



ONLY IN BERLIN WOULD THIS
BE POSSIBLE!
SEYLA BENHABIB

Seyla Benhabib is the Eugene Meyer Professor of Political Science and Philosophy at Yale and was Director of its Program in Ethics, Politics and Economics (2002–2008). She is the recipient of the Ernst Bloch prize in 2009. Her books, which have been translated into 12 different languages, include: *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (1992); with Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell and Nancy Fraser, *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange* (1994); *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (1996; reissued in 2002); *The Claims of Culture. Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (2002); *The Rights of Others: Aliens, Citizens and Residents* (2004); *Another Cosmopolitanism: Hospitality, Sovereignty and Democratic Iterations* (2006). She has been a member of the American Academy of Arts and Science since 1995 and received an honorary degree from the Humanistic University in Utrecht in 2004. – Address: Yale Political Science, 115 Prospect St., New Haven, CT 06511, USA. E-mail: seyla.benhabib@yale.edu

We arrived in Berlin on one of the coldest days of 2009 on a morning in early January with temperatures hovering around minus 15 degrees Celsius. Groggy and stunned by the face-cutting cold, we picked up our keys from the reception only to arrive at Villa Walther to find that the elevator was not functioning and that the heat was off as well. As I watched my husband Jim and the clearly distraught Wiko staff member valiantly take our four suitcases up the three flights of stairs, I could sense her dismay – “Oh, what a bad first impression. Believe me this is not common!” And no, it was not; it was only an aberration in the history of one of the best-run institutions I have ever attended. As my eyes landed on the bread, butter, jam, milk and – above all – good black tea that Wiko had already placed on

the kitchen counter, I felt my muscles relaxing, and as Jim and I sipped our first cups and enjoyed the “Winterlandschaft” outside our balcony, we knew all would be well!

This was not my first time in Germany or in Berlin. Since 1979, when I first came to Starnberg to study with Jürgen Habermas at the Max Planck Institute as a post-doctoral fellow, I have lived in Germany for nearly ten years and have been back at least once or twice a year since then. In fact, there have been periods of my life when Germany was more of a “home” for me and I was more actively engaged in relationships, discussions and politics than in my native country, Turkey, and my adoptive country, the United States. Yet Germany continues to be “heimlich” but also “unheimlich”, in Freud’s sense of the “unheimlich” not as the “unfamiliar”, but as the “uncanny” – as that site when a strangeness reveals itself and you sense your own otherness.

Experiencing Berlin through the eyes of Jim, who had never been to Germany, and of my daughter Laura, who was born in Frankfurt and is a German citizen, but grew up in the United States and had been spending the year in Berlin since July 2008, I was caught in constant perspectival shifts of nearness and distance, joy and irritation. At times I found myself overwhelmed by the “unheimlich”, as when I would complain to Jim about racism against Turks and other Muslims on the streets and in the media. At other times I would defend the honesty, integrity and depth of German culture – as opposed to Austrian or Polish, say – in dealing with the Holocaust and anti-Semitism. Because of the complicated and fateful ways in which my own background as a Jew and a Turk are entangled with Germany’s history and its future, I found myself in a state of perpetual “moral alertness”: Some word, gesture, newspaper headline, or even phrase from an innocent critic could trigger defenses and irritations, but also a sense of recognition and appreciation. I become a moral insomniac when I am in Germany, reading, watching and listening all the time.

This moral insomnia is not fed by a judgmental attitude, but by a continuing concern for and active involvement with the evolution of a pluralist, democratic and anti-racist culture in Germany. On March 15th, 2009 I had the honor of addressing the Bundestag on the invitation of the “Bundestagsfraktion Bündnis 90/Die Grünen” as a keynote speaker. Facing a crowd of 900, with the Spree behind me, I lectured on cosmopolitanism and democracy. As I cited passages from Immanuel Kant’s essay “Zum Ewigen Frieden” on hospitality and world citizenship, I could see smiles on the audience’s faces over my valiant struggles with 18th-century German. But for me, to use a phrase of Hegel’s, this was just a form of “bei-sich-selbst-sein-im-Anderssein” (to be with oneself in otherness) ever since I had discovered German philosophy already as a high school student in Istanbul.

My experiences at the Wissenschaftskolleg were inevitably filtered through these very personal as well as very public aspects of my return to Germany. The translation of two of my recent books at the very end of 2008 into German and the announcement in April that I would be awarded the Ernst Bloch prize brought many lectures, conference invitations and other public obligations. Nevertheless, in those months of deep freeze between the beginning of January and the middle of April, I enjoyed the extraordinary competence of the Wissenschaftskolleg's library and began to orient myself in Wiko's "Lebenswelt". My first memory is of a subtle paper by Michel Chaouli on "the haptic Enlightenment", delivered on our Tuesday colloquia. Dethroning the centrality of vision in Enlightenment thought (or so I thought), Michel focused on the centrality of touch in Condillac's work. "Okay, I thought; this is going to be fun; there will be lots of intersection with my own work as well." The next 4–5 weeks of the colloquia, however, were dominated by lectures on self-camouflaging insects and sexy fish, models of perception and linguistic interaction, and above all by the much-discussed concept of "speciation". I started feeling "unheimlich". Yet in retrospect this feeling proved to be simpleminded and unnecessarily defensive.

There is always a sense of electric shock, particularly if you have been trained in philosophy as I have, in listening to colleagues from other disciplines posit certain premises cheerily and then proceed to what they consider more important in their investigations. While the philosopher is still wandering around the basement of the building, trying to figure out if the foundations are solid, other colleagues have moved on to top floors!!! This was particularly evident for me around discussions of language and perception. I was nonplussed, almost bewildered, by attempts to talk about language use and perception in terms of brain locations and functions. Certainly, they are crucial. But had we not established through hundreds of articles on "the mind-body problem" and "compatibilism" between mental and physical phenomena that they could not be reduced to each other? Although the physical, I thought, was the necessary condition of the possibility of the mental and the cognitive, it was just that – a necessary but not sufficient condition. Yet something has changed and there have been advances in cognitive science, artificial intelligence research, neuroscience, and biology such that the comforting picture of the mind/brain relation with which I have lived all these years may no longer be valid. As Reinhard Merkel put it in one of his colloquia, "There is a lot going on in medical technology that is deeply unsettling for our sense of ourselves as moral agents."

Since the early 1980's I have been a Chomskyan in my picture, not only of linguistics, but of human agency in general: I believe that the human mind is a rule-governed entity that

has nonetheless this incredible capacity to create many new, unexpected, and yet perfectly intelligible combinations. Every normal human child is capable of learning every natural language and of generating perfectly grammatical sentences in that language. Is this no longer true? Is it a pious wish? Is it the dream of a rationalist who still wants to find some hinge, some handle, that will raise us above the animal world and “towards the starry heavens”, in Kant’s words? I don’t know anymore: I need to read up on “the linguistic wars”, which I am told have put Chomsky to rest and have crowned George Lakoff. Although my own research had little to do with these questions, I consider it a genuine gain of this year that I am going back with a rekindled interest in the philosophy of language and an urge to figure out whether Chomsky belongs to the dustbin of history.

My own research focused on the historical evolution as well as the conceptual puzzles surrounding cosmopolitan norms, by which I mean legal and moral norms that claim validity in virtue of our humanity alone and regardless of our nationality and citizenship status. I came to Berlin with an assumption: I had read somewhere and built the impression that Robert Jackson, the Chief American Prosecutor during the Nuremberg trials, had either attended or somehow knew about the trials of those guilty of the Armenian genocide – mainly Union and Progress Party members – that took place in British-occupied Istanbul in 1918 in an Ottoman Court. My assumption has proven wrong; Jackson had not been in Istanbul. However, I was able to establish that the concept of “crimes against humanity” was first used by Lord George of Britain with respect to the genocide of the Ottoman Armenians. This research is not complete, but its implications are explosive: for those who think that cosmopolitan norms of universal human rights and crimes against humanity are but “fig leaves” of a Eurocentric moral and legal universe or “Trojan horses” of global capitalism, this historical conjunction can only offer comfort. But for those of us, like myself, who believe in the universality claims of these norms, which nonetheless have to be carefully distinguished from their Eurocentrism, this episode is yet another testimony to their “promiscuous birth”. It will be some time before I am ready to complete the book that will be based on this research. But I have had the extraordinarily good fortune of many conversations with my colleagues working on law on topics such as sovereignty, family private law, or the legacy of the Nuremberg trials, all of which have broadened and deepened my appreciation for the tension between cosmopolitanism and sovereignty, universalism and national jurisdictions. In many ways, this new book will be a conversation with *Provincializing Europe* by Dipesh Chakrabarty, another Fellow whose good cheer and conversation it was a pleasure to share.

As I complete this report, the tips of the leaves on the trees outside my window are already turning a brownish-yellow: the glorious Berlin Spring and the all-too-few summer days are over, together with the smell of the Linden! I am already booking my flight back to collect the Bloch Prize at the end of September, but I know that as I put my feet up on the little leather ottoman in our house in the mountains of western Massachusetts later this month and gaze out at the American woods, I will close my eyes and think of Berlin: I will remember the haunting simplicity and dignity of the memorial on “Gleis 17” of Gruenewald station; the always fresh wreath that adorns the Walter Rathenau memorial right next to the stop for bus M19; the spectacular and monumental Jewish cemetery in Pankow. I will also remember the stunning Chamissoplatz apartment where Laura lived for 6 months; the high ceilings and lovely drinks of the “Literaturhaus”; the impressive arcades and restaurants of Savignyplatz; the gourmet food section of the KaDeWe; the bygone elegance of the Deutsche Oper and the Komische Oper; and much, much more. But I have a mental image that will not fade: on the evening of our big *Abschiedsfest*, as the African music group brought us all to our feet on the dance floor – staff, fellows, family and all – the music shifted and the tune of “YMCA” started pounding our ears. All of us disco-lovers recognized each other on the dance floor and I spotted a very happy former judge of the German Constitutional Court, smiling and dancing to the cheers of the refrain “YMCA” – And I thought, only in Berlin, only at the Wissenschaftskolleg, would this be possible!!!

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