

How to Avoid the Global Monster of the North: Affirmative Action for the New Global Age.

By Semra Somersan

If ultranationalism, fraternalism and militarism can take hold, unidentified among the descendants of slaves, they can enter anywhere. Past victimization affords no protection against the allure of automatic, prepolitical uniformity.¹

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Stephen Steinberg (1995) has described poignantly “the liberal retreat from race” and its implications in the US context. Here I will to extend his argument to the world-wide scene, arguing for affirmative action and positive discrimination not only within nation-states, but as well, in international economic and political relations between and among them.

For many, however, not only affirmative action but all policies of positive discrimination pose “equality” problems, of intellectual, political and/or economic nature. Still the prolonged and bitter debate on positive versus reverse discrimination continues. So why go back to a seemingly irresolvable old squabble that started in the US back in the 1960s, and which, may well be, more a concern of social policy than of social theory?

Several immediate answers: 1-The necessity to bring the discussion up to the date in the context of globalization, deindustrialization and the aftermath of 9-11. 2-The intellectual poverty of the extant socio-cultural literature related to affirmative action and reverse discrimination. 3-The lack of affirmative action policies at large, where they are needed most, in the mid to low income countries of the South where extremely large disparities in income levels prevail. 4- To introduce the concepts of preferential treatment, quotas and positive discrimination to country-wise bilateral, multilateral and international relations.

¹ Paul Gilroy, 2000, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Univ Press, p.8.

Thus a dialogic system of ever changing affirmative action policies (inequality) has to be more equal than a “consensus” of the status quo which “permanently” establishes its own criteria of justice and equality, depending on who holds power. Quotas and positive discrimination have to become the Truth and Reconciliative measures of the newly dawning cosmopolitan age, covertly or overtly discriminating on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, and/or class, both within a nation state, and across countries in international political and economic relations.

I will argue here that *color-blind*, “*equal*” *opportunity* policies adopted in early modernity (first modernity) to compensate for past slavery, discrimination and colonization no longer suffice in the new global age, or the second modern age of “reflexive cosmopolitanization.”² Without preferential treatment inclusive of quotas and positive discrimination both within a nation-state, and across countries in bilateral and multilateral relations, there can be no real equality of opportunity in the world at large.

1/Rationale and justification

Regardless of where one is located in relation to heated debates on globalization,³ one is hard pressed to argue that the process is working to narrow the economic chasm separating the affluent from the impoverished, both within a nation-state, and in country-wise comparisons. The same can be said with regard to socio-political history, concerning effects of past repression, oppression, slavery, and colonization: the powerful are more so than ever, while the powerless are increasingly losing whatever control they may have had over their own destiny.

Affirmative action, preferential treatment and positive discrimination, in other words, cannot solely consist of crucial policies to be implemented within a country, but must as well be applied to international trade and other international economic and political relations. Given the high probability of,

²Beck, Ulrich (2000). “The Cosmopolitan Perspective: Sociology of the Second Age of Modernity”, *British Journal of Sociology*, 51 (1): 79-105.

³For a classification of the views held on globalization see: David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt and Jonathan Perraton (1999). *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture*. Polity, Cambridge, UK, pp. 1-14.

who knows how many more, civil, local, regional, and interregional wars, more high-tech nuclear, chemical and biological arms, global warming, the rise in the level of seas, and great differentials in income levels, six billion of humankind can not all be delivered across troubled waters to some sheltered shore. A few will make it, but many won't. The cause will not simply be, risk society⁴, the impact of which, in comparison to other factors separating and dividing humanity, is perhaps slightly less important.

Some would say “this is the law of survival; we cannot forsake what we have for the benefit of others, those at the bottom, the down and under.” I would argue however, that as creators and reproducers of culture, humans must not, cannot accept biological evolutionary laws of survival, even if those laws beat everything else in the long run.

Globalization has increased the prevailing inequalities within and across societies geometrically. The rich have come to resemble each other more all over the world than their poor countrymen living in the same environs. Perhaps those in the high-income countries of the North are less aware of such economic discrepancies than their counterparts in the low and middle- income countries who have to face dire poverty on a day-to-day basis rather than the intermediary of the media and hearsay. Events and repercussions of 9-11 (2001) have shown, however, that as long as the vast gulf between the powerful-affluent and the underprivileged-dispossessed prevail, no one is protected no individual, no nation, no region.

As C. Wright Mills⁵ has so aptly shown, power and affluence concur, at least in the American scene, but as well, elsewhere. Mills came up with the lasting contribution that in the US, the upper classes hold, not only the bulk of society's wealth, but also political power. He writes that “...the leading men in each of the three domains of power- the warlords, the corporation chieftains, the political directorate- tend to come together, to form the power elite of America.”⁶ Thus the power elite is made up of the super-rich who own and control the lion's share of the economy. Such families are broadly linked

⁴Beck's terminology: Ulrich Beck (1992). *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. Sage: London.

⁵C. Wright Mills (1956). *The Power Elite*. Oxford Univ Press, London.

⁶C. Wright Mills (1956). *The Power Elite*.: Oxford Univ. Press, London, , p.9.

through business dealings as well as marriage, and are able to turn the national agenda to their own interest. Based on this research, Mills was able to claim that such elites circulate from one sector to another, consolidating their power as they go, challenging the notion that the US is a political democracy; the concentration of wealth and power is too great for the average person's voice to be heard. The power elite notion also challenges the idea that different sources of power serve as checks and balances on one another, arguing that those at the top encounter no real opposition.

Sociologist Saskia Sassen who views the cataclysmic event of 9-11 as “a message from the global south” argues that:

...markets cannot take care of everything. Governments will have to govern more... The violence of hunger and poverty; the destruction of once fertile lands; the oppression of weaker states by highly militarized ones; persecution- all these feed a complex, slow, but relentless movement towards the North. The North creates much of the damage and the North has the resources to redress some of it. Part of the challenge is to recognize the interconnectedness of forms of violence that we do not view as being connected or even, as forms of violence. We are suffering from a translation problem. The language of poverty and misery is unclear and uncomfortable... There are now about 50 countries that are hyper-indebted and unable to redress the situation. It is no longer a matter of loan repayment but a fundamental new structural condition... Debt to GNP ratios are especially high in Africa, where they stood at 123%, compared with 42% in Latin America and 28% in Asia.⁷

The planet's resources must be shared more equitably than has been the case in human history, at the least because the divisions between the haves and the have-nots are sharper than ever; poverty and hunger kill some, while riches spoil the others, and this makes the world an insecure, uneasy place to live in for all. That is on the economic side; on the socio-political side, past history of oppression and persecution must be redressed by providing the subaltern not only with sustainable economic resources, but as well with abundant sustainable socio-political-cultural means and opportunities which will result in their definite release from social-exclusion and “vulnerability to

⁷Saskia Sassen (2001). “ A Message From The Global South: Special Report: Terrorism in the US”, *Guardian*, Sept 12, 2001. www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/article .

scapegoating,” to borrow a phrase from Tariq Modood⁸, and, in making them equal partners with the affluent.

2/ A snapshot of the global scene vis. affirmative action

Affirmative action, generally defined as a set of public policies and initiatives designed to help eliminate past and present discrimination based on race, ethnicity, class, religion, sex or national origin⁹ covers a wide range in implementation. At the more conservative end, it includes color blind policies, equal opportunity, fair employment; at the more radical end, it covers positive discrimination, establishing minority ombudsman institutions, minority, and/or subaltern quotas for groups considered to have been economically depressed and/or politically oppressed. All affirmative action programs seek to remedy past discrimination, economic, political and otherwise, by increasing recruitment, promotion, retention and on-the-job training opportunities in employment and by removing barriers to admission in educational institutions; the rationale being embedded, in the attempt to counter the long history of negative discrimination.

Following The Civil Rights Act of 1964 in the US, which endorsed the use of racial preferences in hiring or contracting staff in organizations doing business with the government, civil rights programs were enacted to help Afro-Americans become full citizens of the US. The 13th Amendment to the US Constitution made slavery and involuntary servitude illegal, while the 14th Amendment guaranteed equal protection under the law to all races and sexes, but applies only to public institutions.

Ironically though, in spite of its over four decades of recent history, not even the discussion of affirmative action has filtered down to the ‘global underdogs’¹⁰ - where policy makers continue implementing their centuries old ideas of some sort of feudal justice and authoritarian administration, under the

⁸Tariq Modood (2001). “Muslims in the West: Muslim diasporas can play a positive role in challenging the dangerous clash of civilizations thesis” *The Observer*, Sept. 30, 2001. www.guardian.co.uk/wtccrash/story

⁹This definition has been taken from Marquita Sykes (1995). www.now.org

¹⁰I have borrowed the term from Ulrich Beck, who uses it in general to refer to the South. Ulrich Beck (2000). “The Cosmopolitan Perspective: Sociology of the Second Age of Modernity”, *British Journal of Sociology*, 51 (1): 79-105.

name of equality and democracy, coupled with dictates from the IMF and the World Bank toward privatization of the economy. In the, now, mid to low income countries of the South, affirmative action policies are almost totally lacking. Just the suggestion of preferential treatment, in fact, meets with raised eyebrows, not only from the conservative right, but from the more equality oriented left as well. Both end up impoverishing and disempowering the poor while equipping the rich.

Positive discrimination is, as the founder of the Cultural Studies discipline, Stuart Hall said of multiculturalism “contested by the right, by individual libertarians, and modernizers. It is contested by the left.”¹¹ It is also contested by high theoreticians such as Zizěk¹², Bourdieu and Wacquant¹³ as well. In an article published three years before his death, Pierre Bourdieu together with Loic Wacquant viewed it as “an American conspiracy on unwitting Europeans.”¹⁴

Its interpretation sometimes takes on a strange twist among non-Western countries. In Malaysia, for instance, politicians speak of quotas and ‘positive discrimination’ as a preference in favor of the ruling Moslem majority (60 percent of the population); one of the rare places in the world where the policy is defined as giving special opportunities to the powerful group, en bloc, at the expense of the Chinese (nearly 30%) and Indian ethnic minorities!¹⁵

In Nigeria, affirmative action in favor of the majority tribes in all 36 states means that, in the words of the writer Chinua Achebe: “It would be difficult to point to one important job held by the most competent person we have”.¹⁶ In Turkey, on the other hand, the Grand National Assembly made up of 550 parliamentarians has only a four percent (22 of them altogether) minority of women, where quotas would make a world of difference.

¹¹Stuart Hall (2000). 3rd Crossroads in in Cultural Studies, 21-25 June 2000, Birmingham, UK.

¹²Slavoj Zizěk (1997). “Multiculturalism or the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism”, *New Left Review*, No. 225, pp.28-51.

¹³Bourdieu, Pierre and Loic Wacquant. (1999). “On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason”, *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol. 16, No.1, pp.41-58.

¹⁴Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant (1999). “On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason”, *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol. 16, No.1, pp.41-58. (London: Sage)

¹⁵David Cohen (2000). “At Colleges in Malaysia Chinese Need Not Apply”, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 16 2000, Vol 46. No. 47, p.A47 (Ebscohost).

¹⁶“Don’t Discriminate”. *The Economist*, Sept.1, 2001, vol 360. No. 8237, p.10 (Database:MasterFILEPremier)

Furthermore, there is not even a single parliamentarian from the officially recognized minorities of Turkey.¹⁷

All is not gloomy however: In India, the University Grants Commission imposed penalties against universities which failed to comply with its policy of positive discrimination in favor of lower-caste teachers.¹⁸

In the affluent North, on the other hand, among EU member countries as well as the USA, the once popular quotas, have now, gone out of fashion along with the trend toward a more conservative global economy and political outlook in general, in tandem with the dismantling of “the welfare society.” Even Hall has voiced his doubt concerning positive discrimination. Addressing a plenary session on multiculturalism at the 3rd Crossroads in International Cultural Studies at Birmingham University in 2000 he said, “I have gone backwards and forwards on the question of quotas. We must disaggregate what is being represented.”¹⁹ For many, not only quotas but all policies of positive discrimination pose “equality” problems of intellectual, political, economic and social nature. Yet the debate on positive versus reverse discrimination will not cease. It cannot cease because the global underdogs omnipresent in all corners, in deepest recesses of the world will not shut up.

Nor will the global lords: In 1995, the all-male European Court of Justice in Luxembourg ruled that the use of quotas is sex discrimination against men and is, therefore unlawful under the equal treatment directive.²⁰ This landmark ruling threw into doubt all the systems of positive action giving priority to job applications from women that are favored by many European states, particularly Germany.

¹⁷According to the Lausanne Treaty of 1923, signed between the Allies and the Republic of Turkey, Greeks, Jews and Armenians are officially recognized as minorities, while the Kurds, Georgians, and Nusayris, Romas and 40 other ethnic groups, being neither Christian nor Jewish, are not considered minorities.

¹⁸Suroor, Hasan, (1997). “Delhi Faces Penalties over Caste”, *Times Higher Education Supplement*, June 27 1997, No. 1286, p.11.

¹⁹Stuart Hall, 2000, Plenary Lecture “Multiculturalism”, *3rd International Crossroads in Cultural Studies Conference*, Birmingham University, UK, 21-25 June 2000.

²⁰Stephen Overell, (1995). *People Management*, “ECJ Takes Negative View of Positive Discrimination”, Nov. 02, 1995, Vol. 1, No. 22, p.13.

3/ Against the tides

Is not most social theory drawn from social life and action, receiving a good part of its initial inspiration from it? The tides, today, in other words, are against affirmative action. The fact that positive discrimination is no longer in vogue in the West, however, is no reason, why it cannot be resuscitated there, nor reincarnated elsewhere, perhaps in the South, among the global underdogs. For that to materialize, however, what is needed is a good push from the more radical social scientists, new theoretical argumentation, conceptual frameworks taking into account globalization and cosmopolitanization. The more so, because, in spite of the enthusiasm of the transformationalists and hyperglobalists,²¹ the tides of the new age have so far, simultaneously discriminated in favor of the powerful/affluent and against the disenfranchised and dispossessed, both within and across countries.

Sociologist Stephen Steinberg, whose piercing book, *Turning Back* (1995) has been influential in putting me to work on this article, has struck me, by the force of his arguments and the material he brought together from the American political scene, supported intellectually by the social science establishment, to make his point concerning the “liberal retreat from race” in the US. One paragraph has stuck in my mind to this day: “A common refrain from the right is that advocates of affirmative action are guilty of the very thing that they say they are against –namely treating blacks as a separate class. This reasoning is upside-down and inside-out. The truth is that, it is the refusal to see race - the willful color blindness of the liberal camp - that acquiesces to the racial status quo, and does so by consigning blacks to a twilight zone where they are politically invisible. In this way, elements of the left unwittingly join the right in evading any reckoning with America’s greatest crime –slavery - and its legacy in the present.”²²

The fact that Steinberg is referring to the US cultural context matters little; almost every society in the world has some parallel of national guilt and

²¹See David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt and Jonathan Perraton’s classification of views on globalization: (1999). *Global Transformation” Politics, Economics and Culture*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, pp. 1-14.

²²Stephen Steinberg (1995). *Turning Back*. New York: Beacon Press, p. 135-136.

other historical processes resulting in inequalities among various groups of its population, some, obviously, much more excruciating than others.

4/Ending notes

I have argued here that it is critical for the affluent-powerful to sacrifice some of their relatively high average income and giant share of the world's economic and political resources in favor of the impoverished-powerless, those historically persecuted and economically downtrodden. I have furthermore contended that this is absolutely essential not only within a country, locally, but also, across countries, in bilateral and multilateral relations, i.e., internationally, economic, political and otherwise.

These, I have maintained are absolutely essential for several reasons:

- 1- Globalization has vastly increased the gulf separating the haves from the have-nots, the disenfranchised from the sovereign.
- 2- Deindustrialization and the onset of the weightless knowledge economy, has put out of commission a mass of individuals formerly in the working classes in industry without educating them in higher level skills befitting the new age. More and more, the labouring class of the early modern era is coming to join the underclasses, and the informal economy. We are moving, as an economist once commented, towards the ghettoization of employment.
- 3- The underclasses, on the other hand, in addition to having become relatively even poorer, are more socially excluded than ever.
- 4- Since the events of 9-11 certain ethnic/religious groups living in, but also out of the North and certain countries representing “the axis of evil” named by the US president in 2001, have been put under “panopticon” surveillance by the “watchdogs” of the world, the affluent power elite and their multifarious security forces.
- 5- Whatever welfare systems that may have existed within nation-states are being dismantled both in the affluent North, but as well among the poor and middle income countries of the world under joint IMF-

World Bank policies, and following the trends toward a liberal, hands-off capitalist economy.

- 6- The fall of the socialist system in East Europe and the Soviet Union, on the other hand, has created a large class of economically insecure and unemployed people there, who now, having all the consumer luxuries of the West at their feet, must, many times, sell “their own household goods in order to buy food.”²³

Thus a dynamic system of ever changing inequality has to be more equal than a static “consensus” establishment equality of the status quo. Without positive discrimination there is no justice, no way of redressing past wrongs, and, a relatively more equitable distribution of today’s cultural, and politico-economic resources, but also, no other means of addressing the injustices and inequalities of the past. Quotas and positive discrimination are also the means by which the vast poverty gap among different classes in, and in-between societies can be somewhat narrowed down. There is no other means of even “slightly” narrowing the cumulated gulf between the underprivileged and the possessed, short of a quantum leap by revolution. Quotas, positive discrimination and all-purpose ombudsmen for subaltern minorities and the global underdogs, should, they *must* become the Truth and Reconciliative measures of the global age. To avoid The Global Monster of the North, measures of preferential treatment, positive discrimination and quotas should, they *must*, also be used in international trade and other economic transactions to bridge the vast poverty gap between the core and the periphery, and for redressing international wrongs, unjust wars, past colonization, and current neo-colonization.

And finally, equality of opportunity is not enough, what is urgently needed is equality of results.

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