

From False Globalisation to the One Communist World, via the Question of ‘Foreigners’

Alain Badiou

We must set out from some very simple observations. Today, a true world constituted by the men and women who live on this planet does not exist.

Why do I say that a world of women and men doesn't exist? Because the world that exists, the world of globalisation, is solely a world of objects and monetary signs, a world of the free circulation of commodities and financial flows. It is exactly the world foreseen by Marx a hundred and fifty years ago: the world of the global market. In this world, there are only things—saleable objects—and signs—the abstract instruments of sale and purchase, the different forms of money and credit. But it is not true that human subjects exist freely in this world. To start with, they absolutely do not have the elementary right to move around and to live where they wish. The overwhelming majority of women and men of this so-called world, the world of commodities and money, have no access to this world at all. They are ruthlessly confined to the outside, where, for them, there are very few commodities and no money at all. This ‘confinement’ is very concrete. Everywhere in the world walls are being built. The wall that will separate the Palestinians from the Israelis; the wall on the border between Mexico and the US; the electric fence between Africa and Spain; the mayor of an Italian town even proposes to build a wall between the

inner city and the suburbs! Always walls to keep the poor confined among themselves.

It is almost thirty years ago that the Berlin Wall came down. Its fall was the symbol of the unity of the world, after fifty years of separation. During those fifty years, there were two worlds: the socialist world and the capitalist world. Or, it was said, the totalitarian world and the democratic world. Well, the fall of the Berlin Wall was the triumph of one unique world, the world of democracy. But today we can see that the wall just moved elsewhere. It was between the totalitarian East and the democratic West. Today, it is between the rich capitalist North and the devastated and impoverished South. Within countries, the contradiction opposed a strong, organised working class to a dominant bourgeoisie that controlled them. Today, the rich beneficiaries of global trafficking and the enormous mass of the excluded live side by side, yet between the two there are all sorts of walls and separations: they do not go to the same schools, they are not cared for in the same way, they cannot move around by their own means, they do not live in the same parts of the city....

‘The Excluded’ is the name of all those who are not in the true world, those who are outside, behind the walls and the barbed wire. Up to thirty years ago, there was an ideological wall, a political iron curtain; now there is a wall that separates the enjoyment of riches from the desire of the poor.

All of this as if, in order for a unique world of objects and monetary signs to exist, living bodies had to be ruthlessly separated as a function of their provenance and their resources. Today there is no world. Because the unified

world of Capital has its brutal price: the violent division of human existence into two regions separated by walls, police dogs, bureaucratic controls, naval patrols, barbed wire, and expulsions.

Why has what we call immigration become, across the globe, a fundamental political question? Because all human living beings who arrive, and try to live and to work in various countries, are the proof that the thesis of the democratic unity of the world is entirely false.

If it were true, we would have to welcome these foreigners [*étrangers*] as people of the same world as our own. We would have to love them as one loves a traveller who makes a stop close to your house. But that isn't what happens. Overwhelmingly we think of these people as coming from another world. Here is the problem. They are the living proof that our democratic, developed world is not the one world of women and men. Among us there are women and men who are considered as having come from another world. Money is the same everywhere, the dollar and the euro are the same everywhere; we don't mind accepting the dollars and euros brought by this foreigner from another world. But he or she in person, their provenance, their way of existing, we say that it is not of our world. We control it, we forbid them to stay. We ask ourselves anxiously how many of them there are, how many of these people from another world—an awful question, if you think about it. A question that necessarily leads the way to persecution, prohibition, and mass expulsion. A question that fuels the criminal aspect of politics.

Here is what we can say: If the unity of the world is that of objects and monetary signs, then, for living bodies, there is no unity of the world. There are zones, walls, desperate voyages, hatred, and death.

This is why the central political question today is indeed that of the world, of the existence of the world.

The one world, against the false world of the global market: that is what the great communist Marx desired, and we must return to him. He argued energetically that the world is that which is common to all of humanity. He said that the principal actor of emancipation, the proletariat—yes, he said: the proletariat has no homeland other than the whole world of the living. And for this to be the case, we must put an end to the world of the global market—that is to say, the world of commodities and money. The world of capital and its proprietors. In order for there to be a world common to all, we must put an end to the financial dictatorship of private property.

Today, certain well-meaning people believe that this powerful vision of Marx's can be achieved by a widening of democracy. We must extend to the whole world the good form of the world, that which exists in Western democracies and in Japan. What is not good is that this democracy does not exist everywhere. But in my view this vision is absurd. The absolute material basis of the Western democratic world is private property. Its law is that one percent of people own 46% of global wealth, and that ten percent own 86% of global wealth. How can one build a world from such ferocious inequalities? In Western democracies, freedom is first of all the limitless freedom to own

property, the freedom to appropriate everything that has value. And then, it is the freedom of circulation of objects and monetary signs. The fatal consequence of this conception is the separation of living bodies by and for the relentless defense, the pitiless defense of the privileges of wealth.

What is more, we know perfectly well the concrete form of this ‘widening’ of democracy. Very simply, it is war. The war in Yugoslavia, in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Somalia, in Libya; and there are dozens of French military interventions in Africa....

The fact that, in order to be able to say that free elections have been organised in a country, one must prosecute long wars, should lead us to reflect not only on war, but on elections too. To what conception of the world is electoral democracy wedded today? After all, this democracy imposes the law of number. As if the world unified by commodities imposes the monetary law of number. It may well be that to impose electoral number by means of war, as in Baghdad, Tripoli, Belgrade, and Bamako, or in Kabul, takes us right back to our problem: if the world is that of objects and signs, it is a world where everything is counted. In politics, also, one must count. And those who do not count, or are counted badly, we will impose our accountable laws upon them by means of war.

Which proves that the world thus conceived does not really exist, or exists only artificially, through violence.

I think we should turn the problem the other way around. We should affirm from the outset, as an axiom, as a principle, the existence of the world. We

should make the very simple declaration: ‘there is a world of living women and men’. This phrase is not an objective conclusion. We know that, under the law of money, there is no unique world of women and men. There is the wall that separates the rich from the poor. This phrase, ‘there is a world’, is performative. It is a matter of drawing the arduous and difficult consequences of this very simple phrase. Exactly like Marx, when he created the first International of workers, so as to draw the difficult consequences of his affirmation: the proletariat have no homeland. The proletariat are of every country. The proletariat are international.

A first very simple consequence concerns those of foreign origin who live among us. Those who are called immigrants.

If there is one sole world of living women and men, then they are of the same world as us. There you go. This African worker I see in the kitchen of a restaurant, this Moroccan I see digging a hole in the road, or this veiled woman looking after children in a garden—all of them are of the same world as I am. This is the important point. It is there, and nowhere else, that we reverse the dominant idea of the unification of the world via objects, signs, and elections, an idea that leads to persecution and war. The unity of the world is that of living, active bodies, here, now. And I must absolutely maintain the proof of this unity: quite simply, these people who are here, with a different language to mine, a different way of dressing, different religion, food, education, they exist in the same world, they exist just like me. Since they exist like I do, I can talk with them, and then, just like anyone, there may be agreements and

disagreements. But under the absolute condition that they exist just like me—that is to say, in the same world.

It is here that the objection arises of the difference between cultures. What? They are of the same world as I am? The partisan of identity politics will say: no, no! Our world is not just any old thing! Our world is the set of all those for whom our values really matter. For example those who are democrats, those who respect women, those who uphold human rights, those who speak French, those who do this or that, those who eat the same meat, those who drink wine and eat sausages.... these people inhabit the same world. But those who have a different culture, say these little Le Pens, are not truly of our world. They are not democrats, they oppress women, they have barbarous customs...how can someone who doesn't drink wine and eat pork be in the same world as me?.... No, if they want to come into our world, they have to learn our values; they have to share our values. We'll make them take an examination in our values, with wine and ham as the test.

The word for all this is 'integration'; those who come from elsewhere must integrate into our world. In order for the world of the worker who comes over from Africa and we others, the masters of this world, to be the same world, he, the African worker, must become the same as us. He must love and practise the same values. A president of the French Republic, Nicolas Sarkozy, said: 'If foreigners want to stay in France, they must love France—if not, they can go'. And I said to myself, well, I'll have to go then, because I don't love Nicolas

Sarkozy's France at all. I don't share his values of integration at all. I am not integrated into integration.

In reality, as soon as you set down conditions for the African worker to be of the same world as you, you have already ruined and abandoned the principle 'there is just one world of living women and men'. You will say to me: all the same, a country has its laws. Of course. But a law is something absolutely different from a condition. A law applies equally to all. It is simply a provisional rule that exists in one region of the world. And no one asks us to love laws—only to obey them.

The one world of living women and men can indeed have laws. But it cannot have conditions of entry. It cannot demand that, in order to live in it, one must be like all the others. Less still like a minority of those others, for example like a white civilized petit-bourgeois. If there is only one world, all those who exist in it exist as I do, but they are not like me, they are different. The one world is precisely the place where the infinity of differences exist. The world is the same because those who live in it are different.

On the contrary, if one asks those who live in the world to be the same, then it is the world that is closed and becomes, as a world, different to another world. Which leads the way inevitably to separations, walls, controls, hatred, deaths, fascism, and ultimately war.

Then you will ask: these infinite differences, doesn't anything regulate them? Is there no identity that enters into a dialectic with these differences? There is just one world, very well. But does that mean that to be French, or to be a

Moroccan who lives in France, or to be Breton or Muslim in a country with a Christian tradition, means nothing before the immense unity of the world of living beings?

It's a good question. Of course, the infinity of differences is also an infinity of identities. Let us examine a little how these distinct identities can maintain themselves even when we affirm the existence of one world for all living human beings.

So, firstly, what is an identity? The simplest definition is: an identity is the set of traits, of properties, by means of which an individual or a group can be recognised as being 'itself'. But what is 'itself'? It is that which, through all the characteristic properties of the identity, remains invariant. Thus one might say that an identity is the set of properties that support an invariance. For example, the identity 'homosexual' is made of everything connected to the invariance of the possible object of desire; the identity of an artist is made of everything connected to the invariance of his style; the identity of a foreign community in a country is that which enables us to recognise someone belonging to it: language, gestures, clothing, eating habits, etc.

Thus defined by invariants, identity relates to difference in two ways:

Identity is that which is different from the rest (static identity).

Identity is that which does not become different (dynamic identity).

In the background here, we have the great philosophical dialectic of the Same and the Other.

On the hypothesis that we all live in the same world, we can affirm the right to be ourselves, to maintain and develop our identities. If the Malian worker exists just like me, he can also affirm that he has the right, just like me, to conserve and organise the invariant properties that are his, his religion, his mother tongue, ways of playing or living, etc.

He affirms his identity by refusing integration—that is, the pure and simple dissolution of his identity in favour of another. Because if he thinks, as I do, that he lives in the same world as me, he has no a priori reason to think it better than his own.

This having been said, this affirmation of identity has two quite different aspects, within the dialectic of the same and the other.

The first aspect is the desire for my becoming to remain internal to the same. A little like Nietzsche's famous maxim: 'Become what you are'. This is a matter of the immanent development of identity in a new situation. The Malian worker will not leave behind any of what makes up his individual, familial, or collective identity. But he may little by little adapt all this, creatively, to the place in the world in which he finds himself. He will thus invent what he is: a Malian worker in Montreuil; or rather, he will create himself as a subjective movement, from the Malian peasant to the worker living in Montreuil. Without anything within himself being decisively broken, but instead through a dilation of identity.

The other way to affirm identity is negatively. It consists in doggedly defending the fact that I am not another. And it is often indispensable—for example,

when our governments, all reactionaries and complicit with fascism on this point, demand an authoritarian and persecutory integration. The Malian worker will forcefully affirm that his traditions and customs are not those of the European petit-bourgeois. He will even strengthen his identitarian religious traits and customs. He will oppose himself to the Western world whose superiority he does not accept. And how can we blame him for this, if we really think that the idea of the superiority of a world is absurd—since there is only one world?

Ultimately, there are two uses of difference involved in identity. An affirmative use: the same is maintained in its own differentiating power. It is a *creation*. And a negative use: the same defends itself against corruption by the other. It seeks to preserve its purity.

All identity is the dialectical play of a movement of creation and a movement of purification.

Thus we see very well the relation between identities and the great principle ‘There is only one world’.

The general idea is simple: under the principle of the unity of the world of the living, identities make creation prevail over purification.

Why is the politics of walls, persecutions, control, and expulsions a disaster? Why does it lead to the emergence of very dangerous fascist options? Because, of course, it in fact creates two worlds, which amounts to denying the very existence of humanity, and leads the way to infinite wars. But what is more, it

rots away the situation within our societies themselves. Because the Moroccans, the Malians, the Romanians, and all the others, they come all the same, in large numbers. Meanwhile, for them the persecution will not reinforce the process of creation, but the process of purification. In the face of Sarkozy or Blair, Hollande and de Valls, who want immediate integration by means of expulsion and persecution, we will have young islamists ready to martyr themselves for the purity of their faith. And this will gradually transform our societies into repressive police states. This leads to fascism, which is nothing other than a capitalist politics enslaved, through policing, to a crude national phantasm. Which is why we must, at all costs, uphold everything that makes creative identity prevail over purificatory identity, even if we know the latter will always be with us.

The only method, the only way to do so, is to state from the outset that there is only one world. And that the internal consequences of this axiom are necessarily political actions that open up the creative aspect of identities; so that I can very precisely discuss, with a Moroccan worker or the mother of a family from Mali, what we can do together so as to affirm that we exist, both of us, in the same world, whatever our partially distinct identities might be.

Everywhere we must organise the political existence of one world. We will encounter one another, and we can obviously discuss our different ways of being in the same world. But firstly, and above all, we will demand together the abolition of laws of persecution, laws that build walls, roundups, expulsions. Laws that deliver foreigners to the police. We will insist forcefully, as in a

struggle, that the presence in France of hundreds of thousands of people from other countries is not at all a question of identity and integration. It is a matter of the proletariat, who, in the end, teach us, through their active, nomad life, that in politics, in communist politics, one must refer to the unique world of living humans, and not to the false world of separated nations. To see all this, the simple idea that they are there and exist like us is enough. It is enough to observe their existence, and to require that it be regularised, that we consider it as a normal life, as a life that we can allow to exist just like any other. It is enough, basically, to do what we all do very naturally for our friends.

In this collective trajectory, we will exchange identities, without having to renounce anything at all, nor to integrate anyone whatsoever. The foreigners will teach us how, in their long journey, they see the horrendous politics of our country and how they will participate in changing it; and we will teach foreigners how we have tried for a long time to change it, this politics, and how we see their essential place in the future of the struggle. Unforeseeable new ideas will come out of this. And also forms of organisation, where the difference between foreigners and nationals will be entirely subordinated to our common conviction: there is one world in which we all exist in equality, and in this world our identities can be exchanged amicably, provided we share political actions.

We can recapitulate this trajectory of thought in four points, as follows:

(1) The ‘world’ of unbridled capitalism and rich democracies is a false world. Recognising only the unity of products and monetary signs, it rejects the majority of humanity into an ‘other’, devalued world, from which it separates

itself with walls and with war. In this sense, today, there is no world. There are only walls, drownings, hatreds, wars, zones of pillage, abandoned zones, zones that protect themselves from everything, zones of total misery—and in this chaos criminal ideologies flourish.

(2) Thus, to claim ‘There is only one world’ is a principle of action, a political imperative. This principle is also that of the equality of existences in every place in this one world.

(3) The principle of the existence of one world does not contradict the infinite play of identities and differences. It merely entails that identities subordinate their negative dimension (opposition to others) to their affirmative dimension (development of the same).

(4) As far as the existence in our countries of millions of foreigners is concerned, there are three objectives: oppose persecutory integration; limit reactive purification; develop creative identity. The concrete articulation of these three objectives defines what is most important today in politics.

On the intimate link between politics and the question of foreigners, today absolutely central, there is a striking text by Plato, which I will conclude with. It is the end of Book 9 of the *Republic*. Socrates’s young interlocutors say to him: ‘All you have told us, about politics, is all very well, but it is impossible. It cannot be realised.’ And Socrates responds: ‘Yes, in the City where one is born it is perhaps impossible. But it may be possible in a foreign city’. As if every true politics presupposes expatriation, exile, foreignness. Let us remind ourselves of this when we go amicably to do politics with foreign students, foreign workers,

youths from the *banlieues*: Socrates is right, the fact that they are foreigners, or that their culture may be different, is not an obstacle. On the contrary! It is an opportunity, it is the possibility of the creation right here of new forms of internationalism. And let us remind ourselves of what Marx said: the most fundamental characteristic of the communist is that he is internationalist. Because the realisation of a true politics in a place within this one world that we proclaim, in order to even be possible, needs those who come from another place in this same world.

A socialist French prime minister said, at the beginning of the eighties: 'Immigrants are a problem.' We must reverse this judgment, and say: 'Immigrants are an opportunity!'

The mass of foreign workers and their children testify in our old, tired country to the youth of the world, to its expanse, to its infinite variety. It is with them that a new politics to come is to be invented. Without them we will sink into nihilist consumption and policed order, let ourselves be dominated by little Le Pens and their cops.

Let the foreigners teach us at least to become foreign to ourselves, to project us out of ourselves, enough to no longer be captives of this long occidental, white history that is finished, and of which we can no longer expect anything but sterility and war. Against that catastrophic, securitarian, and nihilist prospect, let us salute true communism, which is the novelty, and thus the foreignness, of a new morning.

Translated by Robin Mackay