

# Nationalism and Ethnic Particularism

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**Editor:** There has been a renewed outcry against ethnic particularism in the light of ethnic conflicts in Eastern Europe and in Somalia. It's not unusual to hear, particularly in liberal and progressive circles, calls for a renewed commitment to universal values that can transcend all the narrow particularisms that some say crawled out of the woodwork in recent years. Yet the call for international solidarity may seem jarring to some, because the academic defenders of liberal and progressive social change movements have spent so much of their intellectual energies in the past couple of years challenging the possibility of any universal standards. Theorists in women's studies, African-American studies, and deconstructionists in literature and the social sciences have argued for the primacy of particularity and perspectival views of morality, and for a theory of incommensurability of discourse that suggests that every ethical claim is merely the articulation of the needs and interests of a particular group or ethnic tradition. By implication, those who speak from their particular perspective, for example, white males in the West, have no basis from which they could possibly articulate a universal moral critique of anyone else's behavior. Given that approach, originally articulated as an attempt to protect minority cultures and women from the hegemonizing power of male discourse, but now increasingly an impediment to the possibility of forming any universal moral perspective, what exactly do liberals and progressives have to contribute to the discussion of national conflicts in the world today?

**Michael Walzer:** I want to put forward three theses related to the politics of particularism:

1. Particularist identities and the commitments and passions that go with them are simply a fact of human life, whatever we decide to think about them.

2. The political expression of this particularism can be repressed or controlled, and has been pretty successfully controlled by imperialist and authoritarian regimes. National and religious communities can live quietly and peacefully when they are ruled by imperial bureaucrats or by disciplined agents of a vanguard party.

3. Men and women of the Left can't endorse that kind of a rule. So we have to look for political ways of accommodating the particularist realities; and that, it seems to me, should be the topic of this discussion, and not the value of this or that particular identity or even the value of particularist identities in general.

**Jean Bethke Elshtain:** I just returned from Hungary and Czechoslovakia. What I was told was that these countries faced for decades communist regimes that used nationalistic rhetoric when it suited their interests. Nationalism was not suppressed but encouraged within this framework. These regimes fueled nationalist sentiments and even anti-Semitism when it was useful for their purposes.

I would distinguish between ethnic nationalism and what I would call civic patriotism that emphasizes citizenship, universalist in the sense that everyone can become part of the civic identity without effacing their own particular identities.

**Gail Kligman:** I am troubled about the notion that what we are facing in Eastern Europe is the reemergence of a kind of inevitable set of ethnic conflicts. Ethnic identities were always manipulated by Party elites, not suppressed while some kind of international or "socialist" identity was being constituted.

Nationalist discourses are always manipulated by elites; we need to pay attention to the internal dynamics of power interests. In Eastern Europe, anti-Semitism was so manipulated, and so too other ethnic hatreds—e.g., in Romania, a hatred of Hungarians, Gypsies, etc. Ceausescu spent years nurturing nationalist feelings and fears—often suggesting to his people that the Russians were massing on one of their borders and the Hungarians on another; this was an effective mobilization tactic for regime support, at least initially.

Many in the West have paid too much attention to official rhetoric and not enough attention to actual practices. Too many ignored the way that particularism was



in fact a part of the everyday lives of most people in those allegedly homogenized societies.

**Bogdan Denitch:** Some people who discuss the issues of ethnic particularism and nationalism mix up legitimate ethnic pride with the murderous, manipulated right-wing chauvinism that we witness today in many parts of Eastern Europe. They are treating this chauvinism as if it were some variant of democratic, nineteenth century Mazzinian nationalism. But what we are seeing is not that, but rather “blood and soil” nationalism and you cannot sign on.

In the case of the former Yugoslavia, the nationalists are quite clear: you cannot opt to become a Croat or a Serb, you have to be that by blood. They are intent on creating states that are states of the dominant national group that exclude others or that render the minorities second-class citizens. Any yielding to that on the part of democrats or people on the Left is a *major* mistake. There will be hundreds of thousands, if not millions, dead before this issue gets straightened out.

I don't believe that the nationalism we are seeing sprung up organically from the masses who were just waiting for the opportunity to get at each other's throats. I think it was manipulated nationalism, first by the communist elites, and now by the post-communists who can only attempt to manipulate these kinds of feelings since they have nothing else to offer in the current catastrophic economic situation.

I believe that there are universal ideals like human rights—and I reject any view that suggests that these are merely white, male, or Western. Human rights and democracy are not particularistic ideas, they are fought for all around the world, and there are universal attempts by local elites to suppress these ideas and to impose right-wing dictatorships as an alternative. Human rights are more important than a politics of identity. But a politics of identity, as long as it doesn't mobilize the resources or power of the state, is okay. But that's not what we are talking about in Eastern Europe—we are talking about nationally based states who do use the power of the state, and that's different.

**Todd Gitlin:** I agree with Michael Walzer that particularist identities are a fact of life, and I'm not sure there has ever been a form of life in which that hasn't been true. But universal aspirations, beliefs that one belongs to all humanity, are also a fact of life. The mission of the Left is to look for, call attention to, and insist on commonalities that cross particularist tribal or national boundaries. The Left is a boundary crosser. In a world in which the centrifugal forces of separation are rampant, a world in which those separate identifications often become lethal, at the very least because they are manipulated from above,

it behooves us to insist upon the universal condition, and to do so in all circumstances, whether we are in the big tribe or the small tribe, whether we are facing tribes that are most recently ruthless or tribes whose ruthlessness was manifested further back in history.

It's the mission of the Left in particular to overcome all these forms of hatred and ruthlessness. That entails stating and holding to a common standard in two respects: first, it requires a commitment to human rights as a prerequisite to a civic patriotism that transcends the boundaries of one tribe and insists among all tribes that coexistence is the prerequisite of civilization. Second, the Left must promote the recognition that the world is interdependent, both socially and ecologically. This is a central universal fact: that all peoples share one earth and we are facing a common condition.

**Marshall Berman:** Several things strike me. One is that connected to the surge of particularist politics is an explosion of aggressiveness, rage, and liberation from the superego—“we don't have to listen to you anymore, we don't care what you think, to hell with you.” There's a tremendous exhilaration in saying those kinds of things to people who seemed to have the power to define what is “rational speech” and “rational behavior” for the society; a position that gives the definer a certain kind of power. On the other hand, when someone says “It's a Black thing, you can't understand it,” that claim is meant to be understood. A lot of the discourse of “your language is incommensurable with mine” is actually meant to be commensurable; it is, in fact, a reaching out to the other while simultaneously denying the possibility of doing so, a reaching out for the humanity of others that it simultaneously denies. That's the good side.

One of the things that I noticed when I read a rant from a West Bank settler and then compared it with a rap from a young Black man in Los Angeles is how sexy they both sounded. I think the Left has to find a way to make humanism sexy. What's the way? There's actually some pretty sexy humanism in Jewish tradition: for instance, if we imagine Isaiah's animals as signifying different races or types of human beings, there's his vision of the wolf and the lamb and the leopard and the calf and the lion and the kid all “lying down together”: or take Second Isaiah's vision of an “open city” where the gates stay open all night, where all the peoples are gathered together, where the wealth of nations never stops pouring in. These are pretty good images to nourish our imagination. But we can find this imagery actually embodied in the flesh, if we check out the crowds in any American metropolis today. Take a walk on Broadway—or at your best local mall—some Saturday or Sunday afternoon, and look at the families out shopping: you'll





see men and women of every color and complexion with their arms around each other and their children in strollers or carried on their backs; and look at those kids, they are bringing new colors and complexions never seen or even imagined into the world. For anyone who can see and feel, this is one of the sexiest sights of the late twentieth century. (This is what Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever* was supposed to be about, but its pregnancy was aborted.) I believe that one of the primary human rights is the right to belong to a family like this. One of the nicest things about America today, maybe even *the* nicest thing, is its capacity to incubate and nurture millions of multiracial and multinational families. Green lines violate this right and stifle this capacity; I know there are times and places where we have to live with them, but I don't think the Left should promote more green lines or see them as anything but a desexualization and emptying-out of life.

**Denitch:** One of the problems that gets in the way of some Jews thinking clearly about these issues is their confusion between the problems associated with Zionism and the quite different problems emerging in Eastern Europe. It is as if Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia all happened to be asserting now the right of return. I happen to think that there are special reasons why that right makes some

sense in the case of Israel, but it makes no sense in the case of Eastern Europe where I am for states being states for all their citizens, not just for one national grouping. In Croatia a third generation Croat who lives in Australia or New Zealand and doesn't speak the language today is being given the right to vote in the Croatian election, whereas a Moslem, Albanian or Serb who has lived all his or her life in Croatia may or may not get a citizenship. This cannot be what a democratic polity is about.

**Editor:** The argument that each of these groups makes is that the reason that members of their own national groupings now live outside the country is the result of past oppression by one or another of the other national groupings in the area.

**Denitch:** The whole area has had emigration. I do not think that there was national oppression in the former Yugoslavia for any group except the Albanians—except communist oppression, but that wasn't focused on nationality.

**Editor:** Each of the groups has memories that go far beyond a hundred years—and each of those groups can point to historical moments in which they were in fact victims to the imperializing tendencies of some of the other groups.



**Denitch:** All nationalists make the claim that their nation is the martyred nation. In the case of Poland and in the case of Ireland they use Catholic iconography to bolster this sense of martyrdom—but these are used in anti-democratic ways.

**Editor:** Can't there be truth to these claims, and can't there be legitimacy to the desire to want some redress, without these claims or desires necessarily being antidemocratic?

**Denitch:** I don't think an average Pole, Croat or Irishman suffers today for what was done in the eighteenth century—I think that perception is merely an illusion, but it is an illusion that makes these people act in hurtful ways and sometimes kill others. I do not think national oppression centuries ago justifies murdering people who weren't even born or whose ancestors weren't even around when this occurred. This mythology of the past functions as a killer today.

**Editor:** Absolutely. But it may be that jumping to various internationalist or universalist positions may not work until each national tradition is willing to publicly own up to the pain that it has caused others as well as the pain it has received from others, to validate the pain that it has caused others, and mourn its own pain. Without working through the past, the pains may continue on an unconscious level, transmitted from generation to generation, and become the focus through which the anger people are feeling today about living in social arrangements that prevent a deeper connection between them gets expressed. That is, since there are no contemporary social movements that can embody and express people's deepest desires for connection with each other, the anger and alienation that is central to daily life gets expressed in this perverse way, because the community within which one lives seems to legitimate the expression of anger at the "other"—who can now be seen as the embodiment of the historical forces that have prevented us from achieving the kind of nonalienating social life that we seek.

**Kligman:** Historical memory is very selective and is readily reinterpreted by elites. Take a look at Bosnia where mixed populations were living side by side reasonably enough—and now they are slaughtering each other. Not to romanticize prewar life at the local level, relations were constantly negotiated, contested, etc. But people do not live simply in harmony. There are tensions that erupt into violence in nonethnically mixed villages. In the case of mixed populations, cultural difference enables "otherness" and "identity" to be more sharply dif-

ferentiated. This is where the politics of culture comes into play. Some of what has happened in Bosnia is fueled by the ongoing manipulation of the past in the service of present political interests of diverse elites.

**Denitch:** A mythic past!

**Kligman:** A mythic past, and one which is embedded in cultural practices about the dead, lineages, "obligations" to the dead. Bogdan spoke of blood ties—ties that bind. There is a saying in the Balkans that blood ties are thicker than milk ties. Anyway, the past informs the present, to be sure, but the past is also interpreted through the lens of the present.

**Editor:** If it's so easy for people to live together, why has it become so easy for ruling elites to manipulate these antagonisms? Why should it be so easy for people to be moved into these feelings of hate?

**Denitch:** It wasn't easy. It took at least five years for the Milosevic regime to get things to the point where fighting occurred. There were massive demonstrations against it; 85 percent of the young men in Belgrade refused to serve in the army during the war in Croatia. There was hardly massive support for the desire to kill. Over a hundred thousand young people from Croatia and Serbia now live in the greater New York region in order to get out of the conflict. In fact, fighting between Croats and Serbs in that area only occurred during World War II—it's not the case that these people have been killing each other for centuries. They've actually been living in peace. In Croatia the right-wing nationalists did not win a majority; and since they took power they've been banning independent newspapers precisely because it's not easy to get people to agree with their policies. The Bosnian majority too was actually opposed to ethnic strife. It doesn't take a majority to create ethnic strife: the IRA in Northern Ireland was a small minority, but it managed to polarize the whole society. There's some kind of myth that there's some biological urge in Eastern Europe that makes people want to cut each other's throats, but that just isn't true.

**Walzer:** These people lived together peacefully under Ottoman bureaucrats, Hapsburg bureaucrats, and communist bureaucrats. The question we have to face is whether the kind of peace that allows for this living together can survive democratization. I don't think it can unless there is also separation, division, some new political recognition of difference.

The great multinational empires, in which different ethnic or religious groups lived together and which we



now remember rhapsodically, were authoritarian structures. Sure, different groups lived together in one village—but that was when they were ruled by someone else, and neither ethnic group had the upper hand. When those authoritarian structures are shattered, we may have to draw boundaries between the different groups. You can hope to make it not a hard line but a dotted line on the map, you can hope eventually for boundary crossings of various sorts, but *first* you've got to draw some lines.

**Berman:** Walzer's point also suggests to me that there may be some conflict at times between the principle of self-rule and the principle of human rights. If self-rule means that you have to constitute yourself as a Serb or a Croat or an Israeli or a Palestinian, that may lead to a conflict between those who draw such lines and others who don't want to be part of those kinds of boundary lines at all.

I have a student who is part Serb, part Croat, part Jewish and part Gypsy. Such people are in trouble as the world gets divided according to these kinds of boundaries.

I don't think many people's identities are adequately described by these nationalist categories. As individuals people are procrustean beds of complexity.

**Gitlin:** Michael Walzer is more emphatic about the tragic fact of tribalism than about the possibility of accommodating tensions within a common frame. He offers us terrible either/ors: either partitioning—at its worst, multilateral ethnic cleansing—or imperial universalism at bayonet point. While I accept the tragic view of society that acknowledges that people have long, bloody memories that elites know well how to stoke, and that they are lying there ready to be stoked, embers always red, I also think that the blessings of the partitioned life are overshadowed by the potential curse. The main curse today is warlordism, from balkanized campuses to balkanized elites to balkanized Balkans.

**Editor:** But on Walzer's position, that problem exists because we don't have good boundaries.

**Denitch:** There have never been good boundaries.

**Gitlin:** That's just it—everyone has a claim to different boundaries. Some people were nomadic, so it was false to enclose them in a boundary in the first place. Other people have sometimes been on one side of a boundary, sometimes on another. Irredentism seems to me to be a fool's game.

**Berman:** One of the great delusions of the nineteenth century was the notion of "natural frontiers."

**Walzer:** I don't want to be saddled with ethnic cleansing or even necessarily with any commitment to the idea of partition. I am open to any arrangement or pattern of accommodation that works on the ground. If you can get away with decentralization, or regional autonomy or cultural autonomy in some functionalist setup, that's fine. Partition only when there is no alternative. And I think it's important to insist that even when there is partition that we don't give up our interest in the awful things that may go on across the boundary that we have just drawn. The German decision to recognize the Croats without insisting that they first guarantee the rights of their own minorities was a terrible mistake. The international community has to sustain an interest on both sides of the lines that it draws.

**Elshtain:** By pointing out that order between minorities was maintained by unjust rule, you have to put to yourself another important issue: which is the higher political good, order or justice? We have to provide for the expression of "wounded identities" while hopefully taming and chastening them with universal aspirations. There are people in each of these spots around the world who do emphasize constitutionalism and human rights—and they are not without a space to speak in these new nations.

**Berman:** But they are without guns.

**Editor:** Perhaps what we are suggesting, then, is that we are committed to holding universal principles which limit what we allow people to choose democratically.

**Gitlin:** Exactly. Consider the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These are principles that limit the prerogatives of nation-states. This is potentially a thrilling moment in world history, a moment when the prerogatives of superpowers have been dampened. There are institutions in place, particularly the World Court, and occasionally the United Nations—organized policing operations, which have both legitimacy and power to enforce the rights of minorities against tyrannical majorities, or the rights of small nations against larger ones, or of distinct national groups against those who would deny them. As we inch towards the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations and then the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration, there is an opportunity to change the discourse about what is possible on a global scale. One could start to imagine the creation of institutions that would counter the worst depredations of nationalism. It is exciting that when ethnic groups and political prisoners are being assaulted or tortured virtually anywhere in the world, or rain forests and other ecologically sensitive sites are being threatened,



the world now knows about it, and hence cannot pretend not to know. It is horrible that what happened in Yugoslavia happened, but the universal knowledge of violations may be the precursor of some kind of institutionalized commitment to stop all this and defend the rights of embattled minorities.

**Editor:** You are made happy because there is someone to intervene externally, perhaps an international force that replaces the imperial forces that Walzer referred to as having previously established world order and peace between groups. But once one has such an empowered intervener in the lives of each society, do you worry that they might intervene in ways that you might not like (e.g., in the case of Israel, intervening in ways that accorded with the view of Third World countries that saw Israel as more one-sidedly a human rights violator than we, who support the Israeli peace movement, but also see the one-sidedness of some of the critiques of Israel)? What if the "higher rational" force that you look to to intervene is really just a bunch of human beings, with all the normal sets of interests and irrationalities, but now empowered in the name of justice to enforce their own particular views and their own particular interests?

**Gitlin:** I don't mean to suggest that the world is yet ready for some kind of super-court. But I do think that a somewhat more empowered World Court, empowered on the basis of the Universal Declaration, is something that we ought to be moving towards, though not at one stroke. There have to be safeguards, and, in the worst case, there remains the force of civil disobedience. I know that there are tremendous difficulties—but I think we should take the difficulties as part of a conversation that the world needs to be involved in, the conversation about how constitutionalism and rights-liberalism can be strengthened, recognizing that there are going to be obstacles and built-in limits, but we don't know where those limits are going to be.

**Walzer:** I'm not sure that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the right basis. It is enormously detailed and far longer than the American Bill of Rights. If you think seriously about the historical prerequisites and sociological entailments of all the rights on that list, I think you have to conclude that the only form of life or political regime that that document would legitimate is Western liberal democracy, *our* form of life. Everything else would be ruled out.

We need a much more minimal conception of universalism which would enable us to respond to ethnic cleansing or genocide or religious persecution or enslavement. But within the limits set by some kind of min-

imalism, there are going to be a lot of different kinds of regimes in the world. There are going to be nation-states and multinational states and federations and unions of different sorts, and they will have different degrees of state neutrality and different ways of recognizing and supporting ethnic and religious traditions. That is part of what I think a decent minimalism has to accommodate. Certainly, it will rule out ethnic cleansing and genocide, but it's going to allow a range of practices of the sort that might be offensive to some of us, for example the kinds of practices that accompany the creation of an Islamic republic in Iran.

An Islamic republic could not conceivably meet the requirements of the Universal Declaration, but so long as it does not persecute the Bahai and Zoroastrians and Christians and Jews who live there and grants them a minimal set of rights to their own cultural life, we probably should be prepared to recognize its legitimacy.

**Berman:** There is a wide public that doesn't want to see other people killed and that worries about people in Somalia or Bosnia—and these feelings are the basis for some commitment to universal human rights. The mass media has made it much harder to hide mass murder—and that could be a source of progress for this minimalist agenda. I feel optimistic about the fact that a lot of people care about people with whom they have absolutely no ethnic links, but they don't want to see them killed.

**Kligman:** To make this more concrete, perhaps we should be considering "preventive intervention" in Macedonia, for example, to forestall the kind of bloodshed that seems likely to erupt there in the near future. Is there a role for "symbolic peacekeeping" in this period of radically global restructuring that would also redefine the roles and authority of international institutions (e.g., UN, NATO, CSCE, etc.)? Might these international bodies invoke the minimal universalist principles as the source of their authority to act? How can such principles be elevated beyond interest politics without institutional authority? Might this be an aspect of redefining the "world order," reconstituting it as a "new world order?" Presently, past and familiar practices continue to be used in response to unfamiliar, new and highly disordered, circumstances.

**Elshtain:** Let's assume that we accept Michael Walzer's conception of a minimalist universalism; i.e., accept regimes that are organized in ways that we wouldn't wish them to be organized. But we may have to rethink the grounds of intervention. Walzer's book *Just and Unjust Wars* makes the argument that aggression is the one clear crime that a state can commit against another state that



justifies intervention, say, a border crossing of a violent sort. But we are talking about things here, as in the case of the former Yugoslavia, within the borders of a state, that nevertheless violate basic, fundamental norms that we want to nourish in international society. So it raises the possibility of intervention to protect some basic human rights, e.g., the right not to be killed and not to be tortured because of one's race, religion or historic identity. So we may be facing a world of more need for intervention in the name of human rights.

**Gitlin:** You are right about the dilemma: we can't wriggle away from it with the kind of rigid isolationism that has been adopted in certain quarters of the Left. I opposed the Gulf War, yet I was very uncomfortable with the way that some of the people who opposed that war settled for moral isolationism. I think the collective security framework was the correct one within which to debate whether the war was wise.

Of course, when we think of collective security, the principle of regional responsibility ought to be taken more seriously—so I wish that this discussion was happening in Europe.

**Walzer:** I agree with Gitlin and Elshtain that intervention looms large now in Europe, though the issue of intervention in the Third World has loomed large for a long time. Tanzania to stop Idi Amin, for example, or Vietnam against Pol Pot in Cambodia. What's new now is simply that it's happening in Europe, where we didn't think that humanitarian interventions was going to be an issue ever again.

**Editor:** Why the interventions that you mention, but not interventions in an Islamic fundamentalist society that takes away all rights from women and puts them in prison for exercising what we consider basic human rights in the West? Why draw the line at the denial of the rights of women?

**Walzer:** It would make a big difference if the denial of the rights of women in Iran was taking place against the background of opposition by the majority of women, and if they were engaged in a struggle against the regime, and if the regime was murdering and torturing them, then, yes, intervention would be justified. But we all know that the Iranian revolution was carried out with overwhelming support from the women of Iran and that has got to count for something.

**Editor:** What about the case of Algeria if a majority voted in Islamic fundamentalism but a sizable minority of women opposed it, and fought against it because it

was going to deny them rights that we in the West take for granted?

**Walzer:** A lot would depend on the quality of the repression. There is no way to quantify it. Our comrades in Algeria will be those men and women resisting an Islamic fundamentalism, but whether we would be prepared to invade the country to assist our comrades is going to depend on what exactly their situation is.

**Elshtain:** It's simply impossible to come up with an abstract yardstick for intervention. There is a difference between people being rounded up and massacred and people being told that they need to wear the chadorra which, for many Iranian women does not seem to violate their rights.

**Gitlin:** When western women have denounced cliteridectomy at international conferences, some Third World women have told them to mind their own business.

**Elshtain:** There are practices that *we* find abhorrent, cliteridectomy being one. Western feminists have made a strong issue of it, and the women from societies that practiced it told them that this was *their* issue which they would deal with in their own way over time, it was a custom in the hands of women and enforced by women and would be changed as they saw fit. In those circumstances you keep making your own case. Arguments travel in the kind of world we have today—and in some cases that may be the best we can do. Yet in other cases some kind of military intervention may be demanded—if there are massacres or genocide.

**Editor:** Ought we not acknowledge that some manifestations of nationalism and ethnic particularism embody pathology? People's daily lives are filled with pain and frustration, and their attention is diverted from the pain through the creation of a fantasized community—the "nation" or "the people" or "the church"—that does little to change the social relations that caused the pain in the first place. So national or religious traditions may sometimes serve the purpose of turning people's attention away from the ways that their real needs are not being met in the actually existing social order in which they live.

**Walzer:** Beyond the family and neighborhood, all communities are imagined—but there are better or worse forms of imagined communities. Insofar as I value political relationships that are relatively communal in form, warm but not overheated, I would want to work for ways to connect reality to the imagined reality, and to overcome the alienation between the two, but I don't think



we will ever escape the need for imagination in our understanding of our relationship with others. The ties that bind me to someone in Tennessee or California more closely than to someone in Mozambique or China are imaginary ties—they have to be evoked, they reflect a certain history in which I've been socialized, they reflect the holidays of a specific calendar, the rituals and ceremonies of American political life. We make it more real if we make America something more like a participatory democracy, but it's never going to be as real as my relationship with the people who live next door.

**Gitlin:** As the world gets more complicated and intricate, there are plenty of other relationships that make claims on us beyond, and sometimes against, the claims of family and neighborhood. I feel closer to some people with foreign citizenship than to some who share my own national citizenship. One thing that is developing is what Charles Nathanson calls a global civil society that is self-contradictory, unevenly developed, but felt to be as real as the more formal bonds of political citizenship. And in many ways this is auspicious. The fact that hundreds of thousands of people around the world are willing to write letters to one dictator or another at the behest of Amnesty International to oppose unjust jailings is another sign of this, as well as what Benedict Anderson calls "fax internationalism," say, with respect to repression in China.

**Editor:** The talk here is very different from that of those on the Left who support a form of particularism that insists on noncommensurability of discourse, a particularism that challenges universal values.

**Gitlin:** When you said particularism, I thought you might be saying "protectionism," and that is exactly what we are opposing: the notion that one has no other obligation but that imposed by one's primary tribe. All of us have embraced a meddling ideal: alongside our ethnic, religious, and gender identities there is a transcendent identity, a membership in humanity, and part of what we honor in the American ideal is the idea of rights that are inalienable. So we are intrinsically interested in the contact between different groups, so while difference is real and should be honored, so is commonality real and to be honored. We should be very careful before granting supreme powers to any particular identity unit.

Every once in a while something happens that makes one remember why tribalism is fierce: I tuned in to the World Series and I saw the Atlanta fans performing the "Tomahawk Chop" and I immediately imagined the public reaction if a team from Germany, say, calling itself "the Düsseldorf Jews," had a ritual of public davening or wav-

ing dollar bills. So Indians have a total right to be horrified and to feel that this is abominable. But it is not just up to Indians to protest this—it is incumbent upon us as Jews to protest it, for the ADL to protest it, for the NAACP to protest it. It's important while defending the rights and dignity of one's own tribes, to think about what is owed to the peoples of other tribes—and that is a thought that has been submerged with the fascination with particularism. That concern separates most of the people in this discussion from the focus of many of those on the Left or so-called Left in recent years.

**Elshtain:** I do think we are talking about a so-called Left. There is a particular kind of academic politics that claims the mantle of the Left, but I don't think that it deserves that designation. It strikes me as not a particularly liberal idea to talk about incommensurability—it's a kind of resegregation. With that way of thinking we are suddenly given permission to not engage one another: we can issue manifestoes, but we are not required to engage one another. But what we are talking about here is the necessity of engagement.

I've fought all my life against the notion that there is a particular way that women are supposed to think *qua* women; and now we are hearing that very idea in the name of one brand of feminism. There's a notion today that my identity is exhausted by my gender. My view of feminism is one that says that our identity is not totally defined by our gender, though our gender may be the ground of our identities. There are many situations in which I have more in common with a male political philosopher of good will than I have with a feminist of a certain kind of ill will preaching this kind of exclusivity and teaching the notion of male as the ineradicable "other" with whom I can have nothing in common. This is a completely anti-democratic idea. Democracy requires that we can and do engage each other as citizens, a category that makes it possible to engage in alliances with diverse groups of people depending on what the issue is in any given instance.

We get disempowered from making the kind of case that we need to help shape a humane international community if we align ourselves with those tendencies on the academic Left that have advocated the kind of brittle exclusivity I've been describing. We can't have it both ways.

**Kligman:** I agree with Elshtain. Identity is not "fixed," nor biologically determined. Exclusivity excludes, contradicting fundamentals of democratic ideals and practices. Engagement is a critical term here. The "so-called" Left must re-engage not only with itself, but with others as well. □