

Politics of Difference and Nationalism:

On Iris Young's Global Vision

Ranjoo Seodu Herr

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I. Introduction

Iris Marion Young has made an indelible mark in political philosophy by charting a brave new territory against the most prevalent liberal position, the assimilationist ideal that espouses treating everyone equally according to the same “neutral” principles, rules, and standards. Young has convincingly shown that the supposedly neutral liberal rules are a mere disguise for dominant social norms and that ignoring social and cultural differences has oppressive consequences. The social ideal she advocates is the “politics of difference” that promotes “equality among socially and culturally differentiated groups, who mutually respect one another and affirm one another in their differences” (1990a: 163). In order to promote this equality, the politics of difference advocates “group autonomy” so that groups can be empowered to develop “a group-specific voice and perspective” (1990a: 168). It seems that extending the politics of difference to the global arena entails nationalism, especially of indigenous peoples. However, Young takes a strong stance against nationalism, arguing that nationalism, with its conceptual ties to the principle of sovereignty, is morally indefensible for being externally exclusionary and internally oppressive. Most importantly, nationalism perpetuates domination in one form another. Taking the ideal of non-domination as the most important goal in restructuring the global

order (2000a:237, 268-9), Young proposes “decentred diverse democratic federalism” that combines local self-determination and cosmopolitanism.

In this paper, I shall argue that Young’s rejection of nationalism is untenable, and that nationalism, if charitably interpreted, is not only consistent with Young’s politics of difference but also a prerequisite for her global vision of democratic federalism. In what follows, I shall first examine core elements of the politics of difference and Young’s proposal for democratic federalism as the ideal vision for the global order. I shall then argue that Young’s characterization of nationalism is predicated on an unduly essentialist interpretation and propose a non-essentialist conception of nationalism—polycentric nationalism—that avoids the dangers that Young attributes to nationalism. Next, I shall argue that Young’s democratic federalism cannot be achieved except by granting weaker democratic nations the right to non-interference promoted by polycentric nationalism. In other words, I shall show that polycentric nationalism is necessary for realizing Young’s ideal global vision.

II. Elements of the Politics of Difference

Iris Young’s politics of difference has posed one of the most significant challenges to mainstream liberalism and awoke liberals from their slumber of the assimilationist ideal, according to which disembedded and disembodied individuals are treated equally according to the same “neutral” liberal principles, rules and standards. The assimilationist ideal aims at eliminating group-based differences in order to counterbalance rampant discrimination and oppression predicated on essentialist construals of group-based

differences, such as “race” or sex. Young recognizes the contribution this liberal ideal has made to human emancipation in the past. However, Young argues for a politics of difference, pursuing the ideal of “democratic cultural pluralism” that promotes “equality among socially and culturally differentiated groups, who mutually respect one another and affirm one another in their differences” (1990a: 163).

One major reason why Young advocates the politics of difference is that public rules that are claimed to be neutral are not really neutral, but rather represent norms of the dominant group. Group differences are ineliminable in a society as diverse as the United States and “Attachment to specific traditions, practices, language, and other culturally specific forms is a crucial aspect of social existence.” In its “rhetorical commitment to the sameness of persons,” the assimilationist ideal makes it “impossible even to name how those differences presently structure privilege and oppression” (1990a: 163). Hence marginalized groups who do not conform to the dominant norm, such as women, Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, Asians, gay men and lesbians, are “marked as deviant, as the Other,” while members of the dominant group continue to be privileged, often without their awareness (1990a: 164).

Under such circumstances, insisting on equality and liberation predicated on the assimilationist ideal has “oppressive consequences.” Young mentions three such consequences: First, marginalized groups whose experience, culture, and socialized capacities differ from those of the dominant group would be considered as not “measuring up” to the supposedly neutral standards, and the disadvantage they suffer as a result may be seen as deserved (1990a: 164). Second, as dominant groups continue to be blind to their own group specificity by subscribing to the assimilationist ideal, they unknowingly

perpetuate “cultural imperialism” by advocating their own norms as neutral and universal. Third, those who are marked as Other by the dominant norms “internalize devaluation” and suffer from “self-loathing” and “double consciousness” (1990a: 165) that compel them to see themselves always through others’ eyes and measure their “soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (1990b: 60).

When members of disadvantaged groups are oppressed in such ways, the politics of difference can be “liberating and empowering,” as these groups reclaim their despised group identity as something to affirm. In the process, they can overcome self-loathing and double consciousness. Secondly, this reclamation allows them to relativize the dominant culture and enables them to see group differences as mere differences, and not as “exclusion, opposition, or dominance.” Thirdly, the politics of difference promotes “group solidarity against the individualism of liberal humanism” (1990a: 166). As opposed to the assimilationist ideal that hails the economic/social success of minority members as *individual* achievements, the politics of difference insists on the “liberation of the whole group” that requires more fundamental institutional changes (1990a: 167).

Still, Young wishes to maintain “the liberal humanist principle that all persons are of equal moral worth,” while advocating the politics of difference. This double goal seems to entail a “dilemma.” Typically, group difference has been associated with “absolute otherness, mutual exclusion, categorical opposition” (1990a: 169), thereby “essentializing” groups and subsuming individual members under essentialized groups. As a result, differences within groups are ignored (1990a: 170) and some members who do not conform to the “essence” may be denied equal moral worth.

To avoid this dilemma and related problems, Young proposes to reconceptualize group difference as “ambiguous, relational, shifting, without clear borders.” This “relational understanding of difference” conceives of difference as “a function of the relations between groups and the interaction of groups with institutions” (1990a: 171). Young calls groups that exemplify relational difference “social groups.” A social group is “a collective of people who have affinity with one another because of a set of practices or way of life” (1990b: 43). As a group is formed through “a social process of interaction and differentiation,” group members form “a particular *affinity*” for one another. In other words, social groups are “affinity groups” comprising of those who feel “more familiar” and “the most comfortable” with one another. Members of social groups share “affective bonding, and networking” but not some common nature. This means that differences among social groups arise due not to some group essence but rather to “a creation and construction” among group members (1990a: 172).

With respect to oppressed social groups, Young advocates “group autonomy.” The politics of difference accepts as “a basic principle that members of oppressed groups need *separate* organizations that *exclude* others, especially those from more privileged groups” (1990a: 167, emphases added). This is important so that members of a disadvantaged social group can self-determine the fate of their group in a way that meets their specific needs and promotes their specific interests. Group autonomy is “an important vehicle for empowerment and the development of a group-specific voice and perspective” (1990a: 168).

III. Young's Global Vision

Given Young's emphasis on social groups and group autonomy, it may seem that extending the politics of difference to the global arena entails endorsing nationalism, especially of national minorities of indigenous peoples. Yet Young adamantly rejects nationalism, arguing that it is predicated on the "idea of sovereignty" that a sovereign state "wields central and final authority over all the legal and political matters within a determinate and strictly bounded territory" (2000b: 247). The principle of self-determination presupposed by the idea of sovereignty is that of "non-interference" (2000a: 254, 237), according to which "A people or government has the authority to exercise ultimate control over what goes on inside its jurisdiction, and no outside agent has the right to make claims upon or interfere with what the self-determining agent does" (2000a: 257).¹

Young argues that nationalism, understood in this way, is "inappropriately essentialist and exclusionary" (2000a: 237) and morally indefensible both externally and internally: Externally, nationalism is oblivious to the obligations of justice toward those outside of the state and the need to cooperate with others to resolve environmental concerns that affect the humanity as a whole. Contemporary circumstances of global interdependence are sufficiently tight to deserve the title of a "global society" (2000b: 248). Three aspects of the global society, in particular, warrant expanding our duties of justice beyond the boundaries of our states. One is that scarce yet valuable resources are located in a "morally arbitrary" way. Second, unsustainable ways of life in the Global North destroy the environment and affect the Global South negatively. Third, "historical and current relations of exploitation among the world's people" have exacerbated inequality between

the Global North and South (2000b: 249; 2000a: 248).² Nationalism, however, denies any “obligation to devote any of their intellectual and material resources to enhance the well-being of anyone outside their borders,” while excluding “non-citizens who wish to live within their borders” (2000a: 236).

Internally, nationalism cannot accommodate the demands of national minorities for self-determination. Sovereignty implies, first, that a state has ultimate authority regarding matters internal to its territorial boundary and, second, that uniform law, regulations and administration apply within its territory (2000b: 251). Hence nationalism claims that national “essence” can be legitimately imposed, by force if necessary, on those who do not conform to the national norm (2000a: 252). This entails the state’s domination over and oppression of distinct national minorities within, such as indigenous peoples, who seek “significantly greater and more secure self-determination within the frameworks of a wider polity” (2000b: 252) and whose “prima facie right of self-governance” ought to be recognized (2000b: 251). Further, nationalism’s penchant for domination over and oppression of national minorities, predicated on essentialist conceptions of nation and national membership, is fundamentally at odds with democracy, as “Participation and citizenship are always enacted best at a local level” (2000a: 269).

A third reason, related to the second, for rejecting nationalism, which is scattered in Young’s writings, is that nationalism threatens peace at the global level (2000a: 257). Given the tendency of sovereign states to dominate over minorities, contemporary attempts of indigenous peoples to gain a sovereign state threaten to “oppress new minorities and generate bloody conflict over territories to which several groups lay claim” (2000a: 257). Evidence for the destructive nature of nationalism is all too prevalent: “much of the

violence on the Asian and African continents is traceable to [the] process of sovereign state creation [in the past]" (2000b: 247). For such reasons, Young claims that "Proliferation of independent sovereign states... probably works against the need for greater capacity for global regulation and cooperation" (2000a: 257). The failure of nationalism in these respects, according to Young, is sufficient reason to reject nationalism.

In accordance with her politics of difference that values difference, however, Young is not endorsing cosmopolitanism that merely replicates mainstream liberalism. Her alternative instead is "decentred diverse democratic federalism" (democratic federalism for short), which combines "local self-determination" and some sort of cosmopolitan global governance (2000a: 254). This combination of "global regulatory institutions with devolved local autonomy" constitutes "global democracy." The *cosmopolitan* part of this vision involves "a global system of regulatory regimes to which locales and regions relate in a federated system." These regulatory regimes pertain to that "small but vital set of issues around which peace and justice all [sic.] for global co-operation," such as peace and security, environment, human rights, citizenship and migration, and economic transactions, among others. Each regulatory regime provides a "thin set of general rules" that individuals, organizations, and governments ought to follow in taking "account of the interests and circumstances of one another" (2000a: 266-7). Through the application of such regulatory regimes, the "decentering [of] governance" occurs by bringing some of the activities of individuals, organizations, and governments "directly under global regulation, with regional and local governments as tools of implementation" (2000a: 268).

The *local* part of her global vision has to do with her belief that "everyday governance ought to be primarily local," within the confines of global regulatory regimes.

“Locales consist in first-level autonomous units of governance.” (2000a: 268). The emphasis on local self-determination in the global arena is an extension of Young’s advocacy of “group autonomy.”³ The crucial question, however, is what constitutes “first-level autonomous units of governance” or “locales”? In the domestic sphere of multicultural societies—the original focus of the politics of difference—it was social groups that deserved the right to group autonomy. Which entities in the global sphere deserve the right to self-determination as global social groups? Nation-states are clearly disqualified, as Young takes nations to be ineluctably essentialist and territorially exclusive. Instead, she endorses Frug’s “local self-determination ... *without* sovereign borders.” Decisions of self-determination should be made at “the most local level possible” (2000b: 254, emphasis added; see also, 2007: 150-51). Although Young does not elaborate on what counts as the “most local level” in her later works, what she calls “region” in her earlier work seems to fit the bill.⁴ Region is “both an economic unit and a territory that people identify as their living space” (1990c: 252)⁵ and is best represented by a city or cluster of cities (1990c: 229) or “metropolitan regions” (2000a: 268). Region, however, is *not* a communitarian “community” which promotes “a shared whole” and “den[ies] difference and posit[s] fusion.” It may contain social groups, but they “overlap and intermingle without becoming homogeneous” (1990c: 239; see also, 226-36). Hence group differences flourish “without exclusion” in a region (1990c: 238).

When the most local level is defined in this way, the relevant sense of self-determination cannot be as non-interference that relies on a “substantial logic.” Instead, Young proposes a reconceptualization of self-determination predicated on a “relational social ontology” (2000a: 252). Accordingly, a global social group is “a specific group in

interactive relations with others,” and group differences “emerge[] as a matter of degree” and “allow[] for overlap and hybridity among groups” (2000a: 253). The interpretation of self-determination compatible with the relational ontology of social groups is as “non-domination” and not non-interference (2000a: 257 ff.). Domination occurs when an agent has power over another and is thus “able to interfere with the other *arbitrarily*” (2000a: 258). Interference may not be arbitrary, however, “if its purpose is to minimize domination, and if it is done in a way that takes the interests and voices of affected parties into account” (2000a: 259). Hence, despite the prima facie right of global social groups or “local units” to govern themselves, some interferences by “A higher level of governance” may be justifiable in order to resolve “conflicts between locales” or “problems affect[ing] several local units together” or to “protect local units and their members from domination” (2000a: 267, 268, see also, 260). In this process, states or nations would be affectively bypassed as “locales can relate directly to global authorities in order to challenge and limit the ability of nation-states to control them” (2000b: 255). This vision of global democracy primarily consists of two main poles, global institutions and particular regions/locales, each accountable to the other in “upward and downward accountability” (2007: 151). In this process, not only states but also cultural communities, including nations, are rendered irrelevant.

IV. De-essentializing Nationalism

I agree with Young that the “principle of sovereignty” is unacceptable for being exclusionary and essentialist. It is an ideological construct tied to the post-Westphalian state-system of Western Europe and idealizes the notion of a sovereign *state* whose territorial boundaries are clearly demarcated. However, I do not believe that nationalism has to be conceptually tied to the principle of sovereignty, for its focus is on *nation*. While a state is primarily a territorial-political unit, a nation refers to “an intergenerational community, more or less institutionally complete, occupying a given territory or homeland, sharing a distinct language and history” (Kymlicka 1995: 18). In other words, nations are cultural communities. Some nations are co-extensive with states, but not necessarily.⁶ Although Young claims that nationalism advocates “an independent state for every nation and one nation for every state” (a: 254), this is not always the case. Many nationalists in currently colonized nations are realistic enough to understand that almost the entire surface of the earth is already taken and that other alternatives than sovereign states, such as “border revision, federation, regional or functional autonomy, cultural pluralism” would be more feasible (Walzer: 80).⁷ Then, while the principle of self-determination is central to nationalism, the principle of sovereignty is not.

If dissociating the principle of sovereignty from nationalism is possible, Young’s accusation that nationalism, as a “process of sovereign state creation,” will inevitably cause violence and chaos, as has happened on the Asian and African continents (2000b: 247), can be evaded. Even as a historical observation Young’s statement is incorrect. It is true that many states, especially those in Sub-Saharan Africa, have been mired in violence and chaos caused by civil wars since World War Two. This, however, is largely due to the fact that state boundaries were imposed arbitrarily by European colonizers without regard for ethnic

or tribal divisions within African societies, *not* to internal processes of sovereign state creation. In many other countries of Asia and North Africa, too, the most destructive violence had occurred in the aggressive and expansionist colonial contest—“ethnocentric” nationalism—among Western and Japanese empires on their soil. Ethnocentric nationalism, predicated on the idea that power and value dwell *exclusively* in one’s nation, rationalized the domination over and subjugation of weaker nations. Young’s worry that nationalism “threatens to oppress new minorities and generate bloody conflict over territories to which several groups lay claim” pertains to ethnocentric nationalism.

Fortunately, it is not the only kind of nationalism. The other and more relevant nationalism for our discussion is that of currently or formerly colonized peoples, both in the West and the Third World, struggling to (re)gain or maintain national independence in the face of hostile elements that threaten the survival or autonomy of their nation—“polycentric” nationalism.⁸ Polycentric nationalism emerges as a reaction of last resort to violence and chaos generated by ethnocentric nationalism in colonized nations. Although polycentric nationalism certainly added more violence in resistance, it is not the main culprit for violence. To the contrary, in promoting independence from colonial masters, it has contributed to the emancipation of colonized peoples and the equality of nations, however nominal, at the international level. Domestically, too, polycentric nationalism has played a pivotal role in unifying and mobilizing diverse sectors of societies under siege and spreading the idea of equal national membership.⁹ Indigenous movements for self-determination, which Young advocates, are a subgroup of polycentric nationalism.

Undoubtedly, many historical instances of even polycentric nationalism have subscribed to ideological and essentialist conceptions of nation and nationalism and

generated morally unjustifiable repression of various disadvantaged national members, such as “racial”/ethnic minorities and women (see Herr 2003: part II). However, it is by no means the case that nationalism is wedded to such essentialist conceptions that entail the oppression of members and rejection of international cooperation. Nationalism, as any other philosophical concept, is compatible with diverse interpretations, some of which may promote positive values. If so, I find it curious that Young would insist that nationalism is necessarily essentialist. Young’s focus on the essentialist construal of nationalism in popular politics as the starting point of her philosophical ruminations on nationalism, then, is not only uncharitable but also uncharacteristic of her philosophy, as Young, in her politics of difference, sought to counter essentialist constructions of “difference” and “groups” prevalent in society by proposing alternative relational interpretations. One of the most important tasks of political philosophers is to reclaim certain important concepts from misuse and abuse in popular discourse. “Nation” and “nationalism” seem paradigm candidates for philosophical disabuse, given their significance in contemporary politics. In the following, I shall provide such reconceptualizations that can avoid Young’s charges.

Let me begin with “nationalism.” One acceptable way to conceive nationalism is as a political movement that aims to *overcome or prevent domination* by stronger nation-states of weaker nations. The attainment and maintenance of national self-determination and independence is necessary for achieving dual goals: First, obtaining “recognition and respect for the nation as an equal partner among nations in the international arena” (Herr 2003: 149) and, second, protecting an arena in which culturally immersed and self-identifying co-nationals democratically (re)construct a “unique national culture” (Herr 2006: 316). Only polycentric nationalism is consistent with this description, as ethnocentric

nationalism denies the prerogative of weaker nations to maintain their unique culture.¹⁰ Reconceived this way, nationalism's conceptual affinity to Young's group autonomy becomes obvious. As group autonomy promotes equality among different social groups with "group-specific" voices and perspectives (1990a: 168) formed through a "construction" among group members who feel "affinity" toward one another (1990a: 172), nationalism promotes equality among different nations with unique national cultures, constructed by culturally immersed national members who are emotionally connected to one another as co-nationals.

Polycentric nationalism involves the right to non-interference in Young's sense that "A people or government has the authority to exercise ultimate control over what goes on inside its jurisdiction, and no outside agent has the right to make claims upon or interfere with what the *self-determining* agent does" (emphasis added). Yet the right to non-interference is not absolute and should be exercised under *two conditions*, among others: Externally, this right ought to be exercised only to the extent necessary to *prevent domination* from stronger neighbors, as polycentric nationalism's main goal is to overcome or to prevent domination by others. If a newly independent nation attempts to dominate over minority nations within or weaker neighbors, its exercise of the right to non-interference loses legitimacy, as it now pursues morally unjustifiable ethnocentric nationalism. Nationalist goals that warrant the right to non-interference pertain to the protection and maintenance of the nation's unique political, economic, and cultural system advocated by the majority of members, provided that they do not entail harming outsiders.¹¹

Internally, the nation has to be “self-determining,” meaning that it has to be largely democratic with various institutional mechanisms of democratic participation available for members. Democratic nations *are* largely democratic nations. The adjective “largely” is significant in that even communities that aspire to be democratic are always works in progress. No existing nation is perfectly democratic and probably never will be. Perfect democracy exists only as a regulative ideal. This implies that even in democratic nations, there are bound to be some practices/norms that are somewhat morally problematic. Patriarchy, for example, is undoubtedly one of the most serious problems in nonliberal, as well as liberal, nations. As long as some democratic channels are open, however, culturally immersed insiders with emotional connection to their nation and co-nationals will find a way to reform such practices/norms. Women of nonliberal nations, as cultural insiders, are indeed the best agents for reforming their national culture, as culture is a complex and constantly shifting plexus of interlocking values, institutions, and social practices of which only culturally immersed and emotionally attached members can have a reliable understanding.¹² Indeed, contrary to the prevalent stereotype in liberal societies as helpless victims, these women have been struggling for democracy and gender equity in culturally sensitive ways.¹³ Yet it is possible for a nation to descend to tyranny and stop being democratic. Although the precise point at which this occurs cannot be specified in the abstract, it would involve the majority of insiders requesting outside help and intervention.¹⁴ When this happens, the national authorities can no longer justifiably claim the right to non-interference.

Reconceptualized in this way, polycentric nationalism can contribute to world peace in its advocacy of non-domination and equality among democratic nations. It may also

conduce to international cooperation. Global regulation is effective only when nations voluntarily cooperate in upholding it, and voluntary cooperation is forthcoming only when nations are treated fairly with equal respect. Polycentric nationalism promotes fair treatment and equal respect for all democratic nations, including the weaker ones. Nationalism promotes global justice as well. The current global economic order deprives nations in the Global South of the ability to control their economic and political fate (Held: section 6.2). Young herself recognizes this when she states that “the colonial economic relations between North and South persist” and the indebtedness of many Southern states “restricts [their] effective sovereignty” (2000b: 250; see also, 2000a: 248; 2007: 152). Further, the three aspects of the global society that calls for global redistributive justice, rightly pointed out by Young, all involve the inability of weaker nations to protect themselves. Under such circumstances, restraining the power of strong Western/Northern nation-states to reflect their economic interest in the operations of the international economic institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization,¹⁵ curbing the rampant pursuit of profit by Western/Northern multinational corporations, and pushing for reforms of the international economic system is crucial in achieving global justice. Yet the international support for polycentric nationalism of weak but democratic nations is also necessary, as it empowers these nations to conduct their internal affairs more autonomously.

Let me now turn to the concept of nation. Young takes nation, as a subspecies of cultural communities, as an essentialist monolith that “den[ies] difference and posit[s] fusion,” while promoting “a shared whole.” Young’s wariness concerning communities, including nations, is understandable, given the prevalence of essentialist conceptions of

cultural community. Cultural or national “essence,” however, does not exist, as national culture is constantly shifting due to not only intercultural but also intracultural dynamics (Herr 2006: section IV). Nation is also an “imagined” community, as it exceeds boundaries of acquaintance. Yet “[c]onstructed communities are the only communities there are, and so they cannot be less real or less authentic than some other kind” (Walzer 1994: 68).

Given the major role that nation has played since the modern era in transmitting culture and determining the boundaries of the imaginable for the members (Herr 2003, pp. 140, 147-8), most of us imagine ourselves as national members, sharing a unique way of life with co-nationals and thereby feeling emotional connection to them as well as to the nation. If this is the case, nation is a paradigm social group or “affinity group,” which Young defines as “a collective of people who have affinity with one another because of a set of practices or way of life.” As such, nations ought to be taken seriously in global politics of difference.

When nation is reconceptualized in this way, nationalism can avoid the pitfalls of essentialism, both externally and internally. Externally, nationalism can be more inclusive of outsiders, as membership is determined not by some shared national “essence” but by cultural immersion and emotional affinity. This opens a door for outsiders to become national members if they become culturally immersed in and develop emotional affinity toward the nation. Internally, the myth of national essence is dispelled as the *constructed* nature of national culture is recognized. Therefore, those who live within the national boundary but do not identify with the ideological notion of national essence, whether women or “racial”/ethnic minorities, may justifiably resist the coercive imposition of essentialist national identity and insist on their entitlement as national members to participate in national discourses to reconfigure the national culture. Having been de-

essentialized, nation is a significant arena of democracy, understood as a politics of equal member empowerment and participation in internal contestations and negotiations concerning the reconstruction of their common political, economic and cultural structure. Polycentric nationalism, in the pursuit of the second of the aforementioned dual goals, is not only compatible with but requires *internal democracy* (Herr 2006: section V).

If this is the case, nationalism may contribute to global democracy by promoting democracy within nations. Leaving out cultural communities, especially nations, from the discourse of democracy is unrealistic to a dangerous degree. The undeniable political reality is that nations, as “imagined” as they may be, are by far the most significant players on the global scene, despite the current wave of globalization.¹⁶ Nation is the largest of cultural communities that ought to be democratically restructured, given its tremendous importance in the lives of its members. As such, the battle for democracy in nations is one that we cannot afford to lose or abandon; ignoring nations as irrelevant for democracy is at best naïve and at worst dangerous. Global democracy is a valuable ideal that ought to be pursued. Yet the most feasible conception of global democracy is one in which global institutions and rules are accountable first and foremost to democratic nations. In this sense, *democratizing nations is a necessary precondition of global democracy*.

Not all minorities within the nation, however, may want to participate in internal democracy. In particular, national minorities with a territorial base, such as indigenous peoples, have demanded the recognition of their separate nationhood and a strong right to self-determination. In other words, they have pursued the second of the dual goals of polycentric nationalism vis-à-vis the dominant nation-state. This stance of indigenous peoples exposes a sore spot in Young’s advocacy of them. Young is a staunch advocate of

indigenous peoples, while adamantly rejecting cultural communities. Indigenous peoples, however, are first and foremost cultural communities, not “regions,” whose traditional culture is nonliberal.¹⁷ They are *nations* and most, if not all, indigenous peoples recognize themselves as such (Simpson: 115-16). Further, Young’s idealized portrayal of the city life or region as embracing of group differences would find few sympathizers among indigenous peoples. Some members of indigenous peoples dwell in cities of the dominant liberal society, but many of them find it “an intensely alienating and anomic experience,” as “many elements of city life fundamentally contradict the ethics of tribal culture and lifestyles” (Snipp: 402). This is part of the reason why many members of indigenous peoples seek national self-determination to protect and foster their unique cultural way of life. Advocating the cause of indigenous peoples, then, is not compatible with dismissing nations and cultural communities.

V. Is Nationalism Necessary for Democratic Federalism?

In the previous section, I tried to show that most of Young’s objections against nationalism arose as a result of her essentialist mischaracterization of nationalism and that the de-essentialized conception of nationalism can overcome them. In this section, I shall focus on one characteristic that Young fairly attributes to nationalism but nonetheless rejects: nationalism’s advocacy of the right to non-interference. In considering this issue, I shall focus on the situation of indigenous peoples/nations, which is at the center of Young’s discussion about democratic federalism.

Young advocates the principle of self-determination of global social groups but rejects its interpretation as non-interference. Why? In its original construction, Young's politics of difference focuses on the domestic context of multicultural states, specifically the U.S. Hence "equality among socially and culturally differentiated groups" that the politics of difference promotes primarily concerned disadvantaged social groups of various hyphenated Americans of color, gay men and lesbians, who share a common social and political space, most likely a city. In a city, citizens, although they may belong to different social groups, constantly interact with one another as they share the common culture of not only a multicultural city, but a multicultural state as well. Under such circumstances, conceptualizing group autonomy as fluid and "relational," as Young has done, seems plausible. Extrapolating this conception of group autonomy to the global arena, Young argues that the locales' "prima facie right of non-interference" is not absolute and can be "justifiable overridden" (2000b: 254) by global governance regimes when conflicts arise between locales or problems affect several locales together (2000a: 267).¹⁸

Is this relational model of group autonomy/self-determination sufficient for indigenous nations? In order to answer this, let us examine what Young considers to be "problems" and "conflicts" that justify intervention in the decisions of an indigenous nation by the international community. Young states that external intervention is justifiable when a people's self-determined actions "potentially affect" those on the outside (2000a: 259; 2000b: 256). As an example, Young cites the case of the *Goshutes v. Utah* (Young 2001). In the early 1990s the U.S. federal government had launched a recruitment campaign to store highly radioactive nuclear waste among Native American reservations. In the late 1990s, the Skull Valley band of Goshutes, a Native American tribe in Utah, offered to lease

some part of their reservation for that purpose. This would affect not just members of the tribe but also others living in the region nearby.¹⁹ Hence Young argues that this is a case of self-determination that justifies outside intervention in the tribe's decision. The reason why Young takes this case as a matter of self-determination has to do with the *legal* status of Goshutes as "a sovereign nation under the law" (Roosavelt).

This legal right, however, amounts to only nominal self-determination of the tribe. Despite Young's optimism that "Native Americans have a relatively long history of institutions of self-government recognized by the U.S. government" and that "in the last twenty years Native self-government has been more actual than ever before" (2001, p. 30), Native American "tribal sovereignty" was and still is a contradiction in terms. As clearly mentioned in the *United States v. Blackfeet Tribe* (1973), "an Indian tribe is sovereign to the extent that the U.S. permits it to be sovereign" and Congress has "a plenary power" to regulate Indians and Indian tribes by statute (cited in d'Errico: 484). Even the 1934 *Indian Reorganization Act*, which was passed to "stabilize the land base and social conditions" of Native Americans devastated by previous Indian Acts that displaced them from their homeland and destroyed their social fabric, allowed the U.S. to "reorganize" the Native tribes by "overthrowing traditional organizations and promoting a 'democratic' tribal council system structured along the lines of a corporate business" (d'Errico, p. 492). In a sense, "American Indian sovereignty," understood as the powers of federally sponsored tribal councils, is nothing more than "a tool for separating Native American lands from state and local control and for subordinating the original powers of indigenous self-determination to U.S. jurisdiction" (Ibid.: 493).

In addition, Goshutes, much like most other Native American peoples, are suffering from severe impoverishment and marginalization as a result of their long history of colonization (E'ricco: 485). Their land has been devastated by the U.S. federal government's policy to use it as a waste dump for decades; it is surrounded by nerve-gas incinerators, a giant magnesium plant, a hazardous-waste incinerator and a toxic-waste landfill. Under these circumstances of poverty and environmental degradation, it is not surprising that some tribal leaders, who considered their land as beyond repair, were attracted to the opportunity to make as much as \$100 million dollars paid by Private Fuel Storage, a Wisconsin-based consortium of utilities, than to continue the existence of desperate poverty and deprivation in a land that is already severely contaminated (Roosevelt). The case in effect involved the survival of not only the tribe but also of individual members. When the ability to subsist is at issue, one cannot meaningfully speak of self-determination, whether of individuals or groups.²⁰ More importantly, as bad as the economic situation of Goshutes was, not every Goshute agreed with the decision to invite more contamination of their land. The decision has been made unilaterally by a small number of tribal leaders without consulting the majority of tribal members (Roosabelt; Herbert).

Such considerations cast doubt on Young's claim that the Goshutes' decision to store nuclear waste in their reservation represents a case of self-determination. Self-determination of a people implies that a *people* can reach decisions that are representative of the collective will. The only way to reach such decisions is through internal democracy that enables group members to exercise equal power in determining their common political, economic, and cultural structure. The Goshutes' decision is clearly not democratic and

cannot be taken as an example of self-determination that demonstrates the legitimacy of external intervention. Unfortunately, Young does not provide another example of such a case to consider.

Yet the question of when the global community may justifiably intervene in decisions of largely self-determined/democratic indigenous nations is a crucial one in deciding whether nationalism advocating the right to non-interference is justifiable in the global politics. Let us therefore consider two types of cases that involve democratic indigenous nations making decisions that may not please the global community in some way: One type concerns decisions that affect outsiders in negative ways, by causing environmental pollution or species extinction, for example; the other type concerns decisions that do not so affect outsiders but nonetheless involve some internal practices/norms that go against the moral sensibilities of the global community.

In the first type of cases, I agree with Young that such decisions ought to be subject to international oversight. The reason, however, is not that the right to self-determination is “relational” and in principle subject to outside intervention, but rather that every nation is *morally required* not to harm innocent others without just cause. Since we are discussing ideals and regulative norms by which to structure the global arena, it should be incontestable that the basic moral principle not to harm without just cause *ought to* apply not just to individuals but to any human group, including self-determining nations entitled to the right to non-interference regarding their internal affairs.

What about the second type of cases pertaining to decisions that do not harm outsiders but nevertheless involve what seems morally problematic to outsiders as

“internal restrictions” on group members (Kymlicka: 35)? Suppose that a democratic nonliberal indigenous nation maintains cultural customs/norms regarded problematic by the dominant liberal society or even the “global society” led by powerful liberal nation-states. Cases in point are nonliberal cultural practices, such as arranged marriages, compulsory traditional education, the censorship of certain kinds of speech, etc., which are often severely criticized by many in the liberal West.²¹ Let us further suppose that the majority of the indigenous nation, including the “victims,” tend to uphold such practices/norms, although some degree of internal criticism exists. Can the global governance system intervene in such cases?

Given that Young’s “global governance with nested levels of jurisdiction” gives disproportionate power to “global authorities” in resolving conflicts between two or more locales, it is crucially important to determine under which principles global authorities ought to operate. Although Young does not elaborate on the content of such principles,²² she does provide some guidelines for members of the global community to follow in reaching an agreement about such principles. In discussing the global regime of human rights, for example, Young acknowledges that prevailing contemporary formulations of human rights were “developed largely by Western powers,” and that these formulations should be “subject to review in a process that includes” weaker locales. Young rightly states that “a stronger global regime to formulate global standards of individual human rights, and monitor and enforce compliance with those standards” is acceptable only if it does “not impinge on local self-determination.” Two conditions for maintaining local self-determination are, first, that “The peoples and communities obliged to observe these standards have had the opportunity to participate as a collective in their formulation” and

second, that they “have significant discretion in how they apply these standards for their local context” (2000a, 271). I agree that if these two conditions are met, then such a global regime would indeed be genuinely democratic and may justifiably intervene in the affairs of democratic nations to resolve conflicts and problems affecting multiple nations and locales.

The problem is that this ideal, while eminently worth striving for, does not yet exist and requires certain preliminary steps for its realization. One of such steps involves polycentric nationalism. In the current global situation, there are hardly any democratic global institutions. International economic institutions, such as the IMF, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization, as major forces of global economic liberalization, are notoriously undemocratic and represent the interest of powerful Western/Northern nation-states and their multinational corporations. Even the decisions of the United Nations that comes closest to a democratic international institution are severely constrained by the veto power of its Security Council. Under such circumstances, the *economies* of weaker nations are increasingly at the mercy of richer Western/Northern nation-states’ and their multinational corporations’ whims, undergoing “structural adjustment” imposed by outsiders to achieve “development” defined by outsiders, often generating devastating consequences for the majority of the people on the ground. *Politically*, too, powerful Western/Northern nation-states can and do intervene, whether or not supported by the international community, in the affairs of weaker nations, using military force if so inclined under the pretext of expanding “democracy,” “human freedom” or “human rights.” The threat of external intervention, whether economic or political, jeopardizes the internal process of democratic decision-making that is essential

for maintaining “local self-determination” and forming the nation’s collective will. In the absence of a democratic collective national will, participation in the formulation of global standards by nations “as a collective” and the application of these standards for the local context, necessary for making the global regimes genuinely democratic, will be at best merely formal and at worst delusional.

I am not opposed to global democracy as envisioned by Young in principle. However, moving toward such an ideal, under current conditions of globalization, is predicated on empowering weaker democratic nations to overcome the very real and current threat of economic and political domination by outside elements. Supporting polycentric nationalisms of weaker non-liberal nations may be one of the most efficient ways to achieve such a goal, and it involves two steps: First, weaker democratic nations must be granted the right to non-interference to effectively resist external interventions, whether economic or political, so that they can implement internal democracy and form democratic collective decisions concerning their political, economic and cultural structure in their nation. Second, they must be recognized as genuine equals of stronger Western/Northern nation-states and conferred equal respect for their democratic collective will in the global arena. These are indeed the aforementioned dual goals of polycentric nationalism (Herr 2003: 149). As such, nationalism is not only consistent with Young’s rationale for advocating indigenous causes, which is to “minimize domination both of individuals and of self-determining locales,” (2000a: 268) but is in fact *necessary* for achieving her vision of global democracy.

VI. Conclusion

One of the most valuable lessons that Iris Young has taught us is that reclaiming abused terms such as “groups” and “differences” by de-essentializing them opens up new visions in the field of political philosophy that are empowering and liberatory for the disenfranchised. I believe following Young’s lead and reconceptualizing “nation” and “nationalism” would render a similar result. De-essentialized, nation is a prime example of global social group and nationalism is one of the most effective means in the global arena to promote the ideal of “equality among socially and culturally differentiated groups, who mutually respect one another and affirm one another in their differences” pursued by the politics of difference, as nationalism aims at not only empowering weaker democratic nations to achieve equal status as stronger nation-states in the international context, but also reclaiming and protecting their cultural way of life, often vilified by outsiders as “inferior” or “backward,” as their unique and cherished heritage to be (re)constructed according to their collective cultural vision, free from the threat of outside interference.

The legitimacy and efficacy of Young’s global governance system, meant to promote global justice and non-domination, is predicated on the support of all self-determining local units, including nations. The current state of globalization, however, is such that the right to self-determination of weaker nations in the Third World is constantly under threat of intervention by powerful Western nation-states, their multinational corporations, and the international economic institutions that represent the interest of the West. As a result, weaker nations’ ability to protect internal democracy and make democratic collective decisions concerning their political, economic and cultural structure, necessary for genuine self-determination, is severely vitiated. Fostering self-determination of weaker nations, therefore, requires granting them the right to non-interference in matters

pertaining to their internal affairs, advocated by nationalism. If this is the case, then nationalism is indeed “an important vehicle for empowerment and the development of a group-specific voice and perspective” on the global level and a prerequisite for achieving Young’s global vision.

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¹ See also, Pogge 1992.

² See also, Beitz (1979) and Pogge (2002b).

³ I shall therefore use terms group autonomy and self-determination interchangeably.

⁴ Hence I shall use “locale” and “region” interchangeably.

⁵ “Regions usually have a city or cluster of cities as a focus of their activity and identity, but include less densely populated suburban and rural areas” (ibid.).

⁶ Hence Smith distinguishes between “statist” nation, which is primarily a territorial-political unit, and “ethnicist” nation, which is predicated on a common descent and culture. Smith: 176-80.

⁷ For example, Native Americans in the U.S., who see themselves as a nation, do not necessarily advocate a sovereign state of their own, mainly because this is unrealistic in their current state of colonization (d’Errico: 495-98).

⁸ On the distinction, see Herr 2006, section I; Smith: 158-59; Miller: 9-10.

⁹ Even in the case of ethnocentric nationalism of Western Europe, the internal dynamic of modern nationalism is intimately related to the emergence of representative democracy (Held: Part II).

¹⁰ It is undebatable that ethnocentric nationalism is morally justifiable and, therefore, I shall exclude it from my discussion. I shall henceforth use nationalism and polycentric nationalism interchangeably.

¹¹ Even Young has passages where she seems to support “cultural autonomy.” 2000a:268-9.

¹² I call this the “insider’s perspective.” See Herr 2008.

¹³ See, Herr 2004, pp. 83-86; Freedman, p. 19; Deveaux; Forbis; “Iranian Women Activists Gain Momentum.”

¹⁴ A good example might be Myanmar, as recent demonstrations for democracy by Buddhist monks and other citizens illustrate.

¹⁵ Pogge (2002a) is correct to point out that powerful Northern states must curb their nationalism to conform to the “minimal constraint on the scope of acceptable partiality.” p. 124.

¹⁶ Even cosmopolitans such as Pogge and Held recognize the continued significance of nation-states in their cosmopolitan global system. See Pogge 1992: 66; Held: 233.

¹⁷ I shall use “nonliberal” cultures as cultures that do not advocate the value of individual freedom as the overarching cultural value but rather uphold communitarian values that promote the common good/ the well-being of the whole society.

¹⁸ Young also takes “preventing domination” as a major reason for justifiable intervention. Since our focus is on polycentric, and not ethnocentric, nationalism we can safely ignore such cases.

¹⁹ The case has been decided against the tribe in September 2006 in favor of the state of Utah. See, “A big win for Utah.”

²⁰ Young would agree. 2007: 151.

²¹ An analogous case would be the Muslim practice of women wearing the hijab which is defended by the majority of the insiders while severely criticized by those in the liberal West. On insider defense, see Freedman; Killian; Leicester; Read and Bartkowski; Weber. On outside criticism, see Kymlicka 2001, p.175. See also, Mustafa.

²² Even when Young, with Archibugi, discusses the global rule of law on which the global governance system should be based, the content of the law is left undiscussed.