

An Ethical Politics of Our Times. Moral Selves or Solidarity?

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Since the 1980s there has been an ongoing controversy on what constitutes critical thinking and political action. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, developments such as the rise of ethnic and religious nationalisms, the violent reconfiguration of cultural and geographical boundaries, the increasing salience of neoliberal policies, and the growing influence of identity politics around the world intensified this debate by challenging conventional frameworks used in political studies. The theoretical renaissance brought by postmodern, poststructuralist, postmarxist, and feminist analyses guides us in different directions to reflect critically on the formations, since about the eighteenth century, of the modern, colonial, European, liberal political orders. From the purview of these analyses, what is at stake in the current conjuncture of world disorder is the disintegration of modern culture, society and the ideological foundations of the nation-state. Marxist analyses, on the other hand, continue focusing on the restructuring of capitalism in a global context and offer critical reflections on the pervasive influence of capitalism on social relations. On the question of what constitutes progressive politics in our times, the proposals range from class struggle, through the politics of coalition and solidarity between different social movements, to the politics of particularism, isolationism, and the contingency of political action.

Regardless of the framework, there are two recurring issues in problematizing the notion of the political. First, as a methodological problem, there is the dichotomy between the particularity and locality of political developments and the general, historical trends which define

the present conjuncture of world disorder. Second, although the notion of political agency is analyzed at a theoretical level, it is rarely problematized in conjunction with concrete political developments. This paper aims to address these issues by examining the intricate relationship between morality, ethics, and politics at both a global and a singular level simultaneously. It defines the present conjuncture of world disorder as an aporetic condition which contains “pre-ethical,” modern, and postmodern moral codes.

The major argument of this is that the liberal notion of the individual as the prime agent for political action fails to address contradictory moral/ethical impulses that this aporetic condition poses. In the first part, the paper contextualizes the present phase of moral revivalism within the frameworks of Luhmann’s conception of morality and Bauman’s conception of the paradoxical constitution of modern morality. In the second part, it focuses on the morality of neoliberalism by scrutinizing the liberal notions of individual rationality and individual rights in two interrelated contexts: the political economy of neoliberalism and the contradictory role of the nation-states in preserving law and order. In conclusion, it offers a loose framework for an ethical political stand that aims to problematize the contradictory imperatives between recognizing the particularity of political events, the singularity of the worth of a human being, and the need for solidarity with those caught in destitution, in deprivation, and in different webs of physical violence.

I CONTEXTUALIZING MORALITY, ETHICS, AND POLITICS

When the term ethics is used synonymously with morality and with the study of moral philosophy, it addresses the question of how human beings ought to live. Enriched by philosophical, theoretical, and theological perspectives, ethics and morality deal with two interrelated issues: the constants of human nature (such as reason, rationality, love, hedonistic pleasure, natural feelings, care for others, vulnerability, responsibility, selves, selfish ego, knowing subject, self-determination, care of self, self-sacrifice and self-interest) and the collective social values and prescriptions regulating rights and wrongs, dos and don’ts, good and evil, virtue and vice. Since the times of early civilizations in Mesopotamia, ethics and morality have been used in regulating what is now considered as the political realm. Under the rule of Hammurabi in Babylon (1728–1646 BC), and later in Egypt, a set of ethical/moral conventions, rules and obligations were developed to regulate social interactions in conjunction with codes dealing with business, bureau-

cracy and family law.¹ Similarly in ancient Greece, underlying the question of ethics was a philosophical reflection on the basic features of Greek society and politics.² At the outset, then, the symbiotic relationship between ethics and morality has both a social and a political character.

In the current political and theoretical conjuncture there are different conceptions of the relationship between ethics, morality, and politics.³ For the purpose of clarity, it will be helpful first to explain what type of ethics is being explored in this paper and why. Niklas Luhmann defines ethics as “a theoretical reflection of morality” and argues that since the spread of printing, “the ethics wave returns in the eighties of every century with astrological regularity.” He further notes something pathological about these waves, in that morality becomes an issue “only when things become dangerous.”⁴

In his framework, the first wave of ethics can be traced to the 1580s in the form of a theory of morality independent of theology. The key factor in this periodization is the conflict between the will of God and an exploration of the conditions of a secular human social order embodied in natural feelings. In the 1680s the split between the morality of theologians for a divine providence and the morality of a social order became more astute. In the 1780s the ethics wave returned in three different trends, namely Kant’s transcendentalism, Bentham’s utilitarianism, and that of Marquis de Sade. What is common to the eighteenth-century wave is that ethics became a new form of moral reflection grounded in rationality. Luhmann does not explain the political context of the return of ethics prior to the nineteenth century. Yet he notes that in the 1880s, the ethical waves of Nietzsche and neo-Kantians took place in the context of nationalism, imperialism, colonialism, and socialism.⁵

According to Luhmann, the ethics wave of this century emerged in response to the disintegration of modern society. His main argument is that morality, conceived as “a special form of communication which carries with it indications of approval and disapproval,” can no longer serve the purpose of social integration, nor can it “allot people their place in the society.”⁶ Luhmann also views “moral communication [as being] close to conflict and thus located close to violence.”⁷ The type of ethics he develops, aims “to thematise morality as a distinction,” “to warn against morality,” and “to limit the application of morality.”⁸ In his framework ethics is not devoid of moral values but is critical of moralizing judgements. He argues that “if ethics is to be and remain a theoretical reflection of morality ... then it must bind itself to the code of morality, that is, submit itself to the binary schematism of good and bad, it must itself desire the good not the bad.” In so doing, however,

“the researcher on ethics does not have to write an ethics which submits itself to a moral judgement.”⁹

To reiterate Luhmann’s argument about the disintegration of a modern society in a global context, since the 1980s “the pathological development” of our times has been the revival of diverse historical trends that are provisionally identified with Western modernity. Among these revivalist movements at the political level, there are searches for origins of human civilization in Athens, Mesopotamia, Jerusalem, and Medine; the politicization of theological perspectives of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; and the revival of the seventeenth-century split between divine providence and secular human order in the formation of national identities, of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century classical liberal notions of individual rationality in a free-market setting, and of colonial, post-colonial, nationalist, and imperialist discourses on politics in general. Accordingly the political realm in general has become a contested terrain for competing moral claims and codes of social/political conduct.

a) Paradoxical Constitution of Modern Morality

Given the rich ahistorical pastiche of moral revivalism, the first task of ethical politics is to problematize morality in a historical context. Following Luhmann’s framework, Bauman conceptualizes modern morality in the context of eighteenth-century understanding of ethics grounded in rationality.¹⁰ He traces the origins of ethics and morality to the search for order, rule, law, legislation, universality, and foundationalism in modernity. According to Bauman, modern morality emerged in a context where “modern developments forced men and women into the condition of individuals, who found their lives fragmented, split into many loosely related aims and functions, each to be pursued in a different context and according to a different pragmatics ... Morality, rather than being a ‘natural trait’ of human life [was] something that need[ed] to be designed and injected into human conduct ... the void left by the moral supervision of the Church [was] filled with rational rules.”¹¹

Bauman analyses the distinguishing aspect of morality in general and modern morality in particular with reference to the notion of *aporia*. *Aporia* is a Greek word for a contradiction that cannot be overcome. Since the invention of politics, morality, and ethics, the condition of *aporia* has been disguised in a search for the reconciliation of logically contradictory objectives and aspirations. Rowe argues that Greek ethics always contained the contradiction between a fundamentally individualistic ethos and the demands for co-operative behaviour.¹² In Midgley’s account, both in ancient Greek thinking and in Hobbes’s

framework, ethics is a device of egoistic prudence that originated from the social contract. From an Hobbesian point of view, while the “pre-ethical” existence was a state of nature characterized by “a war of every man against every man,” the age of ethics emerged as the political requirement for a survival in social order.¹³ Bauman supports these claims and examines the paradoxical ways in which modern morality contributed to creating a political order.

In the initial phase of modern developments, the radical solution for the aporetic situation was to introduce the notions of universality and foundation. The principle of universality compelled individuals to recognize certain prescriptions as right and thus to accept them as obligatory. The principle of foundation was laid through the coercive powers of the state that rendered obedience to rules and through the popular belief that the rules are well-justified. According to Bauman the contradictory principle in this configuration of order by means of universality and foundation is that modern morality tried to rule over chaos, disorder, and fragmentation by creating an illusion: a promise that contradictions will be resolved in the future.

It is upon this promise that modern ethics was introduced as “a code of law that prescribes the correct behaviour ‘universally,’ that is for all people at all times; one that sets apart good from evil once for all and for everybody.”¹⁴ To highlight the contradictory role of modern ethics, Bauman distinguishes between these universal moral imperatives and the singularity of moral selves. He argues that, although ethics and morality “grow of the same soil, moral selves do not “discover,” their ethical foundations but ... build them up while they build themselves.”¹⁵ In this understanding while modern ethics/morality has a foundational character, moral selves are defined by contingency. Related to this distinction, modernity as the age of ethics legislated moral selves and prevented their full growth.

I will elaborate on Bauman’s conception of moral selves later in detail. For the time being it suffices to note that the moral imperatives of the modern political order were legislated in the name of individual rationality and that state laws were presumed to be founded on reason. Looking back to the promise of modernity in today’s global conjuncture of disorder, Bauman argues that universal values under modern etatization of social space spawned massive oppression and “the greatest crimes against humanity (and by humanity) have been perpetuated in the name of reason, of better order and greater happiness.”¹⁶ The present conjuncture is defined by the dissolution of the promise of modern political order, which, in moral terms, creates the dichotomy between defending universal values and “postmodern privatisation of social spacing.” The latter refers to three specific developments.

First, in the context of political economy, Bauman notes that the freer is the global flow of capital and merchandise, the more fragmented are the sovereign units. The nation-states become weaker and narrower in their grip over their respective territories. Second, in the political context of international relations, it denotes the end of the “secure” bipolar configuration of the world between the NATO and Warsaw Pact line. This implies the absence of a supranational policing force to adjudicate local and regional power struggles within and between nation-states. Related to this development, third, the nation-states fail to perform their past role of producing and supplying identities. This specifically refers to the erosion of the ideological role of states in bringing nations together with reference to particular symbols of citizenship, individual rights, or historically specific cultural representations of a uniform nationhood. In this conjuncture, postmodern privatization of social spacing denotes the increasing salience of identity politics at a global level. The evident failure of supranational and national institutions to effectively perform their role of centralized policing paves the way for communal autonomy and “neo-tribal self-assertion” of particular ethnic, national, and religious groups.

In noting the violent configuration of identity politics in this international conjuncture, Bauman argues that the power struggle and perpetual tug of war are revealed as the sole reliable grounds of an orderly habitat.¹⁷ What he refers to as the “logic of dark ages” in this particular context of violence can also be regarded as a return to a “pre-ethical” stage, which in the Hobbesian framework is characterized by lawlessness, wars, and chaos in the contestation for sovereignty among numerous power holders. In addition to the violent configuration of power struggle between different “communal,” “neo-tribal” groups in asserting their identities, postmodern privatization also raises a moral dilemma. According to Bauman, while the universal values of modern morality expect individuals to conform to the laws and order set by the state, postmodern morality gives way to the dictum that every order is good. In this respect, postmodern privatization of social space refers to a condition of dispersion and “disocclusion” where the divide between right and wrong is no longer determined. Insofar as the morality of identity politics is concerned the violent dispersion of ethnic, national, and religious moral claims makes it also difficult to determine the divide between the victims and the victimizers.

b) Contradictory Imperatives of Ethical Politics

In reviewing the moral progress of modernity in our times, Bauman notes how the victims of the past – Serbs during the Croat genocide in

the 1940s, Vietnamese during the Vietnam war, Jews during the Holocaust – commit cruelty when the opportunity arises.¹⁸ Recalling the Gulf War in 1990, which was presented as a war between democracy and fascism, between Kuwait as victim and Iraq as the victimizer, making moral and political choices on international violence is extremely difficult, if not impossible. From a historical point of view, Bauman rightly argues that “no victory over inhumanity seems to have the world safer for humanity,” yet “moral shocks, however devastating they might have seemed at the time, gradually lose their grip – until they are forgotten. All their long history notwithstanding, moral choices seem always to start from square one.”¹⁹

The political significance of Bauman’s analysis is that he proposes a thorough critique of both politically promoted parochialism of modern moral codes that pretend to be universal and the “everything goes approach” that has come to be identified with postmodern morality. In his words, as long as the choice is merely between these two medicines, “the chance of health must be meagre and remote.”²⁰ This critical stand on both modern and postmodern morality has two implications. First, Bauman’s framework helps us to scrutinize the relationship between moral codes and the modern constitution of reason and individual rationality. Second, having refused to choose between modern and postmodern moral codes, he focuses on the notion of moral self as the prime agent of political change.

As to the former implication, his main premise is that “morality is incurably aporetic, the majority of moral choices are made between contradictory impulses.”²¹ In his conceptualization, moral phenomena are inherently “non-rational, not regular, repetitive, monotonous and predictable.”²² Hence they cannot be exhausted by any universal moral code of dos and don’ts. By the same token this claim does not give a free reign to an unproblematic contingency of accepting all competing moral claims promoted by identity politics. If we accept the premise that all moral phenomena are aporetic, then an ethical stand in our times is not redeemed from contradictory imperatives. In listing the ethical issues in the present conjuncture, Bauman calls for a balance between personal self-assertion and peaceful co-operation as well as synchronization of individual conduct and collective welfare.²³ The crucial element in maintaining this balance is Bauman’s notion of moral self.

In his framework, there is no self before moral self. This implies two things. First, in becoming a person we all carry in us a moral responsibility for another person, which is the act of self-constitution. In the relation between self and the other, this moral responsibility precedes all engagement, including knowing, evaluating, and acting together

with the other person. To put it simply, before I engage in any political, social, personal relationship, I utter to myself that I am a person because I care for the other, I am responsible for the other, and I need to curb some constitutive elements that make me an individual. Second, putting the moral self before oneself implies the limitations of the liberal notion of individual rationality. Bauman argues that morality in general, individual morality in particular, and moral self in and of itself are bound to be irrational. In this respect the moral self is a mystery contrary to reason. In his words, "Reason cannot help the moral self without depriving the self of what makes the self moral: that unfounded, non-rational, un-arguable, no-excuses-given and non-calculable urge to stretch towards the other, to caress, to be for, to live for, happen what may."²⁴

In Bauman's formulation, the moral self escapes logic, reason, and rationality because in stretching to caress, to be responsible for, to live for, and to make things happen for the other, it follows its own resilient autonomy. This resilient autonomy is received as a scandal by modern morality, which tames, cages, and cultivates moral self with a list of rights-directed prescriptions and with manuals about dos and don'ts. In this particular context, the postmodern condition of dispersion and "disocclusion" provides acting individuals with a possibility of using their moral selves for the task of learning and applying an unambiguous ethical principle suitable for the occasion.²⁵

Bauman's call for a return to moral selves suggests that an ethical stand critical of both modern and postmodern morality is inherently aporetic. On the one hand, it is singular, that is to say an ethical stand has to be cognizant of the particularities of the political issue at hand as well as the singularity of the moral responsibility that one has towards the other. In this respect, Bauman's conception of an ethical stand defies any universality and a general moral code of conduct. On the other hand, as a safeguard against the postmodern morality of approving the diversity of all moral claims and code of conduct, Bauman returns to the key contradictory imperatives of ethics since ancient Greece. His ethical stand of moral selves carries within itself the contradictions between personal self-assertion, individual moral conduct, and concern for collective, co-operative, peaceful conduct. The latter concern for collective welfare is both singular and universal at the same time. It is singular to the extent that it is guided by the peculiarities and mysteries of the moral responsibility one carries within oneself. It is universal because it carries the moral imperatives of caring and being in solidarity with others. On all accounts, the singular and universal responsibilities that constitute moral selves escape reason and rationality to the extent that Bauman's critical ethical stand are not founded on

the premise of the resolution of such problems as the violent configuration of the world, the increasing salience of ethnic, national, and religious groups, or the free flow of capital and merchandise in the context of the globalization of capitalism.

II THE POLITICS OF NEOLIBERAL MORALITY: THREE FOR THE PRICE OF ONE

To elaborate on the political significance of Bauman's critical analysis of modern and postmodern morality in the present conjuncture, it is important to recall that Bauman's conception of morality is founded on a particular conception, that is, the eighteenth-century understanding of morality grounded in reason and rationality. The predominant elements of modern morality are founded on the liberal notion of individual rationality, the foundational character of the nation-state to maintain order, and a firm metaphysical belief in the resolution of contradictions. By this criterion, postmodern morality is characterized by the dispersion of moral claims, the individual inability to distinguish right from wrong, and a growing challenge to the foundational character of nation-states. Bauman's narrow conception of modern morality raises a number of questions about the extent to which the existing dispersion, in particular moral codes, can be considered as postmodern.

The politicization of religion, particularly in light of the increasing salience of Islam in the international arena and the re-emergence of religious-nationalist movements in Bosnia, India, China, Israel, Turkey, former Soviet Republics, and elsewhere, suggests that the moral codes of the present need to be problematized in conjunction with these developments. The state-centered morality founded on reason and rationality and the sixteenth-century understanding of morality founded on the split between individual will and the will of theologians are two currently contesting moral codes in politics. More specifically, in the above mentioned cases, the power struggle contains both the secular will to reason and to nationhood and the communal will to an Islamic, Hindu, or Zionist order. On the specific question of order and chaos, the politicization of religion, ethnicity, and nationhood is determined by a firm metaphysical belief in the resolution of contradictions and a search for a lawful society. It is upon this fundamental belief that religious claims for salvation, the assertion of ethnic identities independent of nation-states, and the revival of territorial claims by nationalist groups are justified. In this respect, it will be useful to broaden the conception of modern morality to include two specific codes, one from the sixteenth century and the other from the eighteenth century.

This broadened conception of modern morality has two political implications. First, as Marx astutely remarked, European morality of individual rationality assumes that “in his most immediate reality ... man is a secular being.”²⁶ As was the case on the “Jewish question,” this secular construction, however, was enriched by Christian morals, which have been an integral element in definitions of nationhood as well as in regulating the political/social order.²⁷ Depending on the specificities of the political conjuncture, Christian morals have been politicized during the rise of fascism in Europe (by both fascists and anti-fascists), by the military regimes and their opponents in the 1970s in Latin America, and by the rise of Christian fundamentalism during the Ronald Reagan presidency in the USA. Second, these historical reminders also aim to alert readers to the modern dimensions in the politicization of Islam since the early 1980s. This process is a product of modern formation of nation-states in Muslim countries. Political Islam in its call for a return to *shariat* (the rule of Islam) carries in itself the foundational character of statism and nationalism. Regardless of its anti-modern, anti-Western discourse, political Islam articulates the will of Allah with the capitalist will to make profit.²⁸ In the Turkic Republics of the former Soviet Union and in eastern Europe, Islamic capital has become a significant force in foreign trade and investment. Insofar as its nationalist and international market oriented operations are concerned, there is nothing postmodern about the rise of Islamic identity in global politics.

In the international conjuncture, political Islam filled the void left by the Cold War threat of Communism. In this respect, as was the case with Cold War politics, strategic concerns of NATO members define the contradictory imperatives of the sale of arms to Iran, Afghanistan, Algeria, and other “dangerous” zones since the early 1980s. In this context too, then, the international conjuncture strikes us as “predictably ordered” and contingent on national interests as it historically has been.

In critically examining the specific conception of modern morality grounded on reason and rationality, it is also necessary to reconsider the search for order and the volatility of the political realm from the point of view of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century liberal thinking. From Hobbes and Locke to utilitarian thinking, the notions of order and law were investigated in conjunction with the need for a social contract. Without going into the details of liberal thought, it suffices to note that, in a competitive free-market setting where there is no social contract, one individual is the enemy of another in an egoistic state of war. Two centuries of experience taught adherents of liberalism to never leave the free market in its “pre-ethical” state of egoistic

prudence. Hence, the state was given the role to maintain civil law, the defence of the national territory, and the assurance of judicially defined rules regarding the exchange of property, accumulation of wealth and socially “acceptable” levels of poverty, destitution, and exploitation. As will be explained later in detail when examining the liberal emphasis on individual rights and rationality and the contradictory role of states, it is necessary to distinguish the formation of a “pre-ethical” mode within the context of the globalization of capitalism.

With this hindsight, if we revisit the current conjuncture of global disorder, the dissolution of modern morality gives way to three modalities in politics. There is the persistence of modern morality characterized by searches for order, rule, and law, which are regulated by both the will to reason and rationality and the will to a religious order. There is the so-called postmodern morality characterized by the privatization of social space and the individual inability to take a universal moral stand on political developments. Third, in places where liberalism and capitalism have been introduced from above, there are particular moral conducts reminiscent of the “pre-ethical” chaos. The globalization of neoliberal policies since the late 1980s cuts across these three moral modalities; political order under neoliberalism contains modern, pre-ethical, and postmodern moral codes.

a) Modern Morality in Neoliberalism

Susan Strange defines the main trends in the globalization of neoliberalism with reference to the growth of a) “the conference business and of travel and transnational communication,” b) “the proportion of production of goods and services controlled by foreign based firms,” c) “the reduction of direct controls and taxes on capital mobility,” as well as d) “the increased mobility of factors of production,” including capital, technology, and energy, d) “the liberalisation of long-standing regulatory restrictions within national financial markets,” and e) “the introduction of new technologies in the process of financial intermediation.”²⁹ To highlight the three moral modalities in this schema, it is important to recall Bauman’s claim about the aporetic condition of moral phenomenon. In this respect the first contradictory nature of neoliberalism is that, even though it is founded on the premise of reducing the scope of state involvement in markets, it has come to be globalized by direct state involvement at the political level. Stephen Gill notes that market monetarism in New Zealand was introduced in the 1980s under a social democratic government. The “shock therapy” introduced in Poland and Russia since the late 1980s was “based on experiments carried out in Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s.”

The EC's 1992 Single Market Program "has elements of Jacques Delor's vision of a new form of European democracy combined with Anglo-American *laissez-faire*."³⁰ The growing influence of the neoliberal agenda manifests itself elsewhere in the formation of NAFTA and in the GATT summit in Uruguay in 1994, which just like the cases cited above, are characterized by the paradoxical combination of the triumph of transnational capital and the preservation of political economic order through state policies.³¹

What is modern about this process is the intensification of both commodity and financial exchange at a global level. Furthermore this global exchange, at the political level, is regulated by the triangular relationship between transnational firms, nation-states and international financial institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.³² Third, just like in the nineteenth century when capitalism started to infiltrate into the social realm, this phase of the globalization is characterized by social unrest and political resistance.³³ What is particularly modern about this social/political resistance is that it contains such elements as the political mobilization of labour, the ideological preservation of national values as a means of opposition to globalization, and a strong state-centered discourse against the transnational capital. As to the Third World, where political opposition has historically been repressed, the globalization of neoliberal agenda, among other things, has brought the "super-exploitation of female labor in the Maquiladoras in Mexico and the persistent use of child labour in the Colombian coal mines."³⁴

When it comes to the morality of the globalization of capitalism, there are two distinctly modern aspects to neoliberalism. First, having founded on the eighteenth-century conception of morality, neoliberalism further deepens the classical liberal notions of a universal understanding of individual rights and rationality. In this understanding, the self-worth of an individual is defined in accordance with both state legislation and the ideological requirements of the free-market economy.³⁵ A century ago, Marx defined this modern morality as follows: "[t]he real human being is the private individual of the present-day state-constitution."³⁶ At the political level, what defines the real human being as a private individual is the state that "abolishes, in its own way, distinctions of birth, social rank, education, occupation, when it declares [them as] non-political distinctions, that every member of the nation is an equal participant in national sovereignty."³⁷ Related to that second, in spite of the challenges of transnational capital to the sovereignty of nation-states, the present social/political "order" at global, regional, and local levels is still maintained through state legislation.

To illustrate the modern morality of the relationship between the state and individual rights, we need to pay attention to particular political modes through which neoliberal policies are implemented. In Europe, the bastion of the post-Second World War social democracy, the real worth of a “European” is specifically designed in the Maastricht Treaty. According to the Treaty, union citizenship has become mandatory for nationals of the member states who possess the right to live and work in member states and are guaranteed all the social benefits of the host country.³⁸ Here, the individual right to work implies the free movement of labour and the individual freedom to sell one’s labour as a commodity in the markets. In this particular context, to be European denotes the free movement of only those who are considered citizens of the European Union. By this definition non-Europeans are those who are codified as immigrants – blacks, Muslims, Bosnian refugees, etc. – whose worth is not recognized by the Charter of European Citizenship. On the issue of compliance with neoliberal requirements of economic efficiency, competitiveness, and cutbacks in social spending, different political criteria are used. Sometimes neoliberalism is morally justified in the name of national interest. For example, in Britain the Labour Party has been offering its supply side politics of export-led growth and neo-corporatism in the name of making “British market participants” winners.³⁹ In France, opposition to a single currency in the European Union is justified by means of national interest. In both cases those who take a critical stand on national interests and/or of government policies are politically codified as “angry demonstrators,” “workers,” “human rights activists,” and so on.

In North America, the politics of the morality of neoliberalism is regulated by the same modern principle of defining the private individual in accordance with the legal inscription of citizenship rights and the compliance with national interests defined by specific government policies.⁴⁰ If Europe and North America are considered as the natural habitat of liberal democracy, morality of neoliberal politics is enriched by culturally specific symbols for social cohesion and varying degrees of heightened individual self-interest. In spite of innumerable different articulations of these symbols and cultural constructs, the common element in the morality of modern politics is that in maintaining social cohesion, the liberal notion of individual rights is tailored in conjunction with the political economy of capitalism in such a way that the value of a human being is always measured in hierarchical ranks. In this context, the “private individual” worthy of social and political attention has always been the one who works, who has a job, a career; in other words, a future.⁴¹ The notion of the unemployed is a specific moral code by which rational individuals are ranked. It sounds as if

rational, self-interested, self-motivated individuals ought to be employed in a waged job and accumulate wealth. Failing these obligations, they are demoted to something else than an individual, say an unemployed or a “deserving” poor, which, in the liberal hierarchy of human worth, is a degree higher than dependants on welfare programs, but certainly lower than a “good” middle-class citizen working for a wage.

In today’s (neo)liberal constructions, a private individual not only possesses the “natural traits” of employment and ownership of private property, but is also self-motivated, competitive, efficient and, for the “right reasons,” looks down on such analogous beings as the “unemployed,” the “lazy welfare recipients,” “single mothers on welfare,” “drug addicts,” “criminals,” and so forth. In both political and moral terms the liberal notion of individual is embedded in a multitude of hierarchical oppositions such as citizen/non-citizen, worker/unemployed, worker/lazy welfare recipient, individual/drug addict, etc. Neoliberalism rebuilds its economic platform on the bases of these moral hierarchical ordering of the singular worth of a human being. These hierarchical distinctions also determine the political priorities of maintaining order and law.

b) Pre-ethical, Postmodern Privatization

In contrast with the modern articulations of (neo)liberal morality, the trend towards privatization in economy, politics, and social norms also denotes the emergence of new moral constructions of the worth of a private individual. As a result of the paradoxical effects of neoliberalism, the nation-states have, on the one hand, tightened their political grip over the society, but, on the other, have been subjected to challenges posed by the globalization of neoliberal trends. Susan Strange argues that the “necessity of the state as a public good ... the very idea of the social contract ... was conceived together with the economic necessity of civic co-operation between state and society.” In drawing attention to the increasing power of “market forces” since the post-war period, she argues that transnational private enterprises in finance, industry, trade, communications, and organized networks of crime are now more powerful than states to whom ultimate political authority over society and economy is supposed to belong. In particular the state is less effective on “security against violence, stable money for trade and investment, a clear system of law and the means to enforce it, and a sufficiency of public goods like drains, water supplies, infrastructures for transport and communications.”⁴² To this list of specific areas in which state power has been in a steady decline, we can add Bauman’s

argument about the “postmodern privatisation of social spacing,” notably the absence of a supranational force to adjudicate the contestation for power among “communal,” “neo-tribal,” ethnic, religious, and nationalist groups and a reliance on physical force and wars in maintaining order.

In this conjuncture of the declining power of states, particular policies of neoliberalism contribute to the formation of a pre-ethical existence. With reference to the declining power of states in exercising their centralized policing role against violence Susan Strange draws attention to the peculiarities of organized crime. She argues that organized criminal gangs, which are associated with mafia and drug trading, operate in a similar way to transnational corporations. In terms of their financial operations, “the most important tax havens and offshore centres are situated at the cross-roads of the principal routes of the illegal narcotics trade.” Referring to Panama and Bahamas for the cocaine trade in the USA, to Hong Kong for heroin trade from South East Asia to the West, and to Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and Gibraltar as “shelters [for] illegal proceeds of heroin produced and exported by traffickers from Turkey and other Middle East countries,” she notes the formation of a “some kind of anarchical international society of mafias.”⁴³

She notes three contributing factors to the emergence of this global phenomenon. As a result of the liberalization of financial regulations, mafia and drug traders have “become such good customers of tax heavens and even respectable banks that no one has much interest in distinguishing their dirty money from the rest.” Second, mobile technology in refining heroin and cocaine from the raw material and easy access to high-tech communications make it easier for the transnational gangs to evade state laws. Third, the limitations in national laws in collaborating with Interpol and Europol create conducive conditions for illegal transnational operations in drug trade.⁴⁴ She argues that criminal gangs emerge when state authority is weakened and the government has lost or failed to obtain the consent of the governed.⁴⁵

In two particular cases, Russia and Turkey, the political realm is akin to a pre-ethical stage of lawlessness. Both Turkey and Russia entered the neoliberal phase of globalization through the financial regulations of the IMF, but the state in both places failed to regulate mafia activities. Moreover, in both cases there is enough evidence of the collaboration between the military, the intelligence agents, mafia, drug traffickers, and the judicial system. Both Turkey and Russia are considered potential members of the EU, despite questionable records on individual rights. In reviewing the constitutional requirements of individual rights, the existence of mafia within state apparatuses does not become

either a moral or a political issue in the neoliberal understanding of democracy. By the same logic of neoliberal democracy, individual rationality in Russia and Turkey is celebrated to the extent that it is compatible with the drive towards privatization. But privatization in these countries implies not only the transfer of state assets to private enterprise and the growing share of transnational corporations in production but also the privatization of crime and the collapse of the social contract.

From where I write, I observe the truism of cutthroat competition in a society where the state fails to oblige itself to the basic requirements of a social contract, either in terms of minimum welfare provisions or maintaining law. Individual competition in this context implies shooting incidents among rival mafia groups as well as strangling each other for a meagre income of taxi drivers, prostitutes, or passersby. The effects of the international society of mafia are felt in similar ways outside of these two cases. Pre-ethical moral code needs to be distinguished from postmodern indifference because the role of the state jurisdiction in preserving consent of the ruled differs drastically from one case to another. In these private times, Russia and Turkey (among others) are reminders of the collapse of the nation-state to fulfil the modern requirements of social, economic and political order. As such they are reminders of a lawless chaos in today's global conjuncture of disorder. In places where neoliberalism is brought from above without the social contract and the historical struggle for individual rights, the morality of politics oscillates between cutthroat competition, violence in every day life, individual indifference to the singular worth of the "private individual," heightened individualism in the preservation of self-interest, and a strong communal belonging with the moral codes of the state, military, mafia, and religious and nationalist groups.

CONCLUSION

If ethics is a critical reflection of morality, then the imperatives of an ethical political stand in this conjuncture are to be aporetic. This aporetic stand ought to be singular and universal at the same time. Singularity of an ethical approach to politics recognizes that the responsibility to care for strangers is contrary to reason and rationality and hence cannot be morally coded in a blueprint of rights and wrongs, dos and don'ts. Yet, if ethics is at the same time a theoretical reflection of the morality of politics, it can, at least in theory, identify recurring general trends in world politics. In this respect, neoliberalism, with its insistence on individual rights and rationality, fails to recognize the singular worth of human beings. This being the case, it continues to

preserve a rights-based view of morality devoid of self-responsibility to oneself and to others. To reiterate Bauman's conception of moral selves in this conjuncture, the contradictory imperative of ethical politics is to be in solidarity with those caught in wars, destitution, and deprivation without making a universal moral claim about this being the correct course of action. What is right is being regulated by the morality of liberal and neoliberal discourses and what is left is to be investigated not in writing but in the resilient autonomy of moral selves who, in spite of their self-interest, continue the tradition of solidarity in action.

NOTES

- 1 Larue A. Gerald, "Ancient Ethics," in Peter Singer (ed.), *A Companion to Ethics*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1993: 32–5.
- 2 Christopher Rowe argues that "the rise of Greek ethics can be seen in large part as a reflection of the overlaying of a fundamentally individualistic ethos with the demands for co-operative behaviour implied by the political institutions of the city state." Christopher Rowe, "Ethics in Ancient Greece," in Singer, *A Companion to Ethics*, 126.
- 3 Theoretical debates on morality and ethics provide us with a rich medley ranging from Aristotelian, Hobbesian, (neo-)Kantian ethics to the ethics of feminism, which is different from ethical feminism, postmodern ethics, which is different from modern and postmodern morality, and an ethics of the deconstruction of Western philosophy, which is not the same as repudiating, opposing, or going beyond the ontological premises of Western philosophy.
- 4 Luhmann Niklas, "Paradigm Lost: On the Ethical Reflection of Morality," *Thesis Eleven*, no. 29, 1991: 83–4.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 82–4.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 84, 90.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 86.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 85–91.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 88, 90.
- 10 Unless otherwise noted, Bauman uses the notions of ethics and morality interchangeably.
- 11 By 'modern developments' Bauman specifically refers to the rise of capitalism and the separation of the private realm (household economy, civil society, religion, and church) from the public, political realm. Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1993: 6.
- 12 Rowe, "Ethics in Ancient Greece."
- 13 M. Midgley, "The Origin of Ethics," in Singer, *A Companion to Ethics*, 4.

- 14 Zygmunt Bauman, "Morality without Ethics," *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 11, no. 4, 1994: 2
- 15 Ibid., 9.
- 16 Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, 238.
- 17 Ibid., 230.
- 18 Ibid., 229.
- 19 Ibid., 228–9.
- 20 Ibid., 239.
- 21 Ibid., 11.
- 22 Ibid., 11.
- 23 Ibid., 4.
- 24 Ibid., 247.
- 25 Bauman, "Morality without Ethics," 25–32.
- 26 Derek Sayer, *Readings from Karl Marx*, London: Routledge, 1989: 123.
- 27 For the pervasive influence of Christian morals in the secular, national formation of Europe, see Gerard Delanty, *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality*, London: MacMillan, 1995: 28, 47, 70. The most informative source for investigating the Christian influence on the secular conceptions of nationhood is European literature. In 1912 James Joyce constructs, the self-definition of a young man as follows: "Steven Dedalus is my name, Ireland is my nation. Clongowes is my dwelling place and heaven my expectation." James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, NY: Bantam Books, 1992: 10.
- 28 For an explanation of the modern character of the politicization of Islam in Turkey see my "Allahu Ekber, We are Turks: Yearning for a Different Homecoming at the Periphery of Europe," *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 17, no. 3, 1996.
- 29 Susan Strange, "The Limits of Politics," *Government and Opposition*, vol. 30, no. 3, Summer 1995: 293–6. For an elaboration of these points see Susan Strange, *The Retreat of the State: The diffusion of Power in the World Economy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- 30 Stephen Gill, "Knowledge, Politics and Neo-Liberal Political Economy," in R. Stubbs and G.R.L Underhill (eds), *Political Economy and the Changing Global Order*, London: MacMillan, 1995: 79, 82.
- 31 For an analysis of the 1994 GATT summit in the context of the paradoxical relationship between state legislation and the globalization of information as commodity, see John Frow, "Information as Gift and Commodity," *New Left Review*, no. 219, 1996.
- 32 The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development is on par with the IMF and World Bank in terms of its international, interregional financial operations, except to note that, unlike the latter two, the EBRD gives loans "to those governments committed to constitutional reforms and to

- the principles of free market economics.” Gill, “Knowledge, Politics and Neo-Liberal Political Economy,” 83.
- 33 For an analysis of social movements against NAFTA see Andre Drainville, “Resisting Integration in the America’s: Internationalism in One Country,” paper presented at the International Studies Association Conference in San Diego, April 1996.
- 34 Gill, “Knowledge, Politics and Neo-Liberal Political Economy,” 82.
- 35 Unless otherwise noted, in this section I use the notion of individual rights in the intertwined context of individuals as members of nation-states and individuals as rational, competitive, self-interested participants in the free market.
- 36 In Sayer, *Readings from Karl Marx*, 122.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 122–3.
- 38 With the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty, the twin notions of European Economic Union and Citizens of the Union are codified as one. Cris Shore and Annabel Black, “Citizens’ Europe and the Construction of European Identity,” in Victoria A. Goddard et al. (eds), *The Anthropology of Europe: Identities and Boundaries in Conflict*, Oxford: Berg, 1994.
- 39 Noel Thompson, “Supply Side Socialism: The Political Economy of New Labour,” *New Left Review*, no. 216, 1996: 45.
- 40 For particular examples check your local newspaper or TV station to find out specific interpellations of “lazy welfare recipients,” “babies born to mothers with AIDS,” “drug addicts,” “angry protesters,” and the like.
- 41 The pervasive influence of this particular moral interpellation of a worthy individual can be found outside of Europe and North America. Clarice Lispector, in portraying the self-definition of a young worker in Brazil, captures the liberal morality of self-hood as follows: “Olimpico de Jesus was a metal worker and Macebea failed to notice that he never once referred to himself as a *worker* but always as a *metallurgist*. Macebea was delighted with his professional standing just as she was proud of being a typist even if she did earn less than the minimum salary. She and Olimpico had social status. ‘Metallurgist and typist’ were categories of some distinction.” Clarice Lispector, *The Hour of the Star*, Manchester: Carcanet, 1986: 45.
- 42 Strange, *The Retreat of the State*, xii, 4, 5.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 113, 117.
- 44 Susan Strange, “The Limits of Politics,” 306–7.
- 45 Strange, *The Retreat of the State*, 116.