

Editorial:
***Between the Collective and the Individual in the Shadow of
Persisting Conflicts***

The fifth issue of "Hagar" revolves around the perennial tension between the collectivity and the individual. Generations of political thinkers, philosophers and social critics have grappled with the issue, creating one of the most enduring and exciting debates of social thought. The rise of the postmodern paradigm in Western academia during the 1980s and 1990s has led to a wave of communitarian theories and multicultural models, which have had pervasive influence on group relations and opinion shapers well beyond the West. The fleeting dominance of the multicultural school, however, is now being confronted with a renewed challenge from liberal thinkers.

Such is the challenge presented here by Claus Offe, who leads the central symposium of this issue with a stinging critique of the 'politics of difference'. Such politics, he claims, is an inevitable consequence of the political dynamics of institutionalized difference and a harbinger of increasing intergroup tensions and political instability. Instead of fragmenting the polity through the institutionalization of political difference, Offe proposes to emphasize again tolerance and trust, thereby 'removing the sting' from escalating group conflicts framed within the logic of legitimized, mobilized and essentialized difference.

Three scholars respond to Offe's critique and proposals in an enlightening debate. First, Will Kymlicka, one of the notable proponents of democratic multiculturalism, attempts to deconstruct Offe's arguments, both empirically and theoretically. He reaffirms the need for politics to embrace the recognition and facilitation of cultural difference as a foundation for the management of contemporary societies, especially in the structurally multi-ethnic polities of Central-Eastern Europe.

As'ad Ghanem continues Kymlicka's line of thought by arguing that the attainment of group rights is not only desirable, but a prerequisite for political stability in the early 21C, given the tendency of liberal discourses to function as a thin cover for the dominance of mainstream groups. Finally, Rebecca Kook weaves a subtle argument which supports some of Offe's contentions, yet opens the door for a new perception of 'hybridity' between individual and group identities and, hence, between personal and collective rights. Notably, an underlying difference emerges between the two positions: while Offe and Kook premise their arguments on the individual citizen as the basic unit and the bearer of rights and autonomy, Ghanem and to some extent Kymlicka as well, begin with

the inevitable existence of cultural and political collectivities as the foundation for balancing collective and individual rights.

Clearly, however, the issue of group and individual rights is far from being a mere theoretical debate. "Hagar" is committed to maintain an engaged critical scholarship and, hence, to the production of scholarly knowledge relevant to the transformation of daily life. As we go to print, Israel/Palestine is once again embroiled in ethnic conflict and violent confrontation around the very attainment of group and individual rights. In recent months, Israel has deepened its control of the Palestinian territories by reconquering most cities, causing widespread death and destruction. This has gravely impeded the attainment of basic rights by stateless and largely defenseless Palestinians. However, the recent escalation has not been unilateral, feeding on an unprecedented wave of Palestinian terror in Israeli cities. This has caused pervasive death and fear and the violation of a basic right for individual and collective safety. Sadly, Offe's observations about the deteriorating 'dialectics of fear' are illustrated daily in our troubled land, with no immediate relief in sight.

Yet, within the reality of violence and conflict, the relations between individuals and collectivities continue to occupy the scholarly community. In his paper, Joel Beinin analyzes the evolution of the Egyptian public discourse of and about the Jews, while Tovi Fenster examines the control imposed over Ethiopian-Jewish and Bedouin women by the system of urban and regional planning. Both Beinin and Fenster frame their analyses in terms of group relations, but constantly allude to dilemmas embedded in the oppressive potential of treating individuals merely as group members.

The final three papers also bear direct relevance to these tensions and ambiguities. Zvi Zohar discusses the treatment of suicide by Jewish law; Jamil Hilal examines underlying tensions between secularism and Islamism in the development of Palestinian nationalism, while Harvey Goldberg and Hagar Salamon discuss the on-going dilemmas of studying (ethnic) pluralism in a culture governed by a myth of national homogeneity. The authors all walk the tightrope of dealing with the most powerful of collective narratives – religion and nationalism – only to find occasional undercurrents of opposition to collective hegemonies.

Closing the issue are several essays and reviews. Haim Marantz, in our 'Open Space' section, takes the recent critics of globalization to task, through a new reading of three major texts on the subject. Sherifa Zuhur takes us for 'a walk' through an exhibition catalogue displaying contemporary artwork of four Palestinian women. Their work forms a most telling site, harboring the unending tension between the repressive collectivity and the restless individual, whose poetic voice refuses to be silenced.

The Late Hebrew poet, Yehuda Amichai, was one such irrepressible restless voice. In his poem, *To a mother*, he takes us back to the plight of the biblical Hagar in lyrics written two decades ago, but relevant as ever today:

She put me
Like Hagar put Ishmael
Under one of the bushes
So as not to see my death in a war
Under one of the bushes
In one of the wars*

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* Translated by O. Yiftachel