movements, in order to aspire to self-determination, fostered nationalism, and, since any kind of national pride was forbidden and taken from them, it was construed as a facet of self-affirmation. That, of course, did not only disseminate conflict between smaller communities, but allowed for a false solidarity, tribal-based instead of class-based. Civil rights movements established the minimum of civil rights for all and awakened the need for political freedoms in everyone, those who were oppressed and those who were merely complacent alike. But a backlash came, and we have to wonder: *What went wrong with cosmopolitanism, internationalism, globalism and transnationalism?*

There are many reasons for transnational institutions having failed to help build internationalism. They were controlled by imperialistically minded officials of powerful nations. There was a lack of understanding of the dialectic between economy and politics. Most importantly, the TINA (there is no alternative) mantra, so beloved by the financialized capitalist powers, was hypnotic in its simplicity and versatility, incorporating many calls for dominance and exploitation.

The political movements of the Left (traditionally, speaking of equality and humanity as a whole) are in danger of becoming a maze of particularities, seemingly old-fashioned and irrelevant. There is a danger in voicing reasonable well-meaning ideas, that are never so full of promise as a beautiful lie, but neither can be as daunting as an assumed obligation. Maybe the commonalities of humanity have been overrated, and it's easier to find commonalities in smaller groups. Furthermore, the great opportunities that globalization created have also acted as great temptations for unbridled greed and unfounded ambition.

New challenges arose from certain improvements in international relations that were not supported by sufficient foresight and good faith. Decolonization opened up a new market for transnational exploitation. Technological progress made advances in war and trade quicker and more difficult to counter. Introduction of indigenous cultures to the world stage relativized social standards based on customs idiosyncratic to Western culture. Financialization of the economy, partially a by-product of digitalization, introduced spiralling economic inequality in national societies and in the international arena. "Going back to nationalism is a way to confirm values (national, religious, traditional, for the lack of any universal ones) and fulfil interests (national, class, etc.). That is why we see a number of new (or recycled) grass roots movements that are xenophobic and entrenched in nationalistic view of history. Global protest in the spirit of true internationalism is in part difficult to imagine because of all the bits of incomplete contradictory information floating around which makes little drops of protest less likely to coalesce, as well as the 'modern way of life' which seems like a waste of life on administration and entertainment. The noted exception is #FridaysForFuture, the series of idealistic protests of high school students against lack of action for the protection of the environment. The way of life that requires constant vigilance against predators and distraction from thinking cannot truly be called progress" (Mićunović 2019, 77).

There is a dwindling source of space, energy and time; education, health services and public transportation are eroded, justified by the mantra of TINA, causing the vanishing of commons in any sense, and with them the very understanding of community. It is questionable whether the people who have become disunited by the call for competition and distance, vast income and opportunity differences and identity issues of race, gender, ethnicity and sexuality that linger on, could consider any purpose as other than utilitarian, something that is reinforced by the narrative of wartime rhetoric, i.e. "we can't afford", "we have to sacrifice", "we measure how much more that person can contribute before we disconnect them from the respirator". People are warriors, producers, consumers, worshippers,

breeders *en masse* for the privileged few. If most of those functions can be and are constantly replaced and/or made obsolete by technology, maybe efforts at sustaining the species itself and millions of individuals would likewise dwindle.

There is a question arising from the twin forces of technological progress and financialization, combined with growing inequality and dwindling resources. What will be the purpose of people? If people have previously been reduced to soldiers, voters, workers and consumers, often without much regard for their individual happiness, what will happen when these roles become redundant? It is time to forcefully assert the value of humanity as a project that includes respect for individuals.

We can already see how this is played out upon the periphery. Whole regions are dismissed as unimportant, whole areas of rich countries are left without necessary aid (as happened after Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana and again after Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico) and the UN cannot raise funds to stave off hunger in Yemen. The rights of refugees are denied to people from Syria and Afghanistan, and children are separated from their parents at the border between Mexico and the USA. It is only a matter of time until large numbers of people who, for the time being, consider themselves middle class, and live in middle-income countries, will be faced with such dire need, but there will be fewer people left to speak on their behalf.

We are faced with a choice not dissimilar to the prisoner's dilemma. In the classic prisoner's dilemma, one gambles that someone else's behaviour will be worse than their own. Now it's the case that people are reluctant to recycle while 'scarce' resources are used to maintain golf courses.

If leftist movements, and not all movements are leftist (to paraphrase Alain Badiou '*tout ce qui bouge n'est pas rouge*'), are to gain any traction, they have to address at least some commonalities. Class is too stable a concept for today's busily changing world. We need to recognize that trampling on our basic human, social, economic and cultural rights is contrary to leftist principles, and then maybe we can make those movements coalesce. Solidarity is not something that is foreign to the modern world; it is mostly just confused by stories of division and

scarcity. According to Sartre, scarcity can be overcome in the material world, but it is much more difficult to do so in spirit, which is why exploitation does not always end with satisfaction: more is always needed.

The question of centre and periphery is closely connected with the question of Right and Left: While the Political Left is open to the understanding of polycentricity of the world, ideas and roles we play in society at large, the Political Right has always been conservative in the sense of maintaining the established hierarchies of fixed (unequal) roles. It is very difficult to imagine the spread of leftist ideas at a global level, because throughout history this has not really happened, with some form of geopolitical play always translating such ideas into spheres of influence. The missing ingredient is a care for the needs of strangers (Ignatieff 2001): in a scary, uncompromising prisoner's dilemma manner, 'our' destinies are intermingled with 'theirs', not mediated through hierarchy or different entrenched political causes, but understanding that, however far apart, we are still neighbours.

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