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Global Inequality, Human Rights and Power: a critique of Ulrich Beck's cosmopolitanism

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This article is a critique of Ulrich Beck's advocacy of a cosmopolitan approach to global inequality and human rights. It is argued that cosmopolitanism does not bring a new and unique perspective on global inequality. In fact Beck's proposals on migration would reinforce inequality and anti-cosmopolitanism. It is argued that his 'both/and' perspective on hybridisation and contextual universalism is undermined by inequality, conflict and power that are glossed over in Beck's approach. I argue that human rights interventionism as advocated by Beck falls short of cosmopolitanism, in ways which are shown by qualifications about power and inequality that Beck himself makes in his arguments.

Keywords: globalization, cosmopolitanism, inequality, human rights, power, Ulrich Beck, immigration, USA.

This article focuses on the implications of Ulrich Beck's cosmopolitan sociology and politics for understanding global inequality, human rights and power. Beck has creditably stated that his desire is to outline an alternative to neoliberal and postmodernist responses to globalization, by formulating a politics oriented around social and human goals, including through global political interventions (eg, 2006: 57-71, 115-6 and, on neoliberalism and responses to it, see 2000: introduction and chs 4 and 5). Underpinning this is his prescription of a sociological approach which attempts to break with methodological nationalism in favour of more global and cosmopolitan vision for social science. Beck is a public intellectual in Germany and beyond, identified with a left liberal agenda, on the surface of it critical of neoliberalism, and with cosmopolitan proposals. He has affinities with sometimes similarly characterised authors such as the cosmopolitan sociologists Anthony Giddens and David Held.

Despite his important positive intentions, and a powerful analysis of possible political responses to neoliberalism, difficulties and contradictions undermine some of Beck's key claims on global and cosmopolitan issues. Flaws in his sociology of globalization and cosmopolitanism are at the basis of problems in his global political prescriptions on international inequality and human rights. An important argument in this article is that the proposal of a co-operative

humanitarian global politics fails to work when set against a critical sociological perspective on world politics as structured by conflict and power, including between nation-states, rather than common consciousness and collaboration, as posited by Beck. Beck's approach glosses over conflicts, inequalities and injustices in world society and harmonises contradictions within a benign and optimistic view of international relations. A key concern here is that some of these problems in Beck's theory are brought out by internal contradictions within it.

My focus in this article is on Beck's perspective on global inequality and human rights in his books *Cosmopolitan Vision* (2006) and *What is Globalization?* (2000) and associated articles (eg Beck 2000a, Beck and Sznaider 2006), but they are relevant also to his books *Power in the Global Age* (2005; see also Grande and Beck 2007), and, in parts, to other cosmopolitan approaches to human rights and inequality (eg Kaldor 2003, Held 2000, Archibugi and Held 1995). Beck's concerns in his writings on globalization and cosmopolitanism follow from his earlier work on risk society (Beck 1992, 1999), although in ways I do not have space to discuss here. Likewise a number of criticisms of this earlier work focuses on divisions of class, gender and power and, as such, have links with my own critique here (eg, see Mythen 2004; Rustin 1994). My focus is on his more recent work on globalization and cosmopolitanism as yet less fully discussed by critical analysts.

Methodological nationalism, cosmopolitanism and global inequality

Beck criticises methodological nationalism and advocates the replacement of what he sees as a redundant national outlook or container theory of society with a more cosmopolitan vision. One place where he says this applies is in making sense of global inequality. Here he suggests that previous perspectives have been too methodologically nationalist to understand global inequalities and that cosmopolitanism provides a new perspective that can do so for the first time.

In *Cosmopolitan Vision* Beck argues that global inequalities get 'at best only marginal attention in methodological nationalism' (2006: 38-40). There are two main aspects to this argument. Firstly, he says that inequalities are justified by the performance principle. Inequality is justified by the dynamism and productivity its incentives are said to bring to society and, therefore, the overall wealth it produces. Methodological nationalism he says uses this performance justification internally to give inequality a positive legitimation. Cosmopolitanism shows how the nation-state principle legitimates global inequalities. Secondly, Beck argues that the national outlook being nationally inward-looking conceals global inequalities. It legitimates global inequalities negatively by concealment, therefore, as well as positively by justifying them (2006: 38).

There are a number of questions here. First Beck argues that methodological nationalism justifies internal inequalities using the performance principle.

However one of sociology's great contributions has been to be critical about inequality and expose inequalities of class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality and their negative effects on life chances and power. Sociology has been at the forefront of the analysis of social divisions, from Marx and Weber onwards through neo-Marxists, neo-Weberians and others in the 20th century (eg see Giddens 1981; Crompton 1998). The performance principle as justification has been exposed by sociology through a counter-focus on the ill-effects of inequality, rather than reproduced by it as Beck suggests.

A second issue relates to comparative sociology. Beck says that the nation-state principle has stopped global inequalities being exposed. But comparative sociology while sticking to the nation-state principle, as he has argued critically that it does, can show up inequalities globally through international comparison. Comparative sociology, almost by definition, shows up global inequalities on a cross-national basis.

Thirdly, dependency theory and world systems theory have been important schools of thought in sociology which have shown inequality globally (eg see Harrison 1988). This has been partly in relations in which they continue to show the nation-state as important and shows that methodological nationalism is compatible with understanding global inequality and not necessarily an introverted legitimation for it as Beck claims. But it has also shown this in relations of interdependency, ie in transnational relations of a more global sort. One of the criticisms of dependency theory has been that it does not show enough of an introverted nation-state principle, attributing too much of global inequality to the dependency of the poor on the developed world, and failing to attribute enough of the blame to factors internal to states, such as corruption and internal wars. Far from being too inwardly nationally-focused to see global inequalities, some schools in the sociology of development which have thoroughly analysed global inequality have been criticised for attributing it too much to external factors and insufficiently to factors internal to the nation-state. (For a recent discussion of studies of international inequality and development within the context of globalization see Kiely 2007).

Given these factors, Beck's characterisation of methodological nationalism as unequipped to be conscious of global inequality seems problematic. This raises a fourth issue. Beck justifies his approach by changing his characterisation of methodological nationalism from one which analyses international relations from the point of view of the nation-state and relations between nation-states to one which sees methodological nationalism as 'introverted', ie not oriented to external relations which he is saying here are unequal. The way he can criticise methodological nationalism for legitimating global inequality by not analysing external relations is by defining it here as 'introverted'. This goes against Beck's definition of methodological nationalism elsewhere as open to externalist analysis but from the point of view of inter-national nation-states relating to one another rather than with a view of more supra-national global relations (ref). If Beck had

continued with the latter more externalist definition it would have shown that there is an analysis of global inequalities in an externally conscious methodological nationalism. It is by introducing a stronger definition of methodological nationalism based on introversion that it is possible to define it as blind to social inequality transnationally.

Alternatively Beck can argue that the national outlook can be aware of inequalities between nations but because this stays at the level of differences between nations this is still a national outlook and not a global perspective above and beyond nations (2006: 79-80). Yet it is at the level of analyses of inequalities between nations that understandings of global inequality lie and approaches mentioned such as world systems theory and dependency theory take this beyond the level of nation-state comparisons. It is wrong to criticise inter-national perspectives when they do show up inequality across the world, and wrong to see them as restricted to simply relations between nations when they look at the dependency that maintains global inequality.

Fifthly, Beck's characterisation of methodological nationalism as introverted does not give concrete references to literature that is methodologically nationalist in this globally unaware sense. Yet there is reference to literature on global inequality. So there is a skewed referencing of literature. Beck mentions that which supports his perspective, ie literature on global inequality, but not references which would back up his criticism of alternative perspectives as lacking (eg 2006: 38-9). This makes Beck's own analysis appear as a new cosmopolitan perspective which brings to sociology for the first time an awareness of global inequalities, but only in relation to a deficient alternative which is never concretely referenced. Brevity in evidence and lack of referencing to literature being criticised are also problems elsewhere in Beck's theory.

Sixthly and related to the previous point, Beck underestimates previous literature and this is connected to an overestimation of the role of the cosmopolitan perspective in being able to expose global inequality. So, for instance, he argues: 'a common assumption, but one which is seldom consistently thought through and examined, is that national inequalities may be globally rather than nationally determined ... due to capital flows, crises and upheavals ... Only in the cosmopolitan outlook ... do these restrictions on thought, inquiry and research become clear and can they be overcome' (2006: 39). So cosmopolitanism is stated as the perspective that can introduce systematic analysis of the global bases of inequalities for the first time. But this status and novelty for Beck's work and the cosmopolitan perspective is given because it does not reference previous attempts which it is claimed have failed to meet these criteria. Yet there is work from Marx, through world systems and dependency theory and the whole field of development studies to recent theorists of globalization like Leslie Sklair (2002), to name just a few, which does analyse global dimensions of inequalities. The global bases of national inequalities caused by factors such as capital mobility, trade and integration has been a major research agenda in economics

and other social sciences (for recent contributions see Kaplinsky 2005 and Held and Kaya 2007). It is only possible for Beck to claim this novel status and ground-breaking role for cosmopolitan theory by leaving aside literatures of this sort on global inequality.

An example he gives of the new insight that such a cosmopolitan perspective may bring is in the instance of developing countries asking developed western countries to move away from their protectionist agricultural policies and be truer to the free market principles they advocate by opening up their markets to developing countries. This is seen as an example of the reproduction of global inequalities that the cosmopolitan outlook can reveal. But: a) this is not new information that required the cosmopolitan perspective for it to become visible. This contradiction has been discussed well beyond the confines of the cosmopolitan perspective which it is claimed uniquely has the conceptual equipment to be aware of such dynamics of global inequality. Left critics have exposed the protectionist hypocrisy of developed countries who advocate free trade, as have economic liberals. The inconsistency of developed countries on their own free trade prescriptions is regularly covered in news media coverage of world trade talks. (Again, a recent overview on such issues and literature is provided by Kiely 2007 and newspapers such as the neoliberal *The Economist* have covered such issues for years). Furthermore; b) Beck's highlighting of the free trade hypocrisy of developed countries contradicts his argument for the need for a 'break' beyond methodological nationalism because this instance involves international and global relations but also decisions of states made in nation-state interests and the sealing off of borders against globalization. In short Beck's recognition of the importance of protectionism here shows the continuing importance of the methodological nationalism and anti-globalism he says is redundant in a new cosmopolitan era, at the levels of both awareness and reality.

What the cosmopolitan perspective brings according to Beck is a perspective in which 'the principles of national blindness to global inequalities lose much of their validity' (2006: 40). But the status and novelty of cosmopolitanism claimed here is only possible by not referencing the long, rich and systematic literature in sociology and the social sciences on global inequality that I have mentioned. It asks those interested in this area to reject previous analyses, which it is said problematically are methodologically nationalist and confined by national introversion, and to find the first proper analysis of global inequality in his cosmopolitan framework. This only works by an underestimation or denial of the past and an overestimation of the novelty of cosmopolitanism.

Immigration and global inequality

In fact Beck argues for an arrangement which it seems would reproduce rather than reduce global inequality (2000a: 92-4 and 2006: 108-9). He advocates a division of labour between low skilled jobs in poor countries and higher skilled work being done in richer countries and says this would involve a 'cosmopolitan'

sharing (ie division) of labour that would not require migration. Rather than low skilled workers being imported into Europe, the low-skilled work would be exported to them. This is in the context (2006: 108) of a discussion of the possibility that he feels neoliberalism could take a cosmopolitan turn. Here he says there could be 'solidarity with strangers in the context of a global distribution of labour and wealth'.

There are a number of issues here. First, Beck appears to be endorsing a proposal to restrict immigration into rich countries, so: a) siding with anti-immigration forces and lending reinforcement to their arguments; b) undermining a device which could foster cosmopolitan mixing by the intermingling of people from different international backgrounds; c) reducing opportunities for the poor in rich countries; and d) going against migrations that would help provide solutions to the aging population and lack of younger workers in richer countries. In fact this argument for a system which would inhibit migration seems to be undermined, in a characteristic moment of inconsistency by his argument soon after (2006: 114) that immigrants contribute to welfare systems and provide a solution to aging populations.

Secondly, Beck's proposal endorses an unequal global division of labour between skilled work in rich countries and unskilled work in poor countries, and involves accentuating it by further exporting low skilled jobs from rich to poor countries. He has argued that cosmopolitanism is uniquely able for the first time to recognise global inequality but this proposal seems likely to reproduce inequality.

Thirdly, he sees the proposal as having a cosmopolitan character based on solidarity with strangers over a global distance. This is optimistic. There is a Durkheimian notion of solidarity here, based on interdependence through different specialisations in the division of labour, with geographical distance added to the mixture to make these divisions more accentuated. For Beck the skilled rich will feel solidarity with the distant poor, and *vice versa*, because of a shared interdependence in the division of labour. Yet a polarisation of skilled and unskilled work and geographical distance seem more likely to increase division and conflict as Marx would have seen in his more conflictual and less solidaristic picture of the division of labour than in the more optimistic and benign Durkheimian view of Beck. The structure proposed by Beck seems to reinforce divisions along rich/poor global lines. This is increased through a further extension of the global division of labour, problematic on equality and social justice grounds, but also providing a basis for undermining global and domestic cosmopolitanism rather than promoting it.

Overall, Beck is mistaken in positing a new and unique role for cosmopolitanism in understanding and solving global inequality. Furthermore, one form in which he puts it into practice leads to a proposal for a global division of labour which seems as likely to reinforce anti-immigration arguments, reproduce inequality and

reduce cosmopolitanism as reduce inequality and conflict in favour of a global cosmopolitanism.

A cosmopolitan postcolonialism: hybridisation and power

Beck also advocates a correcting of global inequalities in academic perspectives through a 'leap' to more postcolonial perspectives (Beck and Sznaider 2006: 13-14) as an antidote to 'the naïve universalism of early western sociology'. This would involve being open to many universalisms, conflicting contextual universalisms, and the postcolonial experience.

There is no doubt that sociology and the social sciences have suffered from a 'western bias' that lacks openness to postcolonial perspectives. But again Beck seems to underestimate previous contributions in globalization studies and so overestimate the new leap that cosmopolitanism would be instigating by introducing a postcolonial view and the necessity for such a leap to be grounded in a new cosmopolitan vision. What is needed is not a new leap, for that has been made by many theorists and empirical studies already. Examples in globalization studies could include Nederveen Pieterse's (2004) work on cultural globalization and studies of the history of globalization by authors such as Abu-Lughod (1989), Hobson (2004), Frank (Frank and Gills 1993), and others who try to correct the Euro-centrism of studies of modern western globalization. These authors themselves draw on a significant heritage of previous postcolonial theory.

Beck suggests a new methodology, stated in the terms of an abstract meta-theory that is not systematically grounded in evidence or references to the academic literature. However what is possible for postcolonialism is a grounding in analysis that already exists and the expansion and empirical development of existing perspectives. Postcolonialism is not a theoretical task for a new framework. A better approach would be the extension and critical interrogation of already existing post-colonialism in the social sciences and its empirical application.

Where Beck does try to put into action his cosmopolitan postcolonialism it runs into trouble (eg Beck and Sznaider 2006). He advocates a 'both/and' perspective taking over from an 'either/or' perspective. This is good for bringing in previously excluded inputs to views that have stressed westernisation without understanding a mixture of influences including from non-western sources (eg Abu-Lughod 1989). However a 'both/and' view runs the risk of replacing westernisation perspectives with one in which power and inequality is glossed over by an attempt to resurrect understandings of the inputs of non-western societies. When different global societies meet there are often some that have greater economic, political and ideological power. To highlight this fact is not to endorse it. And it is not to say there are not real sources of opposition and alternatives to westernisation both academically and politically (in the latter case

from Iran to Venezuela for example). But positing a 'both/and' mix appears to give an equality to a mix of perspectives when there are great inequalities and power differences in that mix. In trying to give more of a role to inputs from beyond the West it runs the risk of playing down the western power that such inputs are subjected to.

Beck's own use of a 'both/and' hybridising postcolonialism (2000a:89) underestimates these power relations and inequalities. In a discussion of deregulation and flexibilisation which promote an informal economy, diluted trade union representation and weak states Beck suggests these are non-western standards being adopted by western societies. But the direction of power is the other way around. These are structures and effects of neoliberalism being exported by western-dominated governments and institutions to other western and non-western societies with the deleterious effects that Beck rightly suggests. Western power is underestimated here when neoliberalism is seen as an effect of the importation of poor regulation from the non-west to West rather than an expression of the corporate and state power of western interests.

So the novelty and uniqueness of Beck's cosmopolitanism for establishing a postcolonial perspective is justified by an understatement of the extent to which postcolonialism is already in existence and an overstatement of the role of cosmopolitanism in having a new role in establishing this itself. At the same time, his more hybrid postcolonial view, rather than restoring a greater emphasis on poorer countries' contribution to globalization, may underestimate the power they are subjected to. Beck's postcolonialism fits into a more general pattern in his work, of underestimating previous cosmopolitanism in social science, overestimating the novelty of his cosmopolitan vision, and leading down a road which rather than overcoming power and inequality seems as much to play down how significant it is.

From the first age of international law to the second age of human rights

Beck's advocacy of a global cosmopolitan politics is oriented around the idea of humanitarian intervention to defend human rights as a principle of the second age of modernity. Beck argues that the second age of modernity has brought a shift from international law to human rights, something that underpins the arrival of a new cosmopolitan global politics. (See also Kaldor 2003, Held 2000, Fine 2006).

This seems to be influenced by an event at the time Beck was formulating these arguments – the Kosovo war, where western powers intervened militarily, ostensibly to stop 'ethnic cleansing' in the region. Ethnic cleansing evokes links with the holocaust and other genocidal phenomena and Beck's advocacy of global cosmopolitan politics around the idea of a new age human rights is no doubt also connected with echoes of such incidences. Beck goes on to describe contemporary military interventions as military humanism, including the attack of

the USA and allies on Iraq in 2003. Beck is right to be concerned with the prevention of such crimes against humanity and to search for solutions at a global level, including an openness to military interventions if necessary, although it is not clear the humanitarian arguments that are applied to interventions like Kosovo can be enlarged to include also Iraq.

Cosmopolitan Vision's discussion of the human rights theme (eg 2006: 120-1) was published in 2004 and in English 2006 long after the Kosovo war and later examples such as the Iraq War. So while there seem to be ties to Kosovo, later incidences like Iraq, which have been explained by others in terms very different from human rights ones, have not deterred Beck from still characterising the second age of modernity in these terms. He continues with the theme of the second modernity as marked by a shift from international law overriding human rights to *vice versa* despite knowledge of interventions like Iraq, which he includes as an intervention consistent with the second age. He calls this shift an 'epochal difference between the first and second modernity' (2006: 121) and 'a paradigm shift from national societies to cosmopolitan society' (2006: 122). So there is no questioning the significance of the shift he is positing.

Beck talks of a 'hegemonic power which "defends" human rights in foreign territories under the banner of "military humanism"'. What he questions is the 'self-authorisation' of this military humanism but not whether humanism and rights are the right words to describe it. In other words, Beck questions the unilateralism of contemporary international military interventions and their lack of grounding in global agreement, but he does not question their characterisation in human rights terms.

I will come back to the question of American power and the war in Iraq. But first I will fill out a little more what he means by the new human rights age and some questions about it.

Human rights cosmopolitanism beyond power

Beck argues that this new human rights regime of the second age overrides power (2006: 141). His vision is of global law in which 'it is no longer the power of one state, or a plurality of states, but rather law that determines what constitutes peace'. Here global law would be oriented around human rights and, sometimes, would use war to bring peace.

But it is questionable whether law can be taken out of the realm of the power of one state or of some states. Law is seen to become something that is set out at a global level and beyond states or power and there is no evidence at present that international or global definitions of law or war-making exist in such a vacuum away from state power. Nor is there is a realistic prospect that they could in the foreseeable future given the economic, political and military power wielded by the most powerful states and their orientation around their own national interests,

including in international fora where global agreements are made. At best global law, insofar as it does or may soon exist, is composed by states acting together in which some are far more powerful than others. Beck's is a utopian vision without a convincing basis for seeing how human rights can or will be beyond this sort of politics or power. (Fine 2006 recognises some of these 'ambivalences' although he also decides to nevertheless maintain a cosmopolitan approach).

A pattern in Beck's work, as I have mentioned, is that his arguments are sometimes undermined by qualifications or contradictions he makes to them and this occurs with his argument about human rights beyond the power of states. Beck talks about the possibility of human rights as a way of the powerful imposing power (2006: 143). He argues that while global human rights empower powerless groups and persecuted individuals through recognition of their rights it also empowers powerful states to intervene in territorial states in a 'new geography of power'. The concept of humanitarian intervention 'is situated in a grey zone' which opens up the possibility of actors pursuing their own national or hegemonic aims under the pretext of a cosmopolitan mission. Human rights he says involve weak and poor states giving the rich and powerful *carte blanche* for intervention. It leads to a cosmopolitan monopoly of the west on morality, law and violence. Referring to the shift from the first to the second age of modernity, Beck argues that human rights trumping international law is not just a question of values but also of a power regime, resulting from the end of the cold war and the military and political hegemony of the USA (2006: 123).

This is a good analysis. But these are big qualifications to Beck's optimistic view of a global human rights regime. They paint a picture of a situation where a regime based on human rights and common concern can easily be subverted by the rich and powerful in pursuit of national and hegemonic interests. In fact, Beck is saying this power imposition becomes more possible because of the legitimation that the human rights regime gives it.

This brings us to the issue of human rights as western, which Beck himself raises (2006: 123). Beck says that human rights interpretations may be seen by some parts of the world as coming from the West and reflecting a specifically western view as opposed to more 'African, Asian and Chinese' views which put a stronger stress on duties and communitarianism (see also, amongst others, Zolo 1997: 118-20). Beck does not provide a solution to this imbalance and this undermines his case which relies on human rights as a cosmopolitan global form. Here it is being suggested that human rights may be an expression of the view of actors in particular parts of the world more than others, something which is not very cosmopolitan and goes against some of his more cosmopolitan assertions elsewhere.

Human rights and contextual universalism in *Cosmopolitan Vision*

In *Cosmopolitan Vision* Beck tries to avoid human rights as a western dominated thing by arguing for a perspective of contextual universalism, where universal norms are combined with respect for contextual differences (2006: 60). He sketches out an answer to the balance of universalism and difference which comes to a picture of hybridisation, a mixture or balance of universals with difference. He calls this 'contextual universalism' and it is intended to capture how universalism and difference can be combined, in this case by universalism that is received differently in varying places. Beck's contextual universalism is in accordance with his preference for a 'both/and' perspective over and 'either/or' one – you can combine both contextual and universalism without having to choose either one or the other. In this framework difference is compatible with universalism but there are still universals which guard against a world of complete differences which are incommensurable.

This balancing of universalism and difference can answer the criticism that cosmopolitanism is just about westernisation at the expense of other inputs as he is saying universalising tensions can be counteracted by pluralist inputs into universalism wherever it is received. Beck argues that human rights with universal validity claims which are western in origin are not alien or irrelevant to non-western cultures and that local groups can make their contextual interpretations of human rights drawing on their own cultural and political traditions and religions. Universal law can, thus, be contextualised.

Relations of power in this formulation do not come through. For instance, the implementation of human rights that dominates Beck's cosmopolitanism is one in which humanitarian interventions are made in the affairs of nation-states militarily, overriding their sovereignty in order to protect human rights. But this sort of situation, which Beck focuses on a lot, however justifiable it may sometimes be, is one in which western norms of human rights are applied by superior military might and in which local interpretations of human rights do not, rightly or wrongly, stand too much of a chance. So it is not clear how contextual universalism is possible when concrete relations of power and might are introduced.

One of the characteristics of Beck's theory is that he often outlines such abstract frameworks without much concrete reference. In this case he does give examples of how he thinks a balancing of the universal and particular in contextual universalism rights can work. But the examples do not work adequately to back up the theory. One example given is of a human rights conference in 1993 where he says a synthesis of contextualism and universalism was worked out. The conference was concerned with issues such as violence against women and, although it is not completely clear, Beck seems to suggest that ideas of universal rights to education were balanced with the assertion of Muslim women that they were primarily Muslim and wanted to wear headscarves and embrace a conservative theology. Beck gives this as an example of his 'both/and' cosmopolitanism.

But how concretely the balance between these opposite poles was maintained and worked out at the conference is not described. It is just stated that they were. This is significant because between western ideas of human rights and conservative theology (Muslim or otherwise) there may be many areas where they could clash and it is not described here how both inputs are balanced, in terms of the content of both discourses and in terms of how power relations work out when both sides find they come to contrary conclusions.

Another example given is of a discussion on human rights between Senegalese and US experts in Dakar in which the Senegalese were able to raise the issue of the right not to die of starvation, in a humorous way, that left the US experts on the back foot because they had not raised it and had to admit they had not seen this as a right. It is not completely spelled out what Beck regards as cosmopolitan about this moment but it seems it is that the Senegalese brought in their own perspective on rights, a material and economic one, so contributing to a cosmopolitan mix. The Americans presumably focused on civil and political rights of a more liberal and post-materialist sort. And it seems that it is that the Senegalese did this in a humorous rather than confrontational way that also showed a cosmopolitan respect for difference.

But this perspective: a) shows a contradiction of two perspectives where one has a view of human rights potentially at odds with the other, rather than a cosmopolitan mix. Often balancing different sorts of rights involves trade-offs, for instance civil and political rights being compromised in pursuit of economic rights, or *vice-versa*. This seems as much a situation of potentially conflicting views as a cosmopolitan mix; b) it does not account for the fact that the US delegation represented a state with greater power. Power differences are not accounted for in this example. They are important because they define what ideas of human rights can become most dominant and who has the most power to implement their own. In this case the Senegalese are said to have asserted their definition of human rights in a contextual universalist way, but it is not clear that in the world of political decision-making theirs has played an equivalent role to that expressed by delegates from the world's leading hegemonic power. Methodologically there are issues here too. These are specific examples rather than systematic evidence. Examples illustrate a theory. Evidence which justifies it has to be more systematic than this.

Contextual Universalism in *What is Globalization?*

Contextual universalism in relation to human rights is something that Beck also argues for in *What is Globalization?* (2000: 83-86). He says that that common standards like human rights must hold across contexts, but that they may take different forms in different contexts. For Beck, there are no separate worlds and dialogue has to take place. Incommensurability is not possible and non-interference is ruled out. 'Glocal living has to be accepted', meaning both local

difference but also global standards. So the stress is that while difference has to be recognised, universals cannot be avoided. There is the integration of the contextual into the concept of the universal. But Beck argues also that, at the same time, there are many universalisms in different contexts.

Just as in *Cosmopolitan Vision* Beck also here brings the idea of contextual universalism to bear on the example of human rights. Human rights, he says, should not be allowed to be completely universalist – ie ones that can be imposed by the West everywhere. There are other concepts of human rights elsewhere in different versions. (2000: 85). In a situation of universal human rights but local ideas of them Beck argues that competition and dialogue between cultures, nations, states and religions can decide which conceptions of human rights are most 'helpful' for humans.

But this is in the pattern of Beck's optimism and glossing over of contradictions and conflicts. Contextual universalism involves more an admirable hope for deliberation and dialogue than an analysis of their possibility. There is an over-optimism on the common basis in contextual universalism and on the extent to which successful inter-actor dialogue is possible on the idea of human rights.

For example, different conceptions of human rights will conflict with one another. Rights can exist in economic, political, social and civil spheres and conflict with one another in these spheres. Rights to what or from what often conflict. Beck does not go further than to say there have to be universalisms and contextualisms amidst such problems which is a statement of what would be desirable rather than a theory of how this can be done, how tensions and conflicts could be resolved, concretely as well as theoretically and how contradictory interests are involved. Such tensions and conflicts often can't be resolved and the outcome of them encountering one another can be not getting the balance between universalism and contextualism right but some ideas of human rights winning out over others. It would be better to evaluate competing interests and conceptions of human rights and where these may go than stating a wish for a common agreement amidst contradiction. The need for an analysis of conflict in preference over a presumption of consensus is a key argument of this article.

Contextual universalism also does not provide a way in which things which are opposed to human rights might be dealt with when they clash with it, for instance egalitarianism and poverty-reduction. It also does not deal with the political reality, beyond abstract wishes, that some who support human rights wish sometimes to be excused from them when it is perceived to be in their self-interest on other grounds, for instance for reasons to do with states' perceptions of their needs to maintain security or power.

Beck has a creditable desire to achieve global co-existence and agreement on the basis of an analysis of globalization which also recognises localisation. But

the possibility of global difference and dialogue operating at a global level does not follow because there are conflicts, contradictions and tensions. What is here is an attempt at a philosophical basis for global cosmopolitanism. There is an attempt to embed it in a conception of social reality – glocalisation. But this social reality is one where there are: a) contradictory versions of human rights (economic, social, civil, political etc); b) instances where human rights are subordinated to other concerns (eg equality, collectivism, religion, economic progress, etc); and c) instances where human rights are believed in but supported in an inconsistent and selective way according to considerations of interests and power, for instance in the case of the USA in relation to the International Criminal Court, Guantanamo Bay, torture and so on. A benign aim and well intentioned aspiration to contextual universalism does not identify the real contradictory and conflictual bases for ethics and so comes up with a political answer, contextual universalism, which is not up to the task of tackling in practice issues of ethical norms such as human rights.

As we shall now see, where Beck goes beyond abstract ideas and attempts to grapple with what he sees as the universalisation of human rights at a concrete level there are problems.

Global Cosmopolitan Politics and US Power

Beck argues that in the politics of the second age of modernity the single state or nation-state is no longer the key actor. The key actor is global politics, composed in a cosmopolitan way. He sees a shift from politics based on nation-states and international security to non-state-centred post-international risk politics as a 'paradigm shift' that 'correlates with the distinction between first and second modernity' (2006: 36). So for him cosmopolitan politics is something new and the dating given for its rise is post-cold-war.

There is some ambiguity on the solidity with which cosmopolitan politics has arrived. Whether it is cosmopolitan awareness or reality that is upon us varies in Beck's theory in general. One argument is that there is a global awareness of a shared collective future but not corresponding forms of political practice (2006: 78). The politics of a collectively shared and threatened future, he says, enjoys only meagre institutional support. But in other places it is argued that cosmopolitanism is very advanced and irreversible in reality but that it is in awareness rather than reality where there may be counter movements (2006: 74). As we shall see now there is another ambiguity where Beck, despite seeing cosmopolitanism as post-national, says that a nation, the US, is a key actor in making global cosmopolitanism a living thing in the contemporary world.

One obstacle to the idea of a shared and fairly equal global cosmopolitanism is a view of the US as subverting global cosmopolitanism by exerting its dominant power that competes with and undermines global power and pursues national rather than global cosmopolitan interests. This is a view of US power held by

those from the neocon Right (eg Kagan 2003) to the radical Left (eg Chomsky 2004). From both views America exerts dominant power in a way that undermines aspirations to global equality, does it by economic and military might and in its geopolitical national interests rather than with common humanitarian interests as its goal. This perspective on global power has to be shown to be lacking if global cosmopolitanism is to be defended as a realistic possibility.

Beck overcomes this by a view of American power as about humanitarian intervention. The USA is seen as an actor that uses military humanism to enact the cosmopolitan human rights approach of the second age of modernity. Beck sees US power as compatible with global cosmopolitanism rather than opposed to it (eg 2006: 132-5). One model of global order, he says, is *Pax Americana* based on the principle of global responsibility and promoting humanitarian intervention (2006: 132). The difference between this and global cosmopolis is not in intentions or values like responsibility or humanitarianism but in that *Pax Americana* is hierarchical while global cosmopolis is more multilateral and based on equality and cooperation. So US power may not be organised in the most cosmopolitan way but it is cosmopolitan and humanitarian in content and intent. *Pax Americana*, Beck says, involves replacing the UN with the US (2006: 133) implying that their objectives are the same, it is the agency that changes. (Although he says this is 'exaggerating somewhat' implying that there may be qualifications to this).

Beck says that in the US world military power can be concentrated and directed against new dangers and that the USA can 'create an international system of freedom and fairness based on American values of freedom and democracy' (2006: 133). To do so it must free itself from the principle of non-intervention, and restrictions on intervention include international agreements and institutions such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the United Nations Security Council, the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court. Preventive war is necessary for this hegemonic role to be preserved. Beck ascribes this position to George Bush but then goes on to develop it in a way which is more abstracted and not linked to any source and so, evidently, expressing his own view (but with a vagueness in attribution which means while it seems that it is his view, it could be argued not to be the case).

A key point here is that *Pax Americana* and global cosmopolitanism are distinguished on the basis of structure rather than aims, including US power also as humanitarian and cosmopolitan (2006: 132, 135). So in this picture the US is compatible with global cosmopolitanism rather than a threat which undermines it, which provides an alternative view to that of US power as part of a global politics of nations, inequalities and conflicts which undermine global cosmopolitanism. This allows Beck to go ahead with global cosmopolitanism, underplaying the threat from a perspective which sees the US as using its superior power in national rather than global interests in ways which would undermine cosmopolitanism.

One reason Beck puts forward cosmopolitan consciousness as realisable is that in instances such as his analysis of US power he has too strong an idea of common agendas. For instance, his idea of cosmopolitanism is based on a liberal humanitarianism, which he puts the Bush administration within. With this categorisation of the Bush administration conflicts and differences are less significant and cosmopolitanism more realistic. This is because the US then fits in with a cosmopolitan framework rather than being seen as instrumental to structures of conflict and power that show such a framework to be problematic. However his view of the Bush administration, on such occasions, is over-optimistic.

For instance Beck describes the Bush administration as having a 'democratic mission' which is 'a continuation of an original project of the liberal left' (2006: 119). In *Cosmopolitan Vision* the objectives of the US in the Iraq war are said to include WMDs, nuclear terrorism, regime change and democratisation (some of which had been discredited) but do not include aims such as oil, hegemony, national interest or geopolitical objectives (2006: 38-40, 120, 148, 151; 2006a). In short those which suggest the US pursuing its domestic and global interests do not get mentioned, despite being public issues in debates. The lack of inclusion of such interests, around which conflicts occur, gives a reason for optimism about cosmopolitan democracy. If they are brought back in the possibilities for cosmopolitanism look more problematic. If you see President Bush as not occupying a democratic humanitarian position then the prospects for global cosmopolitanism become less plausible because the world's most powerful state, in military terms hugely more powerful than any other, is going against cosmopolitanism in its aims and substance and not just in the hierarchical and unilateralist way it pursues them.

Other evidence for the idea of the US as cosmopolitan could also be questioned. In *Cosmopolitan Vision* Beck argues that the US and Europe have human rights foreign policies in accordance with the onset of the second age human rights regime (2006: 144ff). But the evidence given for this is a UN report, rather than actual US or European policy, and a statement from Madeleine Albright under the Clinton administration. This is weak evidence because it is from unrepresentative sources (ie the UN and Clinton administration), pre-Bush and is just two statements, and statements rather than actual policy. Many US and European actual policies are difficult to square with the claim. This fits into the pattern of evidential claims given by Beck which are often selective and more illustrative than systematic evidence.

One way in which Beck justifies 'military humanism' is by setting up false 'you are with us or against us' alternatives which echo George Bush's suggestion of such a choice in relation to the Iraq conflict (2006: 154). Beck argues that 'if you are against ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, then you must support the new "war-peace" of "military humanism"'. There are a number of issues here.

First, is the reduction of alternatives to two when there are other choices between crimes against humanity on one side and wars against those crimes on the other. For instance there are more multilateral peaceful approaches. Second, wars on crimes against humanity are themselves diverse – for instance there are differences between ones pursued illegally or unilaterally and those pursued legally and multilaterally. The war of military humanism is itself not a simple choice as it can take different forms. Thirdly, Beck's alternatives assume that the wars he has in mind *are* wars against crimes against humanity and not geostrategic or energy wars, as some would understand some of them. Fourthly, Beck groups together wars to eliminate WMDs with those to stop ethnic cleansing when these are different issues that may require different solutions. Mass murder within a country may in some cases require military intervention to stop it, but it is not necessarily the case that military action would be the best path in relation to the development of WMDs by the same state. Beck often puts Kosovo and Iraq, two different such wars, in the same category in this way.

The contradictions of Beck's arguments for US democratic humanism

Beck's arguments often contain internal inconsistencies. As I have argued, you do not have to go beyond Beck to find arguments which raise questions about his position. He sometimes does so by qualifications or contrary arguments he makes. This happens in relation to his argument about US democratic humanism. I wish to raise three issues in relation to which this happens – 1) illegality, 2) national benefits and 3) abridged cosmopolitanism.

1) *Illegality*. Beck's endorsement of the 'war on terror' extends to legitimization of illegality (2006: 146-7). The label terrorism, he argues, empowers and justifies states to free themselves from the constraints of laws of war. He says that the contempt of terrorists for morality or humanity can provoke abandonment of legal constraints and civilised constraints on use of force by the state. 'Ineffectual international law', he argues, is 'blind to the new dangers', and 'not tailored' to new threats. And Beck questions 'what grounds the legitimacy of force in an era of new threats if legality is not tailored to these threats'. So there is an endorsement of illegal war if 'war on terror' is given as the legitimization for the war and international laws are seen as not up to the job or not respected by your adversary. Human rights here (assuming they are the basis for the war on terror, something which is contested) trump international law which does follow, to some extent, Beck's emphasis on a shift from the latter to the former with the second age of modernity. At the same time, a lack of respect for international legality does not support global cosmopolitan politics which to be really cosmopolitan and globally inclusive must involve shared adherence to common international laws. A global cosmopolitanism would need actors to agree to such laws even if some sometimes saw them as ineffectual or not adhered to by all others. It is certain that in a global context there would always be some actors bound in to such rules who would share such doubts and one of the bases of shared rules being operable is that actors adhere to them even in such situations of

dissatisfaction. So internationally illegal war, endorsed by Beck, seems to undermine global cosmopolitan politics.

2) *National benefit*. Beck also considers why in some cases military humanist interventions happen while in others they do not (2006: 145-6). There are a number of difficulties with what he suggests. Amongst these are reasons which Beck outlines which show that the sort of military interventions he points to could be to do with factors other than cosmopolitan humanism and which become revealed as such by a framework based more than Beck's is on conflicting interests. The advantages of a conflict perspective over Beck's consensual perspective is a key theme for understanding his work.

Beck gives three reasons why human rights interventions may happen in some cases but not others. The first is asymmetries of power. The weaker the rogue state the more likely he says the intervention is, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq being given as examples. This is not completely convincing an explanation by itself as there are weaker states than Serbia and Iraq where humanitarian concerns may have made intervention arguable for but where attacks have not happened, Sudan for instance.

Beck also mentions egoism, for instance where human rights abuses may lead to consequences for states which are interveners and neighbours, and to more global effects in terms of phenomena such as refugees and terrorist attacks. But this explanation does not always work because in the cases focused on - Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan - there was little evidence that human rights abuses there were going to have a serious knock-on effect for the intervening states. In the case of Afghanistan and Iraq it may have been thought that terrorist attacks would have global consequences, although it later became clear that the WMD evidence on Iraq had been weak. It was also evident that terrorist attacks were as likely to be increased as a result of intervening as curtailed by doing so. The July 7th bombings in London can be explained in this way.

But the key issue explanation is the one which is most convincing. Beck highlights national benefit, such as oil and geostrategic advantages. But it is not clear why national benefit is an add-on advantage which facilitates a human rights intervention in some places over others rather than the other way round, human rights as a legitimation for what is primarily a national benefit intervention. Why national benefit should be considered as an addition to human rights justifications for intervention rather than a principle reason above human rights interventions in the cases outlined, is not clear.

3) *Abridged Cosmopolitanism*. In specific comments on US military interventions Beck adds qualifications which cast doubt on interpretations of such interventions as in accordance with global cosmopolitanism. As in other parts of his theories Beck adds these as qualifications rather than seeing them as points which undermine the basis of his argument. For instance Beck argues that US power

constitutes an abridged cosmopolitanism (2006: 125-6). He says that 'cosmopolitan America has an elective affinity with Amnesty International ... American mega-power throws its weight behind the global realization of human rights and democracy'. But this is a contestable interpretation and Beck goes on to say that this cosmopolitanism is abridged.

First, he argues that human rights and democracy are norms on which it is expected that other parts of the world should live up to American values. This undermines some of his arguments for cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism reflects, or will be seen to reflect, a US or western view of how the world should be rather than a genuinely cosmopolitan view.

Second, Beck sees the US as a global ordering power, possessing super-sovereignty, which has an anti-cosmopolitan moment when it sees itself above borders in an absolutist manner and refuses to submit to norms itself. This happens, for instance, on arms reduction, and so, he says, destroys the contractual architecture of disarmament. To this could be added other areas where US non-collaboration also may have such effects, for instance agreements on reducing global warming and international justice. Beck says there is a contradiction in a state committing itself to global democracy while paying scant regard to democratic norms itself in a project of hegemonic universalism. This seems to damn the possibility of cosmopolitan democracy through the US. Yet for Beck these comments are added to his prescription of US cosmopolitanism as a qualification or anti-cosmopolitan 'moment' rather than as something which is more fundamentally undermining. They are put in as qualifications or additions to the argument on the US as cosmopolitan, rather than as structuring the argument on its cosmopolitanism to show that it is not so (2006: 125-6).

This takes on extra significance when Beck argues that global cosmopolitanism must also be a military humanism and cannot dispense with the means of violence (2006: 127-8). If human rights and cosmopolitanism are as 'abridged' as Beck says, in fact even more undermined and compromised than merely 'abridged' as I am suggesting his arguments imply, then adding military power to this project becomes especially problematic. Beck also argues that military humanism should be multilateral and co-operative (2006: 129), something which was quite limited in the cases he mentions frequently, Kosovo and Iraq, where the extent of multilateralism or co-operation is arguable. So he is arguing for a military dimension to a politics which is much less cosmopolitan and multilateral than he suggests.

Another qualification that Beck makes further undermines the case for the USA as cosmopolitan (2006: 140). Beck argues that there is a new logic which involves turning a blind eye to human rights violations. The danger of terrorism, he says, suppresses the alertness of political allies to human rights violations. As in other places in Beck's analysis this is stated in an abstract way without references to a concrete case in particular. However it is difficult not to see this

as applicable to the US who Beck has otherwise defined as driven by human rights concerns, and who with this argument now fall into his category for those who violate human rights in pursuit of a 'war on terror'.

Beck further extends his argument on state violations of human rights in such situations. He says this can be endorsed by international institutions. States have a *carte blanche* in defining their enemies as 'terrorists' which then gets the blessing of the international community and human rights violations are treated 'with discretion'. Elsewhere he refers to the view that criticises the west not for having human rights standards but for failing to apply them when it provides support for dictatorships, corrupt regimes or state terror (2006: 167). The indication, then, seems to be that western regimes which can be the agents of cosmopolitanism fall short on their own standards of human rights.

These qualifications on the second age of modernity as a cosmopolitan one in which the US acts with cosmopolitan intent build up to an extent that the theory they are qualifying seems increasingly undermined in its basic substance. Beck's points undermine his claims about the US, Europe and the West's human rights cosmopolitan responsibility. Elsewhere in a lecture which labels the Iraq war as a WMD intervention his case becomes more undermined when he describes this war as a fake cosmopolitanism (2006a: 17). He says a fake cosmopolitanism instrumentalises cosmopolitan rhetoric for national-hegemonic purposes and the Iraq war is given as an example. He warns against the abuse of cosmopolitanism and knocks down the case he has made elsewhere about Iraq as a humanitarian war about WMD.

To sum up some of these points, Beck has outlined qualifications which show how cosmopolitanism can be illegal according to international agreements, involve asymmetries of power, the pursuit of national-hegemonic egoism, human rights violations which are legitimised, westernisation imposed on others, and the exemption of cosmopolitan actors from cosmopolitan norms on human rights. All of this adds up to what is said can be an abridged or fake cosmopolitanism which can be militarily imposed. These are intended as qualifications to the outline of cosmopolitanism but in the range and significance of what has been outlined as aspects of cosmopolitan interventions Beck has undermined the claim that they can be seen as cosmopolitan.

For reasons of space I have to be brief in my conclusions. In this article I have looked at arguments for a cosmopolitan approach to global inequality and human rights. 1) Cosmopolitanism does not bring a new and unique perspective on global inequality, as suggested. In fact in proposals on migration Beck sets out something which may reinforce inequality and anti-cosmopolitanism. 2) I have argued that the 'both/and' perspective on hybridisation and contextual universalism is undermined by structures of conflict and power that are glossed over. 3) I have also argued that the western cosmopolitan humanitarian intervention prescribed falls short of cosmopolitanism, in ways which are shown

by qualifications that Beck himself makes in his arguments. Beck's approach effectively disguises conflicts, inequalities and injustices in world society and harmonises contradictions with a benign and optimistic view of international relations. An understanding of conflict and power in the tradition of critical sociology can bring out the problems in cosmopolitan sociology and politics and provide the basis for an alternative perspective for understanding global inequality and human rights.

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