



## THE FAILURE OF LIBERALISM IN THE FACE OF HUMANITARIAN ISSUES IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

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### ABSTRACT

*In the framework of the policies and practices of Western liberal states on some international issues, this article intends to analyse the failure of liberalism from a humanitarian perspective. Political analysis focused on liberalism – particularly after the collapse of USSR and the end of the Cold War – claims that it is a triumphant ideology, and that a liberal global system dominated is more a peaceful one. Alas, reality paints an opposite picture, particularly from the 1990s onwards. Despite its success at the national stage, liberal interventionism in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and Libya, the prolonged fatal unresponsiveness to the genocide in Bosnia and Rwanda, the events in Palestine, and the policies of Western liberal countries (with a colonial pasts) have all caused disappointment when it comes to hope of a liberal victory at the global level. This in turn demonstrates that liberalism is not victorious at the global level, but rather has failed in world where basic humanitarian principles are frequently sacrificed for economic interests.*

**Keywords:** The Failure Of Liberalism, Liberal Interventionism, New World Order, Post-Cold War Era, Neo-Colonialism.

## ÇAĞDAŞ DÜNYADAKİ İNSANİ SORUNLAR KARŞISINDA LİBERALİZMİN İFLASI

### ÖZ

*Bu makale, Batılı liberal devletlerin bazı uluslararası sorunlar karşısındaki politikaları ve uygulamaları çerçevesinde, insani bir perspektiften liberalizmin başarısızlığını analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Sovyet Sosyalist Cumhuriyetler Birliği'nin çöküşü ve Soğuk Savaş'ın sona ermesinden sonra, liberalizm odaklı politik analizlerde öne çıkan hususlardan biri, liberalizmin muazzam bir ideoloji olduğu ve bu anlayışın domine ettiği küresel bir sistemin daha barışçıl olacağı yönündedir. Bu yaklaşıma karşın, özellikle 90'lı yıllardan beri var olan gerçeklik, tamamen zıt bir tablo ortaya çıkarmaktadır. Ulusal aşamada elde ettiği başarılarla karşın; Irak, Suriye, Afganistan ve Libya gibi ülkelere yönelik liberal müdahalecilik, Bosna ve Ruanda'daki soykırıma ve Filistin'deki olaylara karşın ise sergilenen uzun süreli ölümcül tepkisizlik ve sömürgeci geçmişi olan Batılı liberal ülkelerin, bu yöndeki alışkanlıklarını farklı bir biçimde sürdürmeleri, küresel düzeyde liberal bir zafer ümidinde hayal kırıklığına neden olmuştur. Bütün bunlar da liberalizmin küresel bir zafer kazanmadığını, aksine temel insani ilkelerin ekonomik çıkarlar uğruna sıklıkla feda edildiği bir dünyada başarısız olduğunu göstermektedir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Liberalizmin İflası, Liberal Müdahalecilik, Yeni Dünya Düzeni, Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Dönem, Neo-Kolonyalizm.

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### Araştırma Makalesi

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## **Introduction**

Liberal-democratic understandings as a guarantee of global peace have been evaluated by many different great thinkers from past to present. Immanuel Kant, published one of the main works on this subject in 1795. Kant (2006) puts forward some principles essential for the possibility of 'perpetual peace' or world peace among states and emphasizes the significance of regulating international relations on the basis of mutual respect, trust, cohesion, and cooperation, in addition to states' maintaining a republican understanding of governance. One of the points Kant emphasizes is that universal international law should be based on an understanding of a federation composed of free states, and power should not be used to interfere with the sovereign areas of states. Kant's optimistic expectation regarding the future remained, in a way, an utopia. Organizations, like the League of Nations and the United Nations, emerged as federative structures composed of independent states to be exemplary of international law and peace, but have failed in practice at achieving world peace, which was Kant's dream.

Michael W. Doyle's articles (1983a, s. 206; 1983b, s. 325-326), published about two centuries after Kant's work, point out that remarkable success has been achieved in creating a zone of peace and cooperation when considering the relationship between countries with liberal regimes. Doyle distinguishes among liberal practices towards liberal societies and liberal practices towards non-liberal societies. He remarks on the success achieved in the relationships between liberal states and comments that in the relationships between liberal and non-liberal states cause exceptional confusion. Doyle explains that liberal states have a problem of trust and respect in their relationships with non-liberal states and uses the relationships with the Soviets as an example of this situation. In addition, he indicates that the USSR refused to negotiate, or when it seemed to negotiate, instead sought after a more insidious conspiracy. Therefore, Doyle who attributes the cause of the problem of trust and respect to the attitude of non-liberal states, believes that liberal states have no fault in this regard.

When the Cold War Period remained after the collapse of the USSR, one of the main discussion topics was "What kind of future awaits the world now?" Fukuyama (1992, s. 4), propounds that the pessimist perspective that dominated the 20<sup>th</sup> century turned into an optimistic perspective through either the positive impact of modern science on human life or the propagation of (liberal) democratic principles and governments in other parts of the world.

In the West, an optimistic vision of the future came in to the forefront during the Enlightenment Age, especially the French Enlightenment, regarding the progress of human history. This was deeply shaken due to authoritarian regimes that emerged and the humanitarian destructions and tragedies occurred as a consequence. Despite that, the political failure and collapse of anti-liberalist authoritarian ideologies were considered a triumph for liberal democracy, at the same time the expectation that a more peaceful future awaiting the world came into prominence with Fukuyama's approach that adopted a Hegelian reading of history.

In liberal theory, as it corresponds to 'social contract', the government and society are considered the supreme organization that emerge as the product of voluntary unity based on mutual consent and consensus of individuals.<sup>1</sup> At this point, rather than disregarding or imposing on the other, a system of international relations and law in accordance with liberal understandings established on a basis of consensus and mutual

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<sup>1</sup> In this regard, see; Locke, 2002.

consent among governments is expected. The established principles of a liberal society<sup>2</sup> are seen on the basis of mutual respect, social reconciliation, and peace. There is an expectation that a culture of reconciliation and mutual respect, therefore peace will prevail in international relations with the spread of these principles at the global level. However, when the issues in practice are taken into account, democratic and humanitarian values are generally sacrificed for economic advantages and the political attitude towards humanitarian problems varies depending on economic interests rather than adhering to the rules of established principles.

Despite the optimistic analysis of the future in Fukuyama's thesis, when we consider the post-Cold War global issues and conflicts, it is possible to say that there is not a positive picture from humanitarian perspective about liberal democracy. As a matter of fact, the main argument of this study is; liberalism fails in practice when faced with problems in the contemporary world, even though it contains some positive theoretical principles in terms of individual life and development. One of the most recent examples of this situation was what happened during the pandemic process caused by the coronavirus disease (Covid-19). Western liberal states, rather than showing cooperation among themselves and with other countries against this global catastrophe that caused many deaths, came into question with the news of confiscating each other's health supplies. They also accused each other of not cooperating or supporting each other.<sup>3</sup>

Fukuyama evaluates Marxist or socialist ideology in liberal theory and considering actions in practice, includes many examples of how the ideology has actually failed. Such analyses of liberal ideology are less frequent. In the field of international relations or political science, there are some evaluations on the contradictions and failures of liberal theory from a realist, Marxist, feminist or post-structuralist perspective. However, the number of studies focused only on the failure of liberalism is not too much. In one of the rare studies on this subject, Patrick J. Deneen (2018), starting from domestic political issues in America and legitimacy problems arising from decreased trust in the system among citizens, mentions the failure of liberalism on these particular points. Considering the general stance of the major liberal countries that are regarded as the hegemonic powers in international relations, this study goes beyond the theoretical arguments about the failures/contradictions of liberalism in domestic political issues and emphasizes the failure of liberalism in its global applications. In this context, the main argument of this study is that liberalism is not an absolute victorious ideology on a global scale, but an ideology that has failed in its global applications. The post-Cold War period was a time of victory declarations for liberalism, but some global events in different parts of the world had tragic humanitarian consequences and are evaluated around this fundamental argument of the study. Evaluations, in this respect, were made within the framework of a comprehensive analysis, covering the roles and political positions of Western liberal states against (humanitarian) problems in different parts of the world.

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<sup>2</sup> Regarding the history of liberal thought, it is seen that different elements have been brought to the foreground by different thinkers concerning what the basic principles of liberalism are. For instance, Alexis de Tocqueville, in his comparative study on the understanding of democracy in America and Europe (2000), while he was pointing out that there is a direct relationship between liberal principles and democratic order; he, in this context, also drew attention to the issues that are understanding of a strong local government, equality of opportunity, fundamental rights and freedoms. J. S. Mill (1966), one of the important thinkers of classical liberalism, emphasizing civil liberties, made evaluations about the principles (which are exercised over individuals) the power should have. J. Rawls (1996; 1999), one of the prominent representatives of the contemporary liberal tradition, focused on individual rights and freedoms regulated by the rule of law, such as fundamental freedoms, fair equality of opportunity and the right to own property.

<sup>3</sup> For related news: URL 1

## **The New World (Dis)Order and the Globalization of Human Tragedies**

*"You know, we don't do body counts."* Tommy R. Franks<sup>4</sup>

There were various debates about what kind of future awaits the world in the post-Cold War period and the US attempted to lead a coalition against the new enemies of humanity, such as Islamic fundamentalism and instability in the third world. The intervention in Iraq under the name of the Gulf War is one of the significant issues of this period. When the Gulf War started, the US President of the time, G. Bush, mentioned 'the new world order where the nations from different parts of the world come together to make international aspirations of humanity such as peace, freedom, security, and law sovereign the international community' and Secretary of State, James Baker, stated that 'an era full of promise' has begun (Chomsky, 1997, s. 19). In the US lead coalition established for the cherished purpose of humanity in the New World Order, military intervention in Iraq was the first de facto attempt made by the coalition and was literally the harbinger of many humanitarian tragedies and instability, whose impacts continue today at different levels in the Middle East. The operation against Iraq, which was described as 'a rogue state that poses a threat to its neighbours and the whole world' by the US and Britain (Chomsky, 2002, s. 7), is one of the first examples of a series of issues related to liberal interventionism that continued into the millennium.

The Gulf War was also extremely significant in terms of the manipulation of mass communication. The war was broadcast live on TV channels like a fictionalized movie. The inevitable defeat of the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein and his army along with the superior bravery of US soldiers was portrayed, however, the human tragedies caused by this intervention were not brought up. In Baudrillard's words, the Gulf War did not take place (1995, s. 24). Because for people in the West, the Gulf War was a spectacular show rather than real, it was something they watched while eating snacks and enjoying drinks in front of the TV.

Iraqi leader, S. Hussein, was a leader without democratic tendencies and exerted enormous pressure, especially on individuals and groups he perceived as opponents or threats to him. The pressure that the Iraqi Ba'ath regime placed on the Kurds, Turkmen and Shiites was a well-known incident. Saddam Hussein was also a leader who was supported sometimes openly and sometimes implicitly by Western liberal countries, until he attempted to invade Kuwait. The question of who provided the weapons that would enable S. Hussein to make Iraq one of the countries with the biggest land power in the Middle East, has not been given much attention. He was rendered as a scapegoat for the international intervention process, begun by liberal states and ending with the Gulf War, because Western liberal states had a great influence on this issue.

Examining authoritarian regimes in the Middle East from a historical perspective, in the case of S. Hussein, we see that Western liberal states influenced both the construction processes and the continuation of most of these regimes somehow. Iraq emerged with the unification of the Basra, Mosul, and Baghdad provinces under the British mandate after the San Remo Conference in 1920 and have experienced many domestic problems since the establishment process. These states were connected to the Ottoman Empire and have different socio-political characteristics. King Faisal was appointed to the head of the country by Britain, which did not eliminate the internal turmoil with the Shiites. They mostly lived in the south of the country in the city of Najaf and frequently rebelled. Following the regime shift in Iran, the pressure on the Shiites, who constituted the

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<sup>4</sup> The retired general who was responsible for US operations in the Middle East during his tenure as Commander of the US Central Command.

majority of the Iraqi population, continued increasingly during and after the Iran-Iraq War between 1980-1988. Another victim of this kind of oppression was the Kurds living in northern Iraq. In 1988, the Ba'ath government killed thousands of Kurds in Halabja with chemical weapons on the grounds that they supported Iran.

A second US-led military operation, called 'Operation Iraqi Freedom,' was implemented in 2003 without a UN decision. S. Hussein's regime's possession of chemical weapons was expounded as one of the main reasons. After the capture of Baghdad, these weapons could not be found, but S. Hussein's regime ended. Although many criminal incidents were in question such as rape, torture, the killing of civilians, ill-treatment, extrajudicial execution, and money laundering during and after the operations against Iraq, these crimes injuring human dignity were not properly responded to by liberal state governments and they were generally not subject to legal sanctions as war crimes. The documents published by Wikileaks contain many pieces of official evidence regarding these unlawful events.

Hundreds of thousands of secret military documents published on the Wikileaks (<https://wikileaks.org>) website about Iraq and Afghanistan revealed that US soldiers and their allies were involved in crimes between 2004-2009 in the Afghanistan and Iraq operations. These were covered up and no legal action was or has been taken on this matter. From these documents, we understand that many murder cases in Iraq and Afghanistan were distorted and reported in different ways, such as suicide and kidney failure. The documents also revealed that 150 people, who were killed in Afghanistan as a result of a missile attack and reported to be Taliban members, were actually around 300 civilians. Again, thanks to these documents, many other hidden incidents, such as the murder of two Reuters reporters and Iraqi civilians from crossfire from a helicopter in Iraq, have become known to the public.

The political reactions in the US regarding this issue, after the publication of these documents, posed a completely different problem in terms of democracy culture and human values. Robert Gibbs, White House spokesperson at the time, stated that the Wikileaks documents published in 2010 'put US diplomats and intelligence agents around the world at risk to promote democracy and open governance.'<sup>5</sup> In the statement, instead of making a commitment about those involved being judged transparently, on the contrary and quite oddly, intelligence agents were presented as people working to promote democracy and open governance. The anti-democratic and inhumane attitudes arising from the military operations of the US were not mentioned in this statement.

Paradoxes also exist regarding liberal discourses used during the operations in Iraq. Illiberal states such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates were involved in the established coalition during military operations against Iraq and close cooperation with these states, made the liberal discourses on the operations meaningless. The operations that were said to bring democracy, freedom, and stability to Iraq, on the contrary, caused increasingly violent chaos, ethnic and sectarian war, and terror in Iraq. A study by a group of academicians from John Hopkins University and Al-Mu University in 2006, stated that around 655,000 people lost their lives in Iraq between 2002 and 2006 alone (Burnham et al. 2006, s. 1427). The number of the people who lost their lives due to war, civil conflict, and terrorism continued to increase after this study was published.<sup>6</sup> While Shiites, Kurds and Turkmens were the main oppressed groups in Iraq during the Ba'ath regime led by S. Hussein, the reversal of the process put these groups in forefront of

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<sup>5</sup> In this regard, see URL 2.

<sup>6</sup> It is stated that the number of civilian deaths due to violence has been more than 200 thousand since the beginning of the operation against Iraq in 2003. See URL 3.

administrative mechanisms. Sunni Arabs then became the main group under pressure. As a result of the failure to establish a democratic and a fair system, the country's political, religious, and social fragmentation continued and the conflicts have continued as well. Hence, the US-led liberal intervention in Iraq has caused, not peace, but much chaos and many human tragedies whose influence continues today. Western states emphasize liberal values and universal human rights when they are in the war process between themselves, but they prioritize these values as a defence of their superiority and as a means of intervention against non-Western states with which they establish neo-colonialist relationships. For this reason, liberal values established among liberal states turn into an instrument for intervention in states that are stigmatized as non-liberal.

Liberal values are used as a discourse for legitimate intervention, so that liberal states can intervene in any country to protect their interests. On the other hand, states that are the target of such interventions generally deteriorate compared to earlier periods, in terms of the rights and freedoms, rather than establishing liberal values in these countries. On that point, J. Baudrillard draws attention to the hypocrisy and paradox caused by Western states' use of liberal values as a means of oppression:

“We are, in fact, trying to wrest all these things from them forcibly – their modesty in the prisons of Abu Ghraib, the headscarf in our schools –but this is not enough to console us for our abjection. They have to come to it themselves; they have to sacrifice themselves on the altar of obscenity, transparency, pornography and global simulation. They have to lose their symbolic defences and, of their own accord, take the path of the free-market order, integral democracy and integrated spectacle. (...) The machinations over oil merely mask a much more serious destructuring. Global power is the power of the simulacrum, of a universal carnivalization, which the West imposes at the cost of its own humiliation, its own symbolic mutilation. (...)” (2010, s. 23-24)

J. Gray states that liberal theorists have some impossible goals, such as trying to bring universal authority to inherited local practices. According to Gray, liberalism has never been successful at demonstrating that liberal democratic institutions are uniquely essential to justice and human well-being. Universal values advocated by liberalism have not been able to offer a reasonable and practicable universal morality (1996, s. 246; 2000, s. 9). Some countries, such as Iraq, have been the target of intervention, by referring to liberal values, but as a reflection of the pursuit of universal authority, these interventions, however, exposed a completely dark humanitarian balance sheet. Tony Blair stated that saving the world from S. Hussein was an action undertaken for humanity and G. Bush claimed that an Iraq free from S. Hussein would bring hope and progress for millions of people, and that it would show the power of (liberal) freedom of transformation. Both the occupation and reconstruction of Iraq were shaped by the liberal ideological vision but failed in practice (Dodge, 2010, s. 1269).

Situations similar to what happened in Iraq took place in its neighbour Syria. Syria declared its independence after World War II and was a French mandate between 1920-1946. The Ba'ath Party came in to power in 1963. Kurds in Syria were under pressure during the Ba'ath regime as they were in Iraq and they have turned into one of the main actors in the country today. The YPG emerged as a PKK-affiliated structure in Syria and is not a liberal structure but based on Marxist-Leninist ideologies. It is an organization supported by both the US and Western liberal countries, such as France and Germany, in many different fields such as arms, logistics, intelligence, and military training. With the support of Western states, the YPG has become one of the dominant powers controlling a wide area within Syria. This structure was renamed SDF in 2015 and began to include some Arab components, as a result of Turkey's political opposition to its allies in NATO on

the basis that the YPG is a terrorist organization with a PKK affiliation and therefore should not be supported. One of the main reasons Western liberal states gave for supporting this structure was the struggle against ISIS.

Right after its emergence in Iraq, ISIS quickly established a field of dominance in the northwest region of the country and also expanded its area of domination in Syria in a short time. During the 2016 Presidential election campaign, the former US President D. Trump made statements that ISIS was founded by B. Obama and his deputy was H. Clinton. He repeated this statement several times on different dates but neither the US nor the world press dwelled on what exactly these words mean. Another issue not sufficiently emphasized at this point was what role the US-led prisons in Abu Ghraib and Camp Bucca had in the emergence of ISIS. These were places where Iraqi prisoners were held after the second operation to Iraq in 2003.<sup>7</sup> A majority of ISIS leaders, notably Baghdadi, stayed at Camp Bucca for a while.

ISIS was the reason put forward not only by Western liberal states such as the US, Britain, and France, but also by other countries such as Russia and Iran, to intervene in Iraq and Syria or to have a military presence in these countries. Iraq, and particularly Syria, became the area where new military weapons and strategies were tested in a conflict zone. The September 2020 report by the Washington-based Center for International Policy (CIP), stated that the majority of arms trade in conflict zones in the Middle East and North Africa (in the last five years) were made by Western states. According to this report by W. Hartung, light weapons and other military aid sold by Western states played a role in the continuation of the conflicts in these regions, and heavy weapon systems caused great destruction in these regions.<sup>8</sup>

B. Assad, who became the President of Syria in 2000, unlike his father H. Assad, initially followed a reformist policy. Assad began to implement policies with authoritarian tendencies in a short time when he was exposed to ongoing pressure to reduce the influence of Western states on his country. After the September 11, 2001 attacks, Syria was also impacted by increasing political pressure and economic sanctions by US policies towards certain Middle Eastern countries and Afghanistan. If Western liberal states had followed a policy that encouraged Assad to make democratic initiatives by easing the pressure on Syria after he came to power, a different Syrian picture might exist today.

Islamophobic discourse on al-Qaeda particularly increased after the 9/11 attacks in Western countries. ISIS is frequently referred to in media and politics in the following period. Extreme right-wing discourses reached a level of hostility to foreigners and immigrants at times. Terrorist attacks carried out by ISIS in some parts of Europe further fuelled the rhetoric in this direction. However, the people murdered in Iraq and Syria by the ISIS organization were mostly civilians with Muslim identity.

The civil war that started in Syria in 2011 deepened the denominational-ethnic divisions and groupings in the country. Millions of people became deterritorialized because of these conflicts, hundreds of thousands lost their lives, and this problem continues today. Interventions in regions such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Syria brought about countless humanitarian tragedies whose effects still continue. The negative, humiliating, and inhumane stance adopted by Western countries, with the exception of

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<sup>7</sup> Although in limited numbers, it should be noted that there are few noteworthy articles published in newspapers on this subject. One of these is the article of Martin Chulov which was published in *The Guardian*, in December 2014 with the title of "ISIS: the inside story". For this, see URL 4.

Again, on the same topic, for Brad Parks' the article of "How a US prison camp helped create ISIS" which was published on *New York Post*, in May 2015, see URL 5.

<sup>8</sup> For details of this report, see URL 6.

some countries such as Canada and Sweden, towards people who have had to leave their countries and seek asylum because they do not have life safety due to the conflicts in these regions, has seriously damaged liberal values in practice. Western liberal states adopted liberal-populist and far-right policies by increasing border controls, thus keeping vulnerable people seeking a safe place out of their country as much as possible, instead of fighting against racist rhetoric and displaying humanitarian attitudes, in line with their UN convention member obligations regarding refugees. In the last few years, racist discourse and racist attitudes have become more evident toward Syrian refugees.

Immigrant and refugee flows emerged as a result of the dependencies, contradictions, conflicts, dissolution, and fragmentation created by the spread of liberalism in the international arena. Economic, political, and military impositions are the current moral and practical problems of liberalism. According to Wellmer (2002), the conceptual articulation between the private rights of the citizen, which is always a part of the liberal and democratic tradition, and universal human rights have become a real and dramatic internal reckoning for Western societies for the first time. Western societies have caused tragedy in moral life on a global scale by betraying their own founding principles. The systematic persecution of Palestinians is another significant indication that contradicts political liberalism's claims of universality. This understanding has failed in practice in the attitude displayed towards Palestinians over the years. There was no hesitation to intervene for years in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan because of S. Hussein, B. Assad, and the Taliban along with the tyranny they have caused, but by ignoring the violent tyranny towards Palestinians since Israel's establishment demonstrates the hypocrisy of Western liberal states in implementing liberal principles. This indifference is closely related to the fact that Israel is a state founded with the support of Western states, under the leadership of England, as a payoff for the crime of genocide against Jews by the Nazis. Israel follows a policy of destroying Palestine and Palestinians with violence that has become almost routine with the support of Western liberal states, instead of trying to live peacefully, by bringing together the Jews living in different countries in the lands where the state has been declared. One of the basic principles of liberal understanding is the security of life and property, and this has been violated in Palestine where freedoms have been suspended. Palestinian land was seized by planned tyranny and was gradually turned into small spots on the map. Millions of Palestinians were deprived of the opportunity to live in their homeland and were forced to become refugees in different countries. Except for some rhetoric intended to suppress public reaction, Western liberal states have provided almost unconditional support to Israel. Political and economic pressures is applied to other states, and bribes with a legitimate appearance are offered today, in order to ignore the illegal practices of Israel in an attempt to normalize the negativities it has caused. The situation of Palestine and the Palestinians along with their reputation as an international actor has been disregarded. Liberal states steer world politics towards Israeli practices and force Palestinians to live a refugee life in prison on their own lands. This has been continuing for many long years and involves numerous human tragedies. This undermines the liberal understanding with its defense of fundamental rights and freedoms.

### **Entering the Millennium Ignoring the Genocide**

Western liberal states desire to intervene in countries with important energy resources such as Iraq, Syria, Libya and Afghanistan for various reasons in the name of humanity. In foreign policy, economic and political interests are prioritized rather than universal humanitarian principles. This long-term unresponsiveness to events that include serious humanitarian tragedies and resulted in genocide as we entered the 21st century, once again demonstrated the fact that liberal policies have failed.



During military operations against Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria, the justification for these interventions frequently cited liberal rhetoric, universal humanitarian values, or that an unstable situation and chaos in these regions would harm regional and global security. On the other hand, at the dawn of the millennium, events that turned into genocide in Rwanda and Bosnia, liberal rhetoric was ignored and Western liberal states became almost deadly unresponsive.

The tribal distinction in Rwanda is very old and this was brought to light with the clashes that turned into genocide between Hutus and Tutsis towards the middle of the 1990s.<sup>9</sup> Hutus make up about 85% of the Rwandan population, while the Tutsis occupy a lesser place in the general with a population ratio of 14 % but held a privileged position socially, politically, and administratively for a long time. The Tutsis were placed in the country's administration under the command and patronage of the Belgian colonists.

Tutsis were treated as a superior race against other ethnic groups as mandated by the Belgians. On the other hand, Hutus mostly participated in farming or were involved in hard labour. They were excluded from administrative mechanisms and were subjected to discrimination, not only in administrative terms, but also in political and social life. They were often denied the right to education and were subjected to physical violence when they did not accept the life style imposed on them or when they did not obey orders.

Similar to New Age conditions in Europe, the bourgeoisie emerged as a new class and gained considerable power in the economic field as a result of individual initiatives, but faced various problems due to the land-based aristocratic hierarchy system. This new bourgeoisie tried to acquire titles of nobility by purchasing land. Those who had financial means among the Hutus tried to be included in the Tutsis aristocracy by purchasing more cattle in order to get rid of the discrimination they were subjected to because of their ethnic identity.

Hutus began to come into the forefront of the country's administration at the end of the 1950s. This situation brought about the reversal of the oppressor-oppressed relationship seen in the previous period. The practices during the Belgian mandate period constituted the basis of the conflict between Hutus and Tutsis. The majority Hutus started to take over the country's administration and displayed an attitude towards taking revenge against the minority Tutsi. The country gained independence in 1962 and set up a dual-ethnic dictatorship. The Hutus had a single say in the administration of the country<sup>10</sup> but they killed tens of thousands of people from time to time in the conflicts they had with the Tutsi, the dominant powers of the colonial period. In the 1990s, this ethnic conflict in

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<sup>9</sup> Rwanda, which was under German occupation between 1890 and 1916, was under the Belgian occupation between 1916 and 1962, and in those years when it was under occupation, the application of identity cards, which form the official basis of ethnic separation, was put into effect by the Belgians in 1933 (Pottier, 2002, s. 209). Mackintosh (1996, s. 49-50) points out that with the practice of identity starting in 1933, all Rwandans were classified according to the number of cattle they have. Thus, those with more than ten cows were classified as Tutsi, those with less than ten cows as Hutu, and those engaged in pottery work as Twa. J. R. Oppong (2008, s. 50-51) points out that when Europeans arrived in Rwanda, they already encountered a hierarchical structure, but this hierarchical structure deepened under the rule of Europeans. Oppong states that this hierarchical system is organized around distinction based on provinces, districts, hills, and neighbourhoods. In this stratification, the Tutsi represented the upper class with aristocratic privileges, while the Hutu vassals were at the bottom of the stratification. The privileged position of the Tutsi, who are believed to be more civilized and whose physical appearance is more similar to the Europeans, was reinforced by the Belgians; Hutus, who were seen as primitive, uncivilized and ignorant, were thought to deserve to be treated like slaves.

<sup>10</sup> It is interesting that Belgium was one of the first countries to recognize the independence of Rwanda under Hutu rule, which once excluded Hutus and brought Tutsis to the forefront of the country's administration. Considering the changing political conjuncture of the country, it can be said that Belgium preferred this way to be effective on the country's government.

the country turned into a genocide against the Tutsi. Increasing violence in 1994 caused around one million deaths. Moderate Hutus, who opposed this genocide against Tutsi, also fell victim to this spiral of violence.

One of the main topics of discussion regarding the genocide in Rwanda is related to the role of France in this process. After Belgium's withdrawal from Rwanda, France started to establish a close relationship with this country and made a comprehensive agreement with Rwanda in 1962 covering cultural, technological, and economic areas. Different agreements were made subsequently and France's influence was felt in the country. On July 18, 1975, a military agreement was made that included France's financial and educational support for the Rwandan army under the Hutu government, and as a result of this agreement, France began to keep military power in Rwanda. This agreement was revised in 1983 and 1992, and the French military forces, who were previously in Rwanda with the French uniform, now started to serve in the Rwandan uniform (Prabavathi, 2015, s. 62-63).

The French army provided training and equipment support to the Hutus, who committed genocide against Tutsis and moderate Hutus. The French government of the period gave direct support to the Hutu administration in line with their cooperation agreements. French President Mitterrand at the time did not hesitate to show his insensitivity to this crime against humanity by saying "in such countries, genocide is not too important" (Tiersky, 2003, s. 412). Although there was UN Peacekeeping Force in Rwanda during the period of genocide, there was no intervention to prevent genocide. The UN soldiers were withdrawn from the country as a result of US pressure on the UN. The UN Security Council did not intervene to prevent the genocide, nor did it show a strong reaction to what happened. The United States and France played a major role in the UN's decision to remain passive on the events in the region. After the genocide process turned against the Hutus supported by the French, a significant number of Hutu officials were made to go to Paris. Among them was Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza, who was convicted of genocide by the international court and went to Paris to meet with F. Mitterrand. During the genocide process, France transferred millions of dollars worth of weapons to the Hutu regime via Egypt and South Africa. Although a French parliamentary investigation in 1998 rejected about these accusations, but admitted that F. Mitterrand and France's centre-right government of the period had been blinded to take sides with radical Hutu groups in order to protect French interests in the region (Uchehara, 2014, s. 35-36).

Liberalism expresses the importance of each individual's life singularly in a theoretical context and defends the legal regulations for this, although in practice, economic interests have generally been prioritized over universal human values. Not only was the genocide in Rwanda ignored by Western liberal states for a long time, but also surreptitious arms sales were made to this country. Goose and Smyth (1994, s. 95) point out that the US, which is the largest arms dealer in the world, did not have control over its arms exports in order to reduce sales to Rwanda. According to the US Senate *Appropriations* Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, 'the evidence obtained during this process shows that the government is trying to increase the sales of arms instead of decreasing them.'

A similar indifference to the genocide in Rwanda occurred with the genocide in Bosnia. In Yugoslavia, different languages, religions, cultures, and ethnic groups coexisted, and ethnic tensions and conflicts were rooted in the past. Yugoslavia's disintegration process started with Slovenia's declaration of independence in 1990 and then Croatia in 1991. This resulted in Serbia, (North) Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Kosovo becoming independent states as well. With the exception of Slovenia and (North) Macedonia, the processes of declaring independence was very tense.

When the societies with ethnic, religious, or cultural differences are considered from a socio-political perspective one group generally tries to dominate others. In this environment of divergence, groups that consider themselves superior to others try to position themselves as a 'boss' or a 'dominant' figure as a reflection of this conception. In some cases, this state of domination preserves respect for others, at certain points, and does not turn into violence or extreme pressure. In other cases, when differences are completely disregarded, and in the event of resistance towards disregard, it may take the form of policies of intense suppression, involving violence. In the case of Yugoslavia, the Serbians saw themselves as the 'boss' figure and followed an intense pressure policy on marginalized groups in order to impose their own dominant elements.

Bosnian and Albanian Muslims were ignored and oppressed in Yugoslavia for a long time. The process of Bosnia-Herzegovina's declaration of independence was a complete humanitarian tragedy. A referendum held throughout the country in 1992 resulted in the support for independence. The Serbians living in the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina were opposed this declaration of independence and rebelled with the support they received from Serbia. They started to attack Bosnians and declared that they established the Republika Srpska within the borders of the country. Immediately after the declaration of independence in April 1992, Serbian attacks and Bosnian massacres began in towns near Srebrenica such as Bratunac, Skelani, and Kravica. This then intensified and turned into genocide. In one of the first examples of this violence, 64 Bosnians, including women and children, were massacred in the village of Glogova in the town of Bratunac. Their bodies were thrown into a river, and Muslim houses and places of worship were destroyed.

This situation was only the beginning of greater human tragedies that occurred. Mehler (2017, s. 608) states that, with the rise of such violence and the emergence of images depicting mass murder, Serbians began to be likened to Nazis, and Muslims began to be likened to Jews who were the victims of genocide committed by Nazis, so much so that Jewish lobbies in America supported such an analogy.

The Bosnians genocide was the most extreme in Srebrenica. A scientific study on this subject based on UN reports, states that after Serbian forces conquered this settlement in July 1995, at least 7475 Bosnian Muslims, including women, children, and the elderly were murdered by racist Serbian militias. This was the worst massacre in Europe since World War II (Brunborg et al., 2003). One of the main points emphasized within the scope of this study is that the largest genocide against Muslim Bosnians throughout the war happened in Srebrenica, a place declared to be a 'safe settlement' by UN Security Council resolution 819 on April 16. This place should not be subjected to 'any armed attack or any hostile action'. A few weeks after the decision to declare Srebrenica a 'safe settlement area', the Sarajevo, Tuzla, Zepa, Bihac, and Gorazde settlements were also declared 'safe settlement areas' by the UN and the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), but genocide against Bosnians was not prevented.

One of the first international reactions after the emergence of images depicting the massacre of hundreds of people during the genocide against Muslims in the Bratunac settlement area in 1992, was the initiation of an embargo against the region with the support of the UN and NATO. The sad truth regarding this embargo is that the Bosnians who lacked armament in the first place, could not obtain ammunition to defend themselves. Whereas Serbians, who already had weapon power and were consistently supported by the Russians, were not affected by this embargo at all. Bosnians rather than Serbians were adversely affected by the embargo and went through tragedies incompatible with the law of war, such as rape and mass murder of thousands of Bosnian women, simply because they could not defend themselves.

The number of deaths in the Bosnian War is above one hundred thousand, although the exact number is still unknown to this day. Additionally, millions of people were displaced. Today, in many parts of the country, there are cemeteries from this modern period of barbarism committed against the Bosnians. Ethnic genocide lasted for years right in front of the international community and was led by the liberal community. It was ignored for a long time and the massacres of Bosnians was carried out in places declared to be safe settlements by the UN Security Council and were supposed to be under the guarantee of the UN Peacekeeping Force. The Dutch soldiers representing the UN Peacekeeping Force in Srebrenica, in their insensitivity and neglect, allowed Serbian militias to take away hundreds of Bosnian men from a camp under their control; so, the mass murder of these detained civilians makes them complicit to the crimes committed.

An air attack was launched against the Serbian militia after increased reactions in the world public opinion about the genocide and ongoing violence in Srebrenica. Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General at the time, stated that an air strike was needed 'not only to protect the lives of UN Peacekeeping Force soldiers, but also to protect the lives of other UN Peacekeepers, military observers and inspectors', but he did not refer to the vulnerable civilian settlers living in these areas that were supposed to be safe. In a scientific article (1996, s. 154-155), one of the former UN officials, Michael N. Barnett states that when the NATO-led air movement was carried out, the main goal was not to protect vulnerable Bosnians, but to protect a limited number of UN officials. NATO and the United Nations, rather than protecting civilians, resorted to air strikes in order to correct their deteriorated international image because of the genocide in places declared as 'safe settlement areas.' S. G. Mestrovic (1997) states that the American and European policy suffered a great defeat in preventing the Bosnian genocide, and that the British and the French were silent collaborators with Serbia in this process. Mestrovic states that compared to the US's willingness to lead a war against Muslims in the Gulf War, its reluctance to fight a war against a Christian element (Serbians) to save Bosnian Muslims actually reveals a kind of bigotry. J. Baudrillard (1996), also states that the Western world was a part of the crime committed by ignoring this tragedy at the time, and evaluates this situation as 'The West's Serbianization.'

The UN's International Court of Justice decided on February 26, 2007 that Serbia was not involved in this crime and did not provoke genocide, even though it was stated that a genocide was committed against Bosnians. In this decision, the fact that the places where genocide was committed were not within the borders of Serbia is shown as evidence for acquitting Serbia. The decision that Serbia was not involved in the crime of ethnic cleansing against Bosnians legally prevented the Bosnians who were victims of genocide from claiming compensation. One of the prominent points in this report is that apart from the mass murders committed, not only Bosnian women but also thousands of Bosnian men were subjected to sexual assault and humiliation (International Court of Justice, 2007, s. 191). Some parts of the trial were broadcast live and were carried out in front of the whole world. At the end of the trial process, the criminal perpetrators were reduced to individuals and groups, making this an incomplete and flawed trial.

### **Ongoing Colonial Habits**

In the early 20th century, following World War I, national independence movements became widespread, and by the 1960s, the majority of former colonial states declared their national independence, paying the cost with many lost lives. However, the exploiter-exploited relationship between the colonialist Western states of the post-colonial period and the states that declared their independence, continued in a neo-colonialist way. The existence of such a relationship is much more obvious in some countries in Asia and Africa. Western liberal states have a great influence on the political decisions and practices of the

former colonial states in various fields such as education, politics, economy, culture, and military structures. The aforementioned effect arises from the recreation of the colonial mentality based on keeping the other under control in the post-colonial period, rather than depending on voluntarism or consent.

One of the main policies of Western states, such as Great Britain, France, Italy, Belgium, and Germany after the withdrawal from their colonies in Africa and Asia and the former colonies' declaration of national independence, was to create an upper class that would exist to cooperate with them, so that they could be influential at different levels of government, in order to keep their privileged position in the post-colonial period. Ferro (1997, s. 340) states that this new privileged class, representing the colonialists, was detached from the people, found to be odd by common people, and gave the impression that they are still under occupation despite the declaration of national independence. The vast majority of the native people lived in poverty, while this new privileged ruling class, with the Western policies they followed, instead of fighting against poverty, tried to ensure that the former colonialists continued their privileged status in the new period. One of the main indicators of this was privileged energy, such as oil, deals to companies belonging to former colonial countries. Ferro states that the ex-colonies in Africa are struggling with hunger and poverty, but instead of developing (basic) agriculture, they buy more tractors from Western states and focus on coffee production for export to these countries.

Africa is one of the main places where the former colonies are concentrated and is a very important region in terms of resources such as natural gas, coal, fossil fuels, and renewable energy; especially uranium, which is necessary for both oil and nuclear energy. An indication that even after national independence, the old colonial relations continue in a new form is the current general situation of the former colonies in Africa that cannot freely use their energy resources in line with the interests of the local people. Instead, they generally concentrate on limited production in other areas of the economy. The educational system under the influence of colonial cultural values gave priority to former colonial countries in public tenders. Central bank revenues are generally under the control of the former colonial states and are another indicator of this situation. France's policy towards the African continent looks to be in line with the neo-colonial understanding by showing many different examples that colonial habits have not been abandoned in the new period.

When France withdrew from its former colonies, it ensured that French was one of the official languages and kept basic public practices in the fields of politics, economy, army, and education under its control. Today, French is the official language in half of the countries in Africa. The position of the French in these countries became stronger, rather than weakening after colonialism. The FA Franc became the official currency of the Francophone countries and this caused these countries to be dependent on France, economically and politically, even though they achieved their *de jure* independence (Marcoux *vd.* 2011; Langan, 2018; Taylor, 2019). Although some discursive changes were observed in France's policy towards Africa in the 2000s (Uchehara, 2014), it did not turn into a large-scale paradigm or a large-scale change in practice. It should be noted that the effects of neo-colonialist approaches that started after colonialism continue today. Like France, Britain continued its privileged position in its relations with its former colonies in the post-colonial period and followed a policy to protect its interests, especially in the field of energy (Bölme *vd.* 2020). In Africa, poverty is widespread today and this is closely related to the countries in this continent not being able to get out of dependency. The '*de facto*' situation in the form of the exploiter-exploited effect that still continues in practice, undoubtedly contradicts the very basic principles of political liberalism.

Borders drawn after the colonies in the Middle East and Africa declared their national independence caused border and ethnic conflicts that can still be felt today. The former colonies were used as a source of labour power and were a product of a pragmatic understanding of politics in Western European countries that entered an economic recovery and industrial development process after World War II. Today however, with the rise of anti-immigrant and xenophobic approaches in Europe, demands to utilize immigrant labour for employment in labour markets have been subjected to many restrictions. This contradicts the free market understanding of the liberal mentality. The former colonies were used, not only as a source of imported labour to Europe, but also as centres of cheap tax and cheap labour for Western-owned factories. Another significant problem that countries in Africa face today is the transfer of hazardous waste from European states to their regions. In addition to all of this, governments that openly oppose the relationship between the exploiter and the exploited and aim to pursue independent policies are generally overthrown by military coups, subjected to economic and political sanctions in the former colonies or in states that have not directly experienced colonialism but have been subjected to a relationship of dependency with neo-colonialist understanding. The roles and attitudes of Western liberal states in these processes damage the prestige of the liberal mentality.

The US, as one of the main actors in international relations today, easily rejects the 'negatives' of the European states' colonial period, but does not fail to use the aspects of this accumulation that would 'enable it to maintain its leadership position'. Although the US gives the impression of trying to establish a different relationship with other societies through the political discourse that it did not get involved with the European colonial states in their dirty heritage in Asia and Africa, its general attitude and practices show that it is not much different from the others and that this argument is 'actually an illusion' (Bulut, 2002, s. 158; 2006, s. 93). Samir Amin (2004) argues that the US project to dominate the world through military power has its roots in European liberalism and that US imperialism is more barbaric and more destructive than previous forms of imperialism.

One of the US's main foreign policies has been to maintain a global leadership position as a hegemonic power by creating dependent governments. In Latin America, Asia, and Africa, the US played explicit or implicit roles in many coups against administrations which were considered to threaten American interests. Moreover, such interventions did not bring more freedom to these societies, instead these interventions generally resulted in greater political pressure and caused many humanitarian tragedies.

The US's operational approaches, launched during the Cold War were not abandoned and what appears to be US liberal interventionism in countries such as Turkey, Iran, and Venezuela continue in the form of coups or economic-political pressure, are evidence of this strategy. One of the liberal democratic values is to respect the right of individuals living in a country to choose the people who will govern the country and this has been ignored. Although US administrators make implications that the existence of authoritarian regimes is a justification for liberal interventionism, it should be especially noted that this situation is not related to the formation of the political regime. It is hard to say that the current administrations in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, or Egypt have more democratic values than the current administration, for example, in Turkey. On the other hand, the administration in these countries' close cooperation with the US prevents them from being exposed to such practices or pressures. Even though the governments of the aforementioned countries have illiberal attitudes and practices, they are supported in some way by the US and therefore are prevented from being subject to international sanctions. The murder of opposition journalist Jamal Khashoggi, who died in a murder planned in detail by the Saudi authorities at the Consulate General of Saudi Arabia in

Istanbul, is an example. Although the perpetrator was known, this incident was somehow covered up after the large amounts of commercial agreements were made with the US, almost as a price. It also appears that Saudi Arabia is prevented from being subject to international sanctions.

One of the most remarkable examples showing that this situation is not related to the type of regime is the change of government in Honduras with the military coup in 2009. After the Liberal Hope Movement (Movimiento Esperanza Liberal) won the election in Honduras in 2005, José Manuel Zelaya Rosales became Head of State and one of the first political implementations of the new government was removing tariffs and trade barriers and favourable conditions for foreign investments. The Central American Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA) was signed in 2006 between the US and the Dominican Republic. The liberal government, which signed an agreement with the IMF in 2008 to 'maintain macroeconomic stability and reduce public spending', joined Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) led by Venezuela in September 2008, due to the increasingly deepening economic problems after the global economic crisis that emerged in the same year (Gordon *vd.* 2011, s. 333; Shipley, 2013). Zelaya's involvement in this alliance and the reforms he tried to make in certain areas brought the end of his power. He was detained after the military coup on June 28, 2009, and was exiled to Costa Rica. Canada and the US supported this military coup. There are a number of extents to which this kind of situation to happen even in a liberal government. First of all, as the approach that liberal understanding is the only ideology that will provide global peace collapses, it also means that even if liberal understandings dominate globally, there will always be conflicts of interest between states; strong states will always try to establish a hegemony over the weaker ones.

### **Conclusion**

Liberal understandings are seen as a unique ideology by those who adopt them. They claim universal principles and values in terms of fundamental rights and freedoms, but they are a failure due to inconsistent application arising from the inequality of these rights and principles in practice. In liberal societies, however softer compared to the past, hierarchical states of affairs continue to exist in practice, even though the laws state otherwise. Today in the US, Black people, Native Americans, and immigrants of non-Anglo-Saxon or Jewish descent are still treated as inferior. Today, immigrants with non-Western origin in Europe are exposed to much discrimination compared to local citizens, even if they have citizenship status in the countries they live in. From an ontological point of view, the existing assets of the states such as Australia, New Zealand, and the Americas, that were built upon colonial exploitation and forcible seizure of indigenous lands, are themselves incompatible with liberal principles like respect for the right to life and property. All these show inconsistent application of theoretical liberal principles in practice.

Liberalism advocates values, such as equality of opportunity against pre-emptive privileges and superiorities based on a strict vertical hierarchy, prerogatives, and advantages, which are reciprocal to the aristocratic tradition that dominated the Middle Ages, but in practice Western liberal states try to steer global politics and see themselves as states with advanced privileges and superiority over others in international relations. This contradicts the liberal principle of equality and creates a new aristocratic structure in practice. Liberalism emerged as an understanding that expresses that the interests of a certain class (bourgeoisie) had been purged of its class identity and transformed into a universal ideology over time, but in practice, it still functions as an ideology aimed at protecting the interests of certain groups. An international order in which liberal nations leading international relations see themselves rightly authorized to pass judgement and

lecture is incompatible with liberal theory. This is one of the indicators that liberalism has collapsed in terms of its functioning in practice.<sup>11</sup> One of the most significant indicators is that economic interests are generally placed above political liberal principles. Purchasing weapons from Russia, ignoring the free-market discourse advocated by liberal theory, and threatening countries and imposing certain sanctions show liberal contradictions in action, and also show that the political liberal principles are sacrificed for economic interests in practice.

Western liberal states judge and lecture other regimes and countries on human rights issues, but at the same time they negate both their responsibilities for the negative consequences and humanitarian tragedies caused by colonialism, and their responsibilities in the face of humanitarian disasters caused by liberal interventionism policies pursued today. Western liberal states have serious economic and humanitarian obligations to these countries due to years of exploitation of their former colonies' resources. They provide limited support from time to time and attempt to show it as a blessing because they prefer to continue the dependent relationship with a neo-colonialist mentality in the new period. Trump's exclusion or deduction from some of the allowance and support programs he has been involved in as a result of anger, can be considered as an example of such politics. The fact that liberal states abandoned some of the international agreements and obligations to which they are a party of for conjunctural reasons, caused serious erosion of the trust and dignity in the liberal understanding.

Evidence shows that liberal discourse has failed in practice in the attitudes shown in dealing with global problems. After the genocide of Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, humanitarian tragedies caused by the conflicts between Croats, Serbians, and Bosnians were ignored by Western liberal states for a long time, the rise of the extreme right that threatened liberal values and correspondingly increased. Violent reactions towards immigrants and refugees, the rise of Islamophobia, and the unwillingness and failure to prevent these negative consequences, harm liberal principles. Versatile cooperation in various fields with illiberal regimes is incompatible with liberal values. Explicit or covert support for military coups in different parts of the world, the mostly blind support given to Israel, disregard for the humanitarian tragedy in Myanmar except for some minor reactions are basic examples of the failure of Western liberal states in the face of problems in the contemporary world.

Despite discourse that liberal understandings achieve an absolute victory compared to the failures of alternative ideologies, such as fascism and socialism, in practice, it is not possible to speak of the victory or success of liberalism, given its failures in global practice. Liberalism emerged as a rebellion to hierarchical social structures, but collapsed after reaching a theoretical maturity. Until the life of an individual in Palestine, Rwanda, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Kenya, Niger, or Libya is seen as valuable as an Anglo-Saxon person in the United States, or a native citizen of England or France, it is not possible to speak of a global liberal victory.

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<sup>11</sup> I. Wallerstein (1995) points out that the success achieved by liberal countries at the centre of the world system is closely related to their economic exploitation of peripheral countries. Despite the success achieved at certain points at the national level, the liberal system on a global scale has failed.



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