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Commentary to Gila Stopler Article:

"Contextualizing Multiculturalism – A Three Dimensional Examination of Multicultural Claims"

In a clear and interesting article Gila Stopler argues against the one dimensional restricted nature of some multicultural approaches. Insisting exclusively or predominantly on the right to culture, she claims, tends to neglect other important aspects of justice. Following Nancy Fraser's theory of justice, Gila argues that claims (either of discrimination or accommodation) based on the right to culture should be analyzed within a political, social and economic context. Looking at social justice issues only, or mainly, through the prism of the multicultural perspective "helps obscure power disparities and a reality of economic and political discrimination (or preferences). This according to Gila often leads to "a distorted view of the cultural or ethnic minority position within the polity and of the validity of its claims".

Employing Fraser's notion of "parity of participation – social arrangements that permit all members of society to interact with one another as peers" on the level of classic discrimination and special accommodation, and across three dimensions of justice – recognition (culture), redistribution (economy), political participation (politics), Gila examines the situation of two major minority groups in Israel – Palestinian Arab citizens and ultra orthodox Jews.

Again, looking at these two groups as only cultural groups, neglects to take into consideration the crucial fact concerning the power relations between the groups as well as their different positions in the Israel society and the different nature of their claims. Contextualization is the main tool of analysis and understanding; this means one should analyze cultural claims in their sociological, political and historical particular circumstances.

First, few short comments on Fraser's theory. Fraser suggests that we conceive recognition as a matter of justice, which together with redistribution and political participation is supposed to give us a theory of assessing and designing cultural, economic and political institutions. But Fraser does not really provides us with a detailed theory of justice, but rather with a meta theory which tells us that while assessing questions of justice we should take into consideration the cultural,

economic, social and political dimension. She does not provide us with any detailed principle which we could use to assess questions of justice. Except saying that maldistribution involves exploitation, marginalization and deprivation. But in many problematic situations we would still be left in without practical criteria to assess maldistribution. Take for example the definition of exploitation (having the fruit of one's labor appropriated for the benefit of others) this does not seem to help us while we are trying to assess the morality of the labor market, unless we want to abolish the capitalist or the social democrat labor market. This criticism concerning Fraser's general characterization of maldistribution, applies as well to questions of misrecognition.

Fraser states that perceiving misrecognition as a matter of justice and assessing it should be done from an objective external view as opposed to judging it from the subjective point of view of the group claiming misrecognition. I agree that misrecognition should be assessed from an external point of view but why ignore the subjectivist point of view and regard it as biased. Struggles for recognition of oppressed groups, like women and racial and ethnic minorities, took so long because the external point of view of the majority has difficulty and lack of interest to recognize and understand the oppression felt from the subjectivist point of view of women and members of the minority.

Gila adopts Fraser's theory since other theorists of multiculturalism fails, according to her, to adopt the complex and contextualized model of Fraser, among these theorists she mentions Charles Taylor, Will Kymlicka and Halbertall and Margalit, Regarding Kymlicka I think that it is important to mention that he wrote quite extensively on the relationships between distribution and recognition, trying to reconcile the support for the welfare state with claims of multiculturalism. But still gila's argument has it own merits independently if she provides an accurate picture of those belonging to the identity politics camp.

Applying the test of "participatory parity" at both levels of discrimination and a across the three dimensions of justice: political participation, distribution and recognition, to examine the situation of ultra orthodox Jews and Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel,

Gila argues that they are not similarly situated in the Israeli society and that there is a vast disparity in terms of claims of discrimination, accommodation and power.

Given the state of Israel self definition as an Ethnic Democracy – as a Jewish and democratic state it is easy to understand why the Jewish members of the state fare better economically, politically and socially, than non Jewish members. Gila detailed clearly and meticulously the injustices suffered by the Palestinian Arab citizens in Israel and the opposite effect on the ultra orthodox minority. She also points out to the intra-group injustices suffered by women in both groups, collectives controlled by men.

Concerning political participation Gila's conclusion is that the ultra orthodox are treated as peers and even given privilege position, while Palestinian Arab citizens are treated as second class citizens.

Regarding the redistribution dimension the Palestinian Arabs suffer from considerable discrimination while the ultra orthodox community members do not suffer from such discrimination and even enjoy a preferred status.

In answering the question why is the ultra orthodox community the poorest community in Israel, Gila points out to the complex relations between redistribution and recognition. She argues that the large subsidies granted to the ultra orthodox community (subsidies and deferral of military service to men studying at a yeshiva and child allowances structure which benefit large families) have distorted their way of life, transforming their culture and increased their poverty rate.

Gila asks to what extent is a state obliged to support a community whose cultural practices render it unsustainable. Practices that also prevent other groups from receiving adequate economic resources. She thinks that the ultra orthodox cultural practices violate the principle of parity of participation for all. Thus we should change policies that encourage young adults to stay in yeshiva and policies that increase fertility rates.

However, one should notice that it is not only due their political powers that the ultra orthodox succeeded in promoting a policy that increase child allowances, but that over the years it was the state official ideology to support and encourage higher fertility rates in order to win the demographic war against the Palestinian Israelis. Second, I think one has to distinguish between arguing against child allowance policy in terms of its influence on fertility rates and treating child allowance as resources that are provided in order to fulfill children's needs, children who were born into poor

families, Gila does not make this distinction. Thus although one might have an argument against such policy due to its bad consequences, we should also look at that policy from a children's rights' perspective.

Throughout her discussion Gila treats the ultra orthodox community as one unified collective, however this community consists of two different communities mizrachi ultra orthodox and Ashkenazi ultra orthodox. The mizrachi ultra orthodox established a different educational system, separate religious institutions and a separate party due to their long and consistent discrimination by the Ashkenazi ultra orthodox establishment. It is important to note that the description of the ultra orthodox Ashkenazi community does not fit the mizrachi ultra orthodox, for example as political participation is concerned many shas party voters are not ultra orthodox. They join shas because, among other reasons, it entitles them to receive welfare services that the state has ceased to provide. As for the place of women in the ultra orthodox mizrachi community, some of them enjoy social mobility and are in charge of its educational and welfare institutions, positions that were not available to them neither in the Ashkenazi ultra orthodox community, nor in the secular Israeli society, this is another aspect in which patterns of recognition interact and influence patterns of distribution. In sum much more contextualization is needed in the description of the ultra orthodox community.

As for the cultural dimension (which consists of domination, non-recognition and disrespect) Gila describes the relationships between the secular majority and the ultra orthodox minority as a "fierce culture war between two equally powerful forces over the future image of Israel". I think that this description does not fit the Israeli reality and symmetrical power relationships do not exist in the cultural dimension. The secular majority holds exclusively major state institutions like the courts where the ultra orthodox's rights are not given equal consideration (see gad barzilai and ronem shamir criticism and last high court decisions concerning children's school launch). Moreover major institutions of cultural representation like the private and public mass media, where ultra orthodox community usually are treated in disrespect, are held exclusively by the secular majority. Here too, more contextualization is needed in this clear and enlightening article.