

## ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ ПРОБЛЕМЫ МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ, РЕГИОНАЛЬНОГО И ГЛОБАЛЬНОГО РАЗВИТИЯ

UDC 327

### Community Beyond Hegemony? Liberal Cosmopolitanism, Generic Emancipation and the Political\*

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This article critically re-evaluates certain blind spots in the debate on the possibility of a cosmopolitan political community. It does so by addressing certain key areas where, in my view, remaining conceptual misunderstandings prevent a full articulation of the conflicting positions. In particular, I concentrate on the ontological differences between liberalism and poststructuralism which, as long as they are not laid plain, distort the exchange of ideas on the nature of the political and on the issues of identity, recognition and exclusion. I contend that in poststructuralist ontology antagonism remains the only force that can constitute an inside-outside boundary and thus establish an identity. Hence, one needs to agree with Sergei Prozorov when he insists that cosmopolitan politics can only be post-identitarian. I then analyse the differences between the two visions of generic post-identitarian politics identified by Prozorov — those of Alain Badiou and Giorgio Agamben. This analysis helps to highlight the thesis that even if we can conceive of a truly generic community that is not grounded in any identity and therefore does not presuppose external othering as a constitutive practice, we might still need antagonistic politics as the only means to make this community possible.

**Keywords:** cosmopolitanism, antagonism, identity, othering, hegemony.

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## Introduction

This article critically re-evaluates certain blind spots in the debate on the possibility of a cosmopolitan political community which would, according to the proponents of the idea, supersede international anarchy, thus revolutionising the existing world order. This debate has been a remarkable feature of the theoretical development in the discipline of International Relations (IR) during the last two decades, especially after the publication of Alexander Wendt's influential article on the inevitability of a world state [1]. It reflects a growing interest in the problem of the universal that is characteristic of contemporary political thought. One of the central dividing lines in this discussion is between scholars supporting a critically revised version of Carl Schmitt's claim that any political community is necessarily based on antagonism and exclusion [2] and their opponents, who believe in the possibility of non-exclusionary and non-antagonistic cosmopolitan politics.

This article briefly assesses the current state of the debate on cosmopolitan community and then addresses the key areas where, in my view, remaining conceptual misunderstandings prevent the participants from fully spelling out their positions. In particular, I concentrate on the ontological differences: as long as these are not sorted out, they distort the exchange of ideas on the nature of the political and on the issues of identity, recognition and exclusion. I contend that in the poststructuralist ontology, which rejects any pre-existing ontological hierarchies, antagonism remains the only force that can constitute an inside-outside border and thus establish an identity. Hence, one needs to agree with Sergei Prozorov's assertion that generic politics can only be post-identitarian [3], and a cosmopolitan *identity* cannot but cover up an exclusion much more radical than in any particularist articulation.

Spelling out his vision of post-identitarian politics, Prozorov turns to the notions of generic community developed by two influential contemporary philosophers — Alain Badiou and Giorgio Agamben. He treats these two versions of generic politics as largely equivalent, since both authors view generic politics through the prism of subtraction from the dialectical process. In my view, this reading is not entirely correct, as Agamben and Badiou diverge on the question of how subtraction relates to antagonism. This observation highlights another key argument: even if we can conceive of a truly generic community that is not grounded in any identity and therefore does not presuppose external othering as constitutive practice, we might still need antagonistic politics in order to make this community possible. Generic emancipation is bound to face resistance and thus will necessarily involve antagonistic negation of the existing order.

Apart from Badiou's philosophy, my theoretical perspective has been informed by poststructuralist theory of hegemony developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Badiou's (and Agamben's) generic politics and Laclau and Mouffe's hegemony are not entirely compatible; their respective interpretations of politics are qualitatively different. I do believe, however, that to some extent this is a level-of-analysis problem: hegemony theory works very well as a conceptualisation of 'normal' identitarian politics, but is unable to step beyond this point. The 'generic' version, on the other hand, can conceive of post-identitarian alternatives, but often becomes redundant when less radical questions are at stake.

This article begins at the level of identitarian politics by discussing the difference between liberal and poststructuralist understandings of identity and community. It is my contention that a failure to appreciate these differences is behind much of liberal criticism

against the poststructuralist understanding of identity politics. In the third section, I compare the versions of generic community put forward by Badiou and Agamben, taking issue with certain aspects of their interpretation by Prozorov. This leads me to the concluding remarks about the significance of the emancipatory agenda for our vision of the future cosmopolitan world order.

## Overcoming international anarchy

The idea of a cosmopolitan community has a long history starting at least with Immanuel Kant. It may, indeed, be argued that the search for the ways of overcoming the intrinsic fragmentation of the international system was the foundational mission of IR as a discipline [3, p. 216]. Up until the 1990s, cosmopolitanism was defended mostly in liberal IR, which developed in confrontation with realism. Central to the discipline was the question of whether, and under which circumstances, cooperative behaviour would be rational and international solidarity feasible. In as much as liberals disagreed among themselves, it was on the question of the relative merits of supranational state versus stronger international institutions. The proponents of liberal universalism supported the idea of radically eliminating international anarchy through the creation of a global sovereign, while their liberal internationalist critics warned about the dangers of a worldwide dictatorship and promoted the idea of a pluralist international society<sup>1</sup>. State sovereignty was not questioned by liberals in any fundamental way — their solution to international anarchy consisted in either limiting it by legal and other means, or elevating it to the global level.

The advent of the reflectivist paradigm in 1980–90s reached across disciplinary boundaries by bringing in insights from political philosophy and historical sociology. Inter alia, the new approaches refused to treat sovereignty as a self-evident constant: the concept was historicised and problematised in many different ways. It was demonstrated that modern sovereign statehood emerged out of the unique historical situation of early modern Europe and that it went through substantial transformations during the next centuries. The boundary between domestic and international politics was also reconceptualised by, for instance, pointing out that national identity and foreign policy were co-constitutive [5].

As it turned out, one of the most productive new engagements in IR has been with Schmitt and his notion of the political. Schmitt's view of politics as inherently antagonistic has contributed to new approaches to international anarchy and conflict and made a crucial impact on security studies. Most importantly, however, disentangled from the state-centrism typical for Schmitt, his view of global politics as a pluriversum and the sharp criticism of liberal universalism provided realists and poststructuralists, but also liberal internationalists, with an important intellectual resource against the neo-Hegelian vision of the end of history.

It is not surprising therefore that the proponents of global political unification and, speaking more generally, of the liberal vision of politics as balancing between the plurality of particular interests, spare no effort in trying to rebut the Schmittian understanding and to insist on the feasibility of a cosmopolitan community. The flaws of the mainstream cosmopolitan argument have been convincingly exposed by Mouffe [6].

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<sup>1</sup> The classical distinction between realism, universalism and internationalism as forms of thought about international anarchy was introduced in [4].

Her critique clearly spells out the disagreements between poststructuralism and the mainstream cosmopolitan argument. It is not surprising that her writings on the topic are an obligatory reference point for anyone engaging in the debate [3, p.220–221; 7; 8, p.205–211]. However, there remain certain intricate issues where in my view Mouffe's analysis does not go deep enough. One of them is her promotion of a multipolar world order, to which I turn at the end of next section. Before doing that, however, it is important to consider the question of whether exclusion is a necessary precondition of any identity. Among the diverse texts which try to invalidate this premise, the article by Arash Abizadeh [7] stands out as a systematic and thorough treatment of the anti-cosmopolitan case. In the remaining part of this section and through the next one, I will therefore focus my analysis on Abizadeh's contribution, bringing in other authors' arguments whenever they are relevant.

In contrast to Wendt, whose Hegelian world state is a product of mainly, if not exclusively, the struggle for recognition [1, p.528–529], Abizadeh explicitly embarks on the endeavour to review all arguments against non-exclusionary cosmopolitan identity and 'to demonstrate [...] that the particularist thesis, construed as a conceptual or metaphysical claim about the inherent nature of collective identity, solidarity, or community, does not stand to reason'. In sum, there are two assertions he makes to prove this point. Firstly, while agreeing that 'identity presupposes *difference*', Abizadeh rejects the premise 'that it presupposes an external *other*' [7, p.45]<sup>2</sup>. Secondly, even if some form of othering and exclusion are necessary for the constitution of identity, they do not in his view have to be antagonistic: a mere difference would suffice to sustain the existence of the Self.

Abizadeh describes 'the particularist argument' as organised along several lines: conceptual vs. metaphysical, the recognition/dialogical argument, the Schmittean enemy argument vs. the Derridean difference argument. It must be made clear from the outset that my critique of Abizadeh does not amount to a defence of each and every version of the particularist position. However, ontology and epistemology advanced by Laclau and Mouffe, on the one hand, and Prozorov, on the other, are very different from Abizadeh's. Highlighting those differences is important as a way to demonstrate certain key blind spots in the liberal view on cosmopolitan community.

### *Liberalism: the pre-eminence of the individual*

In order to spell out these theoretical disagreements, it is convenient to start with the question of the ontological status of both the individual and of political borders. In Abizadeh's worldview, individual human being is endowed with unquestioned ontological priority, while the political border separates one group of individuals from another. This is evident already in the very first conceptual claim made by Abizadeh, that '[w]hile *individual* identity may indeed be inherently particular, *collective* identity is not' [7, p.47]. Addressing the recognition/dialogical argument, he goes on to argue that collective identity can be relational without being particular, because 'the recognition required by a *collective* identity *can* come solely from the (other) individuals who make up that collectivity'. Similarly, 'the dialogue might simply take place among [a collectivity's] own constituent members' [7, p.48]. In all these respects, Abizadeh does not diverge from

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<sup>2</sup> Henceforth, unless otherwise indicated, I keep original emphasis in quotations.

Wendt, for whom individuals are 'ultimately' the constitutive parts of the international system, while the struggle for recognition operates on two easily distinguishable levels — 'between individuals and between groups' [1, p. 504, 516]. Turning to Schmitt and Mouffe, Abizadeh takes issue with the understanding of politics as inherently antagonistic; in his interpretation, the Schmittian 'enemy is supposed to consist in an *empirically specifiable group(s) of actually existing concrete individuals*' [7, p. 55].

All these statements are based on the assumption that the social and political world consists of individuals as primary units. In the final analysis, it is not even important whether one equates the concepts of the individual and human being or, following, for example, Carol Rovane's interpretation of Locke [9], defines individuals as units, including groups, within a certain rational point of view. It still conceives of political actorness as a projection of human personality, while political community is seen as a mechanical combination of self-conscious individuals pursuing their rationally defined interests.

The same ontology lies beneath Abizadeh's treatment of borders. Thus, he finds it necessary to differentiate between four types of Other: an entity's Other in the strict sense is 'another entity that shares *no* constituent parts with it'; besides, there is also overlapping Other which 'shares some and only some elements' with the first entity, encompassed Other which is fully included in the first entity, and encompassing Other which, on the contrary, fully includes the first entity [7, p. 51–52]. He then goes on to argue at length that the Other required for the constitution of the identity of the Self can be internal as well as external. Similar approach is discernible in Abizadeh's conceptualisation of exclusion, which he equates with the denial of membership. Even though he admits that the denial does not have to be formal and can consist in marginalisation, misrecognition etc., we are still dealing with a strictly hierarchical ontology in which every whole consists of a limited and countable number of elements (e.g. the state consists of a certain number of citizens, possesses a certain territory subdivided into regions or provinces; individuals sharing similar views unite in political parties and movements and oppose other individuals sharing different views, and so on). To be sure, an individual can belong to many different entities and groupings, but, looking at the empirical situation of an individual or any other pre-given entity, we can always clearly classify them as either belonging or excluded.

Mouffe, in turn, presents her understanding of politics in the following way: 'Politics aims at the creation of unity in a context of conflict and diversity; it is always concerned with the creation of an "us" by the determination of a "them"' [10, p. 101]. In Abizadeh's interpretation this statement is equivalent to an openly reductionist one: 'every collective identity simultaneously and necessarily excludes *some individuals* from its constitution' [7, p. 55 (emphasis added)]. What for Mouffe is a confrontation between two political *positions*, for Abizadeh becomes reduced to a conflict between two *groups of individuals*.

This reductionism can hardly be deemed satisfactory in view of the recent theoretical developments. It illustrates Nick Vaughan-Williams' indictment of the current theoretical literature which 'continues to rely upon an unexamined epistemological and ontological anchor point provided by the concept of the border of the state' [11, p. 749]. It was already in the early 1990s that such authors as David Campbell and R. B. J. Walker demonstrated the problematic nature of the customary separation between domestic politics and international relations. The outside is produced in an effort to establish sovereign rule over the inside, and therefore 'it is not possible to simply understand international relations as the existence of atomized states that are fully fledged intensive identities'; on the contrary,

'foreign policy comes to be seen as a political practice that makes "foreign" certain events and actors' [5, p. 61] (see also [12]). More recently, Walker carried this argument further by suggesting that there is an outside to the international itself [13, p. 130–149].

Vaughan-Williams, relying on Giorgio Agamben's notion of bare life, proposed the concept of the 'generalised bio-political border' that 'reconceptualises the limits of sovereign power as a decision on the status of life that can effectively happen everywhere: a multi-faceted and decentred bio-political apparatus that is as mobile as the subjects it seeks to control' [11, p. 749]. In all these accounts, state border does not separate two given territories or a relatively stable group of member individuals from the non-members. Instead, it emerges as an effect of sovereign power which can be exercised anywhere and in relation to anyone, while at the same time playing a constitutive role in the production of the sovereign power itself. This also resonates with Hannah Richter's recent interpretation of Roberto Esposito's ontology of political community, which relies on 'an open-ended, introversive balancing of inclusion and exclusion'. This eliminates the ontological necessity of 'a particular Other', but acknowledges the need for an 'undefined outside' [14, p. 222]. What Vaughan-Williams makes clear, however, is that constitutive outside cannot remain undefined forever: rather, at any given moment it can manifest itself as a particular Other whose exclusion might be transitory, but still essential for the reproduction of the Self.

These accounts of political borders continue to concentrate on the state and its sovereign power as the key phenomenon that needs theoretical reassessment at a qualitatively new level. Abizadeh, however, explicitly rejects this focus. He insists — and here I could not agree more — that many particularist conceptualisations of political identity are nothing but the result of a failure to appreciate the fact that the sovereign nation state is historically contingent. Limiting our imaginary to sovereign territorial state as the only possible form of political community obviously makes any universalist alternative to international fragmentation either utopian or leading to unilateral domination in the name of arbitrarily defined 'universal human values'.

### *Poststructuralism: the primacy of the discursive*

A theoretical departure that enables one to talk about borders without sovereignty and statehood as pre-givens is provided by poststructuralist theory of hegemony. In this respect it originates in the Gramscian notion of historical bloc, which is developed by Laclau and Mouffe into the concept of hegemonic formation. Hegemony is an operation through which a particular identity is universalised, i.e. elevated to a position where it can represent the community as a whole [15, p. 134–145]. The conventional modern form of struggle for hegemony is the competition around the notion of the national interest between different parties and movements, each representing a particular view of common good, but each also claiming the right to speak in the name of the nation as a whole. However, theory of hegemony does not have to rely on any ontological hierarchies in order to conceive of the political. Whereas in state-centric accounts state sovereignty, even if contingent as to its empirical embodiment, still remains an indispensable locus to be seized in order to exercise power, hegemony theory is able to treat the pre-eminence of the state in modern times as an empirical fact rather than as theoretical prerequisite. This is so because the power which enables a particular identity to become hegemonic is derived not from the state but from antagonism.



Antagonism is what makes unity possible in a world which is envisaged as lacking any pre-given metaphysical hierarchies. If we follow Ernesto Laclau in describing the social as a level field where all differences have the same ontological status (or, for that matter, adopt Alain Badiou's [16] view of any situation as a pure multiplicity), it becomes obvious that

A neutral limit would be one which is essentially continuous with what is at its two sides, and the two sides are simply different from each other. [...] In the case of an exclusion we have, instead, authentic limits because the actualisation of what is beyond the limit of exclusion would involve the impossibility of what is on this side of the limit. True limits are always antagonistic [17, p. 37].

Antagonism, understood as violent negation of the constitutive outside, is what makes political unity possible in the absence of any prioritised locus of power, such as sovereign state. While the establishment of hegemony presupposes a sovereign subject (but *not necessarily* a sovereign state), the reproduction of the hegemonic situation is a structural self-sustaining process which can be conceptualised without relying on the notion of subjectivity or sovereignty. Even more importantly, the boundary produced by antagonism can run anywhere in the political space. In other words, a political community constituted through antagonism is *neither* a state *nor* a group of individuals, it does *not* have a territory or any other necessary connection with the geographical space. A political community may try to establish a sovereign state or speak in the name of the existing state by articulating a particular vision of national identity and interests. It may, on the other hand, position itself as an explicitly anti-statist project, such as the workers' movement of the late nineteenth — early twentieth century. It can even try to ignore the state, as in the case of certain autonomist or localist movements.

Community produced through the hegemonic operation is still particularistic and exclusionary, because its very existence depends on universalising some particular identities at the expense of antagonising a constitutive outside. But in relations between themselves political communities are neither hierarchical nor mutually exclusive, because multiple hegemonic projects operate in any given political space, competing for the same discursive and material resources. This competition leads to their mutual dislocation, so that neither community is complete and fully sutured. Therefore, the border of any empirically observable political community is never fully 'negative', in the sense of being prone to generate 'mutual antagonisms or intergroup aggression' [18, p. 125]. The negativity inherent in social boundaries is always dispersed into distinct moments which can mutually reinforce or cancel each other, thus producing patterns of inter-community relations ranging from hostility to friendship.

Adopting an individualist perspective in such an analysis is simply impossible: an individual cannot freely choose to belong to a particular community; neither is she forced to make a choice. Rather, the very status of the individual, the value of human life, the autonomy of individual decision etc. are culturally and politically conditioned. Free will and individual responsibility remain valid notions, but their applicability is limited to the microsocial level, to private histories and experiences. These experiences can consist in safely belonging to some communities and being fully excluded from others, but also can pass through various zones of indistinction where the status of individual human being remains suspended for a brief moment or indefinitely.

It must be clear by now that Abizadeh's criticism of particularism and the antagonistic view of politics is valid only in relation to those of his opponents who stay on the same relatively modest theoretical ground as himself — such as Charles Taylor or Anthony D. Smith. In the poststructuralist view, a political community created through the operation of hegemony antagonises a particular political position and *not* a clearly defined empirically identifiable group of physically existing human beings: in Íñigo Errejón's words, this notion encompasses 'an intensity that can inhere in any type of relation and any subject that involves the establishment of a friend-enemy relationship' [19, p. 56]. The fact that any political position is regularly expressed by actually existing individuals does not justify endowing individuals with a higher ontological status than that of antagonism itself. On the contrary, while speaking about politics, empirically existing individuals shift between different discourses, make contradictory statements, adjust what they say to the expectations of the audience and so on. We can sway an individual opponent to our side, thus making her one of our own, but even if this is an important political leader, this will not in itself reduce the intensity of the constitutive antagonism<sup>3</sup>. Conversely, if we hold enough power, we can designate a particular individual or group as representing the enemy, and even have them incarcerated or destroyed.

In a certain sense, it may be argued that political discourses 'speak' through particular individuals, not vice versa; and they also interpellate individuals into specific positions in the political space. Ontologically, discourse is much more firmly rooted in the historical situation than particular individuals with their transient subject positions. Admittedly, intense political contradiction can and often does result in the physical destruction of individual human beings, but this is not a definitional feature of adversarial politics, since a forceful political antagonism can be reproduced indefinitely without translating into physical struggle. Even less significance has the fact that this particular human being gets killed, while another one escapes: what matters is how the killers define the group they target, and that is a discursive phenomenon independent of the existence of any concrete physical body.

It is therefore incorrect to interpret, as Abizadeh does, the Schmittian or poststructuralist notion of exclusion involved in the creation of any political identity as a denial, formal or effective, of membership. He is right to maintain that 'the Derridean category of the constitutive outside is not coterminous with an empirically specifiable set of concrete individuals' [7, p. 57]<sup>4</sup>, but wrongly concludes that for this reason the constitutive outside can be located inside. A definitional feature of a political community is that it excludes other political positions and/or identities, not individual human beings. Nevertheless, exclusion can severely affect individual lives, because *anyone* can end up on the outer side of the boundary separating 'good citizens' from 'enemies of the people' or 'terrorists'. Being recognised as a member of an inclusive cosmopolitan liberal democracy does not guarantee anyone from incidental interpellation into the subject position of an enemy, as it happened to Jean Charles de Menezes, shot by the UK anti-terrorist officers in the aftermath of the terrorist attack in London in July 2005 [11, p. 747–748]<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> This, in effect, was a point made already by Schmitt when he insisted on the need to differentiate between the political enemy and the private adversary [2, p. 28–29].

<sup>4</sup> The term 'constitutive outside' was actually introduced by Henry Staten [20, p. 16] as an umbrella for various words and phrases employed by Derrida.

<sup>5</sup> Vaughan-Williams uses this fact as an illustration of everyone's position in the 'zone of indistinction' rather than exclusion, but it might be argued that in the act of killing itself Mendes figured as a (mistaken) embodiment of the external enemy.



There is therefore no point in opposing collective identity to individual one by insisting that while the latter might be necessarily particular, the former is not. And it is simply logically impossible to claim, as a ground for advancing the idea of cosmopolitan identity, that a political adversary may be internal: while the constitutive outside can indeed be *domestic* from the point of view of a territorial state, it is still by definition located on the outer side of the border delineating the internal space of a political community (whether it is imagined as a state, a class, or as entire humanity).

Consequently, the first counterargument advanced by Abizadeh against the ‘particularist’ position — that constitutive outside can actually be internal — is only sustainable as long as we stick to liberal individualist ontology, which is explicitly rejected by poststructuralists. His criticism might be valid in the context of the debate between the particularist (Taylor) and the cosmopolitan (Wendt) versions of the Hegelian theory of recognition, but cannot be deployed against poststructuralism. If liberal theorists want to engage with the notion of constitutive *outside*, they would have to start by confronting the philosophical premises of poststructuralism, instead of simply trying to impose their own ontology on political thought that has very different, and much more radical, philosophical origins.

## Difference and antagonism

The second major counterargument Abizadeh puts forward against the particularist position is that ‘there are no metaphysical grounds for thinking that a relation of difference is necessarily a relation of antagonism (i.e. for thinking that a possibility of war is always effective and structuring)’ [7, p. 57]. It would be impossible to argue against this assertion, thus phrased, were it not for the fact that it confuses difference with othering and only because of that can be used as a refutation of the poststructuralist thesis about the constitutive role of antagonism. What is at stake here is not terminological niceties but a profound disagreement about the nature of the political.

This is evident already in Abizadeh’s contention that the adversarial understanding of politics is unwittingly derived from Hobbesian preconceptions of human nature, whereas in the empirical reality ‘the other might also be a willing and cooperative *aid* to my survival’, not an enemy. Abizadeh thus interprets enmity as ‘a contingent, empirical possibility’ and accuses Schmitt of wrongly transforming it into ‘a metaphysically determinative necessity’ [7, p. 54]. This claim is disputed by Prozorov, who maintains that the status of enmity in Schmitt ‘has little to do with any anthropological or theological account of “human nature” but rather arises out of a *vigilant receptivity to the existence of the Other*: “man” is neither good nor evil but simply dangerous because of being different’. Prozorov links the indispensable nature of enmity in Schmitt’s political philosophy with the fact that ‘[f]or Schmitt, *all* politics is *identity politics*’: it does not have to unfold only in a violent mode, but ‘[w]hat is foreclosed in Schmitt’s logic is the disappearance of the “most extreme possibility” *qua* possibility, i.e. the formation of a political entity in which the problem of difference would not arise’ [3, p. 221, 222].

Let us reiterate that in poststructuralist theory of hegemony, unlike in Schmitt’s writings, the constitutive nature of antagonism is not derived from ontological alterity as such, but is a logical consequence of the refusal to build ontological hierarchies. In the absence of any privileged locus of power (such as sovereign state) which would create unity amidst an infinite expanse of differences, it is only pure negation of the outside that can produce

boundaries and thus make political identity possible [15, p. 144]. In order to imagine a cosmopolitan world we certainly have to move beyond the state-centric approach, but this leaves us with antagonism as the only force that can bring identity into existence.

Against this background it must also be clear that the literature on temporal othering, which proliferated at the turn of the centuries, in particular in the field of European Union studies [21–23], misses the point in as much as it offers the Self's own past as a constitutive outside which can allegedly serve as the basis for a more benign attitude to the outsiders. In order to be 'otherable', a particular part of the past must be politically relevant, which most probably means that there are certain political positions whose interpretation of history does not fit into the mainstream political consensus. As Prozorov maintains, 'any historical action must negate a section of actually existing Space, thereby transforming this present existence into the past', and therefore 'it is impossible to negate only temporarily or only spatially' [24, p. 1282]. Even if we imagine a situation in which the memory of the past is so painful that it is politically relevant even though entire society coheres in treating it as constitutive outside, its very presence is likely to decentre the present identity of the Self and invite securitising responses from at least some parts of the ideological spectrum.

In other words, as Bahar Rumelili rightly points out in her critique of liberal constructivism, the idea that a political community can be exclusively grounded in temporal othering actually involves abandoning the basic theoretical premises of constructivism and letting positivist ontology in through the back door: it 'immediately presupposes a pre-given past that a pre-given ... collectivity shares' [25, p. 259]. In the real world, of course, any discourse of temporal othering is prone to result in the same extreme forms of exclusion that are characteristic of any other forms of non-reflexive universalism.

It is unfortunate that Rumelili herself is not consistent in her treatment of the otherness problematic: instead of waging her anti-essentialist campaign through to a logical conclusion that a decision on whether one form of othering is better than another must always be situational, she does the opposite by trying to develop a set of *abstract* criteria for normative differentiation between good and bad othering. Not surprisingly, she ends up having to embrace a number of preconceptions, such as that violence must always be avoided, that alterity must always be celebrated, etc. [25, p. 262–265]. As a matter of fact, the very idea of establishing a universal hierarchy of the forms of othering is inherently liberal, because it is based on the belief that a formalised norm is the best or even the only way of achieving justice. In the end, Rumelili does conclude that any form of othering has its negative sides: thus, inclusive identities tend to 'construct the Other as less than Self' and thus 'necessarily embody a hierarchy'. She ends up with a typically liberal internationalist claim that exclusive identities that do not strive to construct a moral hierarchy work best to preserve peace [25, p. 265, 279–280]. However, the possibility of neutral exclusive identities that are not prone to securitise difference is extremely problematic in view of the above discussion. In any event, cosmopolitan identity must by definition be inclusive, and therefore Rumelili, while sharing certain normative background with liberal universalism, in the end makes a case against the latter.

Mouffe herself, when discussing the models of the future world order, comes very close to endorsing a version of liberal internationalism. She argues in favour of 'abandoning the illusory hope for a political unification of the world' and seeks solution 'in the pluralisation of hegemonies': 'we should advocate the establishment of a multipolar, agonistic world organised around several big regional units with their different cultures and

values' [26, p. 553] (see also [6, p. 90–118]). From the point of view of the global order this is certainly a counter-revolutionary project because it attaches a lot of value to multiplicity of political spaces and thus denies the possibility of global solidarity. Moreover, it can have some reactionary consequences even at the local level, because it gravitates towards relativism in the debate on universal values. She ends up advocating the idea of 'multiple modernities', 'vernacular models of democracy' and "homeomorphic", i.e. functional, equivalents of the notion of human rights' [26, p. 557, 559, 560].

Such notions can take us even further down the relativist road than the classical version of liberal internationalism. In the latter, the existence of other states with their own value systems is accepted, but these value systems are not necessarily endorsed. Mouffe's version, on the contrary, runs a serious risk of providing legitimacy to non-liberal oppressive regimes as an inevitable trade-off in the process of creating a multipolar world. It must be clear that such an endorsement of the status quo is a departure from the original project of radical democracy developed by Laclau and Mouffe since the 1980s [15]. Instead of promoting solidarity based on a situational, historicist analysis of grassroots demands [27], it embraces pluralism of political spaces as a value that supersedes the goal of universal emancipation. This could have devastating consequences for any counter-hegemonic project that crosses interstate and civilisational boundaries trying to establish relations of equivalence between different struggles and oppressions all over the world. Instead of solidarity with the oppressed, this vision promotes the feeling of complacency and limits our political horizon to the local political situation.

### **Towards post-identitarian politics?**

One of the most radical attempts to transcend the inevitably antagonistic character of the political in order to move beyond international anarchy is undertaken by Prozorov's writings on generic universalism [3; 24; 28]. He builds on the political thought of two prominent contemporary philosophers — Alain Badiou and Giorgio Agamben. As one may guess given this background, Prozorov's reasoning is rather complex, and even summarizing it here would be a challenge. What this section does instead is going through certain elements of the argument which are directly relevant to the above discussion of liberal cosmopolitanism and highlighting potential flaws shared by both approaches.

To begin with, Prozorov treats both of his sources as presenting structurally equivalent argument, even if based on different premises. Both Badiou and Agamben in his view make a case in favour of generic universalism as a way of transcending identitarian pluralism, and converge in terms of the practical imperatives that can be drawn from their teachings. While I agree that both philosophers advance generic universalist agenda, I believe that the ways each of them develop their ideas lead to two distinct visions of political praxis that need to be evaluated in their own right.

#### *Alain Badiou and generic emancipation*

Badiou starts with an ontology rooted in set theory, part of contemporary mathematics. His basic premise is nicely summarised by Prozorov: 'Badiou conceives of every situation as a pure multiplicity, defined solely by a relation of *belonging*, whereby every multiple is always a multiple of multiples' [3, p. 230]. The key distinction on which the whole edifice

of Badiou's ethics is built is between relations of belonging, which is radically egalitarian (every multiple is a multiple of multiples and a part of another multiple), and inclusion. The latter reconfigures the elements of the situation into subsets which are *identifiable*, countable and finite. Thus, it can be said that identity emerges as an aspect of the *state of the situation* and thus has direct relationship with power [16, p.81–83].

Contrary to the whole tradition of thinking in terms of 'politics of recognition', and also to Schmitt, what Badiou's ethics amounts to is a "desublimation" of difference: alterity in his view 'must be made both ethically and politically inoperative, i.e. recognised as a banal fact of human existence that is irrelevant as a political criterion.' This is achieved in a generic world community which is radically egalitarian because, again, it includes not a finite number of individuals (or nations, civilisations, etc.), but an infinite diversity of multiples. This will mean that 'all differences have been neutralized and the antagonistic potential of the identitarian and pluralistic logic of the political deactivated, if only because [...] there will be only one subject, namely the world community itself' [3, p.229, 234].

However — and Badiou emphasises this throughout his writings — the end of politics is not to be achieved through depoliticisation. As Prozorov correctly notes, 'Badiou's politics is certainly militant and his discourse is not averse to the rhetoric of radical enmity and even the justification of terror' [3, p.234]. A generic world community is not something that can be outlined here and now: the generic subset, Badiou writes, 'is clearly infinite and remains beyond the reach of completion. Nevertheless, it is possible to state that if it is completed, it will ineluctably be a generic subset' [29, p.116]. World community thus lies on the horizon of political thinking; it must inform our political practice but cannot be set as an immediate goal. We cannot link the present pluriversum with the future world community by simply connecting the dots, because we do not (yet?) have the language to construct a logical chain between the present state of the international situation and the future radically egalitarian 'figure of the one'. With the disaggregation of the world working class and the bankruptcy of parties and trade unions, we do not have the slightest idea of what the subject of this transformation might be [30]. The only thing we do know, according to Badiou, is the form that this movement must take — the paradoxical form of an *event*, which disrupts the state of the situation, 'exposes a foundational void that is true for every element in the situation' [31], and which then can be prolonged in time and extended into space indefinitely, through politics that becomes 'radically universalist, addressed to everyone and to no one in particular' [3, p.232].

Hence, the question that needs to be asked — not *contra* Badiou but *with* Badiou — is the same with which Rumelili confronts liberal universalists: even if we think we know where history ends, we still do not know *how to arrive there* [25, p.260]. A key facet of this problem is whether it is possible to move towards generic world community in a non-antagonistic manner. Colin Wright suggests that such a model could be provided by the 'Not in Our Name' (NION) movement — a slogan that emerged out of the protests against the 'war on terror' declared by U.S. President George W. Bush. What is truly distinctive about the whole discursive logic of 'Not in Our Name' is its explicit universalism (the 'Our' in NION can be extended to everyone with no exception) with an equally unequivocal refusal to be identified, counted, labelled by the state ('Our Name' in NION is everyone's and no-one's in particular, it does not speak in the name of any group or identity). As such, it invokes universal belonging by simultaneously opposing any inclusion [31].

However, the starting point of NION is explicitly antagonistic: to use Wright's words, 'it destroys (or at least challenges) the citizen-as-unit-of-consent counted by the liberal warring State on the one hand, and creates the *citizen-as-subject-of-resistance* on the other' [31, emphasis added]. Admittedly, liberal politics is also about resistance and not just consent. However, as Prozorov warns, 'the dominant mode of this "politics of resistance" today is particularistic "identity politics", in which grievances against and demands on power arise from the positive predicates of one's particular identity' [32, p. 50]. In its true generic sense, however '[p]olitics never consists in the mere affirmation of any particular identity but must establish a relation between this affirmation and the transcendental order of the entire world' [32, p. 53]. This form of politics might not be hegemonic in the sense that no particular content is being universalised, but it is still antagonistic as long as there is the Other of the Master which obstructs the emancipation of the Slave. Speaking about the present human condition (as opposed to the horizon of a generic world community) 'politics beyond antagonism' is to be found neither in Badiou's writings<sup>6</sup> nor among possible empirically identifiable instances of generic politics.

### *Giorgio Agamben: bankruptcy, inoperosity and the withdrawal*

Agamben's vision of a 'coming community' apparently does involve abandoning antagonistic politics as a practical step here and now. It is grounded in the linguistic capacity shared by all humans — it is 'not a nature, a voice or a common experience in a signifying language; it is the vision of language itself and therefore the experience of language's limits, its *end*' [quoted in 3, p. 237]. This leads him to a concept of human nature that emphasises potentiality over any purposeful practice: 'the only ethical experience,' he writes, 'is the experience of being (one's own) potentiality, of being (one's own) possibility — exposing, that is, in every form one's own amorphousness and in every act one's own inactuality' [33, p. 43]. The 'coming community' that arises from this ontology is described by Prozorov in explicitly post-identitarian terms: it is 'a community devoid of any identitarian predicates, that has liberated itself from historical tasks and is finally able to dwell on its "being-thus" or "whatever-being"' [3, p. 237].

Apart from the understanding of human nature as pure potentiality, Agamben's 'coming community' is rooted in the historical experience of bankruptcy allegedly shared by all Europeans and perhaps by all humans: 'one of the few things that can be declared with certainty is that all the peoples of Europe (and, perhaps, all the peoples of the Earth) have gone bankrupt,' Agamben declares, citing examples such as Nazism for the Germans, the civil war for the Spaniards, Vichy for the French, and so on [34, p. 141]. Prozorov stresses the fact that grounding universal community in the shared feeling of bankruptcy does not amount to yet another form of temporal othering because there is no way 'of fleeing one's bankruptcy either in space or in time'. Rather, we are talking about 'the human reappropriation of historicity, whereby time is no longer subjected to the work of negation and becomes available for free use in social praxis'. The net outcome in practical terms is the notion of inoperosity — a rediscovery of politics 'as praxis devoid of all tasks' [24, p. 1288]. Prozorov summarises this concept in the following way, referring again to the dialectics of Master and Slave:

<sup>6</sup> Badiou's own empirical examples of generic truth procedures, such as Chinese Cultural Revolution or contemporary struggles of migrant workers in France, are even more explicitly antagonistic than NION.



Agamben's version of end of history has nothing to do with the Hegelo-Kojévian eschatological idea of the *fulfilment* of all historical epochs but rather consists in the radical *interruption* of the epochal dimension as such, whereby the Slave does not achieve recognition in the universal homogeneous state but simply suspends his work and in this manner refuses to engage in negating action altogether. The struggle for recognition is thus not won by the Slave through the murder of the Master but simply discontinued, whereby the Slave exits his condition of slavery by abandoning his work and Master is consequently left without anyone to be the Master of [24, p. 1288–1289].

Prozorov is adamant to demonstrate the equivalence between Badiou's and Agamben's conceptual frameworks, in particular between Badiou's generic community and Agamben's 'coming community'. Both concepts are indeed very close and share a common background in the notion of generic emancipation, which was introduced by young Marx as early as 1843 and arguably became the cornerstone of the Marxist paradigm. Moreover, deriving the 'coming community' from shared linguistic capacity is similar to the invocation of the 'general intellect' by the theorists of multitude, which can also be traced back to Marx. Yet, as Benjamin Arditi points out, even if 'this intellect or potential faculty to think [can be] the foundation of social cooperation', it remains to be seen whether it is 'enough to create the commonality of the multitude as a *political force*' [8, p. 216].

Badiou's generic subject can only come into being in an event that opens a void in the existing political order; fidelity to this generic experience is bound to be met with resistance on the part of the structural forces: 'when politics exists, it immediately gives rise to a show of power by the state' [29, p. 157]. In Agamben's version, on the contrary, the generic subject *deliberately and conclusively* withdraws from any antagonism, leaving the Master to himself. Inoperosity certainly does not amount to passivity and inaction, but what makes praxis inoperative is the absence of any telos or task.

Prozorov follows Badiou in differentiating between destruction and subtraction as two possible forms of resistance, and he associates antagonism exclusively with the former [28, p. 533–535]. It might be argued, however, that subtraction necessarily involves the need to face the power of the state in order to 'assign a measure' to its excess [29, p. 158]. Badiou himself sums up this disagreement in the following way:

Agamben, this Franciscan of ontology, prefers, to the affirmative becoming of truths, the delicate, almost secret persistence of life, what remains to one who no longer has anything; this forever sacrificed 'bare life', both humble and essential, which conveys everything of which we — crushed by the crass commotion of powers — are capable of in terms of sense [35, p. 559]<sup>7</sup>.

What differentiates the two authors is the fact that Badiou's politics strives to transcend the situation by opposing the state in a series of acts whose preconditions are defined by the local context but which nevertheless resist any inclusion by virtue of being true to the revolutionary void of the event. As it is subtractive rather than destructive, it does not make opposing the Master its point of departure, but it is certainly ready to fight if the situation so demands. By contrast, Agamben's subtraction is equivalent to withdrawal: his subject lets the state remain as it is in its irreparable bankruptcy and engages in inoperative praxis which is incomprehensible from within the norms on which sovereign power rests. Whether this amounts to resistance or escapism and depoliticisation might be a question of definition, or simply of taste. Yet this concern

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<sup>7</sup> On the concept of bare life and its political significance, see [36], and for its use in IR [11; 28].



must definitely accompany Agamben's political project — very much in the same way as Badiou's project is necessarily self-restrained by the requirement of self-reflection conceptualised as fidelity to an event.

## Conclusion

This article has critically analysed a number of recent attempts to present theoretical grounds for thinking about a future cosmopolitan community. The key questions that shape the debate boil down to one crucial point: the possibility to conceive of politics that would be free of antagonism and therefore non-exclusionary. It makes no sense to question the existence of a universal human identity and therefore of humankind as a community, which is so visibly present in all types of everyday discourses and practices. However, as soon as we enter the political terrain, the notion of cosmopolitan identity that presupposes no difference at all — either within itself or in the form of exclusion — does not seem to be a logical possibility. This is acknowledged even by liberal universalists such as Abizadeh.

In the final analysis, the rationale of the whole exercise is to demonstrate that, contrary to Schmitt, antagonism is not a definitional feature of politics and thus to substantiate the feasibility of a cosmopolitan political community that is not based on exclusion and negativity. This critique does invalidate Schmitt's view of a political enemy as a 'fighting collectivity of people' [2, p. 28]. Yet poststructuralist political theory has reworked this ontology by redefining antagonism as occurring between political positions rather than groups of individuals. In this case, we can conceive of a community whose identity does not depend on the explicit exclusion of any pre-given empirically identifiable group of individuals, but whose political existence nevertheless inevitably produces negative dynamic which results in specific instances of exclusion where concrete individuals are targeted depending on the circumstances. Nazi politics, for example, clearly and unambiguously excluded several concrete groups of individuals, first of all Jews. An attribute of Stalinism, on the contrary, was the exclusion of 'enemies of the people', an indistinct category that potentially held everyone in its grip, from simple workers and peasants to top party leaders.

The defining moment here consists in the ontological hierarchy that lies at the core of liberal thought. For liberals, the autonomous individual pre-exists any social structures. Poststructuralism, on the contrary, explicitly rejects any pre-given hierarchies, which leaves us with an infinite expanse of differences where no specific type of units enjoys the privilege of existence before others. Since there is no genuine, primary identity that can serve as a starting point for community-building, antagonism remains the only constitutive force in identity politics. If liberals are unhappy with this image, they have to start their criticism at the ontological level instead of criticising poststructuralist inferences on the basis of an ontology that poststructuralism does not share.

If, on the contrary, we accept the poststructuralist perspective, we must conclude that a cosmopolitan *identity* is impossible, while the only way to imagine a cosmopolitan *community* consists in abandoning identitarian politics altogether. This possibility is suggested in the philosophical writings of Agamben and Badiou and elaborated by Prozorov. In both versions, generic emancipation starts with subtraction from the existing order of things, and thus with a refusal to associate political subjectivity with any identity whatsoever. The key question that arises in this connection is whether subtraction necessarily amounts to with-

drawal, as Agamben's inoperosity seems to suggest, or it can still take the form of purposeful action aimed at transcending the reality, antagonising at least some of its elements. In the former case, there is a danger of making one's political project irrelevant, while the more militant option stands on the verge of reverting back to the Hegelian dialectics and confronting the Master in a frontal antagonism. It must be noted, however, that the most pertinent empirical examples of generic politics, such as the 'Not in Our Name' movement, come into existence through the logic of negativity and visibly antagonise certain segments of the mainstream political space. This evidence is certainly inconclusive, but it shifts the balance in favour of the opinion that genuine political praxis, *in as much as it is generic*, presupposes being prepared for antagonism — simply because the establishment of an inclusive generic community must revolutionise the existing political order, and this rebellion, whatever form it might take, is bound to cause resistance on the part of the Master.

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