



Promoting Global Justice When Backlash Strikes

EU and UN Beijing +20

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Abstract

The UN Beijing World Conference on Women in 1995 was a landmark event resulting in the famous Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action. In 2015, a review of the implementation of the 1995 Beijing agenda – Beijing +20 – was conducted by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), culminating in a CSW conference in New York. Equipped with a typology of three global justice conceptions – global justice as non-domination, as impartiality, and as mutual recognition – the paper utilises publicly available documents, media reports, and interviews with civil society representatives and gender experts, to identify underlying normative ideas of the Beijing +20 process and the EU's approach. A comparison is made with the process and the global justice conceptions central to the Beijing Declaration and the EU's role at the Beijing World Conference. Findings show that the EU's role as a promoter of impartial global justice was limited in the Beijing +20 process, and that justice as non-domination prevails as a strong organising principle. This represents a shift from the original Beijing path that arguably had a firmer basis in ideas of justice as impartiality. Also the noteworthy commitment to global justice as mutual recognition, which characterised both the Beijing 1995 documents and the processes in which they came about, was far less pronounced twenty years later, despite the EU's declared ambitions to include civil society and ally with women's rights advocates. These troublesome developments likely reflect a global political climate that is less gender equality friendly, and where established lines between low and high salience are becoming more unclear. This can potentially, and perhaps increasingly, turn gender policy into 'big politics'. In addition, the EU's ability and motivation to act as a progressive entrepreneur in the gender equality area may be diminishing as a result of internal developments in the Union.

Keywords

Civil Society – Democracy – European Union – Gender Equality – Global Justice
United Nations – Women's Movement – World Conference on Women

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Introduction

The UN Beijing World Conference on Women in September 1995 was a landmark event. 17 000 participants and 30 000 activists were registered (UN Women), and the famous Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action that resulted, made substantive commitments in twelve critical areas of concern, including human rights for women, women and armed conflicts, women and the economy, women and health, and women in power and decision-making (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 1995).

Existing studies have established the European Union (EU) as a central agenda setter and progressive player at the Beijing 1995 conference (Kantola 2010; Krook and True 2012; True and Mintrom 2001; van der Vleuten et al. 2014). The resulting Beijing Declaration has moreover had real significance. To be sure, gender equality in all central dimensions of life is still a highly unfinished agenda, and some countries have made little progress in this area – or have indeed moved backwards – with devastating consequences for women and girls.¹ However, the Beijing consensus facilitated transnational diffusion of gender equality norms and the establishment of new gender machineries and legislation in many parts of the world in the years that followed, including on EU-level and in EU member countries (Krizsan et al. 2012). What the 1995 Beijing Declaration implied from a global justice perspective, has however not been elaborated.

In 2015, a review of the implementation of the 1995 Beijing agenda – Beijing +20 – was conducted by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), culminating in a CSW conference in New York. The EU's role in this follow-up process also remains to be scrutinised and assessed. Equipped with a typology of three global justice conceptions – global justice as non-domination, as impartiality, and as mutual recognition – the paper utilises different data sources, such as publicly available documents, media reports, and interviews with civil society representatives and gender experts, to identify underlying normative ideas of the Beijing +20 process and the EU's approach.

Based on previous studies that depict the EU with democratic deficits, but as a global promoter of women's rights (Debusscher 2011, 2016; Kantola 2010; Krook and True 2012; Schmidt 2005; van der Vleuten et al. 2014), and the conventional insight that gender equality is a low salience issue in international politics (Moravcsik 2002), the expectation was that the EU during Beijing +20 would promote a human rights-oriented, but top-down notion of global justice, operate relatively unaffected by sovereignty and international power balance considerations, and rank output above input legitimacy. Yet, findings show that the EU's role as a promoter of impartial global justice was limited in the Beijing +20 process, and that justice as non-domination prevails as a strong organising principle. This represents a shift from the original

1 See for example <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/GII> and <http://eige.europa.eu/rdc/eige-publications/gender-equality-index-2017-measuring-gender-equality-european-union-2005-2015-report>.

Beijing path that arguably had a firmer basis in ideas of justice as impartiality. Also the noteworthy commitment to global justice as mutual recognition, which characterised both the Beijing 1995 documents and the processes in which they came about, was far less pronounced twenty years later, despite the EU's declared ambitions to include civil society and ally with women's rights advocates. These troublesome developments likely reflect a global political climate that is less gender equality friendly, and where established lines between low and high salience are becoming more unclear. This can potentially, and perhaps increasingly, turn gender policy into 'big politics'. In addition, the EU's ability and motivation to act as a progressive entrepreneur in the gender equality area may be diminishing as a result of internal developments in the Union.

These findings are significant for at least two reasons. First of all, the UN contributes to agenda setting for gender equality mobilisation and gender equality policy globally. It is thus key for research to better understand what goes on within the UN in this area, and the Beijing process is of indisputable centrality. Secondly, the Beijing process has been important to the EU, both because of its significant effects on the Unions' internal gender equality policies, and because implementing the Beijing Declaration, and pursuing the Beijing path further, has been central to the EU's engagement with gender equality on the international scene. In this light, the EU's success, or lack of success, with this engagement is of greater general interest.

The first part of the paper outlines the three-fold typology of global justice conceptions developed by the GLOBUS project and specifies its analytical role.² This section also spells out some general expectations for the EU's approach to gender equality norms and policies in its external relations and policies. The second part analyses the 1995 Beijing Declaration pushed forward by the EU and EU countries among others. Obviously, a mixed set of justice conceptions underlies the Beijing agreement – global consensus statements and action guidelines of this kind must take into account a range of interests and both ideal and non-ideal concerns, and we cannot expect a complete 'fit' with one of the justice framework ideal types. Yet, on some decisive points, global justice as impartiality does prevail in these documents. Given that the Beijing 1995 agenda was largely EU-promoted, this is in accordance with expectations. However, we also see that justice as mutual recognition plays a larger role than expected. The third part of the paper analyses the Beijing +20 process from a global justice perspective with a particular focus on the EU's role and on the noteworthy shift in underlying justice notions from impartiality and recognition to non-domination. The final section sums up findings and includes some concluding remarks.

Impartiality, non-domination or recognition? Conceptions, expectations and indicators

Policies can be assessed on the basis of different parameters, relying on for example cost-benefit analysis (Sunstein 2003), or indicators of their social legitimacy or support (see Dingler et al. 2018 for a recent contribution). The latter are widely used criteria,

² For more information about the GLOBUS research project, see: <http://www.globus.uio.no/>

also when evaluating gender equality policy, but there are other assessment standards as well, typically related to substantive notions of good policies or good policy outcomes. The discussions of the merits of the UN Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action from 1995 and the following policy-making and implementation process are illustrative. On the policy side, the Beijing Declaration has been praised for its broad, multi-dimensional and innovative approach to gender equality policy-making: it includes a range of societal areas and challenges conventional, gender-biased distinctions between the public and the private sphere; it addresses human rights, as well as regulatory and redistributive issues; and it introduces and conceptualises powerful policy ideas in novel ways, be it the principle of gender mainstreaming³ or the idea of state feminist machineries (Skjeie et al. 2017; McBride and Mazur 2010). On the outcome side, the implementation and success of the Beijing 1995 agenda is regularly and extensively checked on the basis of a varied set of measurement tools. Prominent examples are the international gender equality indexes (Elias 2013; Liebowitz and Zwingel 2014), where annual index reports rank countries on gender gap indicators developed on the basis of the goals, dimensions and areas from the Beijing documents.⁴

This paper will complement these exiting and ongoing assessments by providing an analysis of the Beijing Declaration from the perspective of global justice, or rather from the perspective of a distinctive approach to global justice – and more specifically a set of global justice conceptions based on this approach – developed by the GLOBUS project (Eriksen 2016; Sjørnsen 2017). First, this approach is global in its scope; justice is not primarily assessed as a virtue of polities, be they states or regional powers such as the EU, but as a virtue of the international system or the global order at large. Secondly, the focus is less on redistributive issues and the ‘fair share’ of ‘goods’, and more on the more or less ‘just’ qualities of ‘political and administrative structures that could alleviate or even out harsh material conditions and ensure the protection of basic rights’ (Eriksen 2016: 1, 3). Thirdly, it is not assumed to be one overarching principle or set of principles of global justice written in stone, but instead multiple and not necessarily mutually exclusive ‘reasonable conceptions of justice which highlight important concerns and dilemmas’, but that may come with ‘serious limitations with regard to the requirements of justice at the global level’ (Eriksen 2016: 4).

More specifically, GLOBUS elaborates on three such conceptions of global justice (Sjørnsen 2017: 4-9). First, there is global justice as *non-domination*. This conception

3 The main idea of gender mainstreaming is to promote gender equality by means of institutionalising gender-sensitive norms and practices in all structures and processes of public policy (for a conceptual analysis, see Verloo 2005).

4 The EU Gender Equality Index includes the widest set of dimensions of the international indexes, and is explicitly developed to capture the Beijing criteria (EIGE 2017). Among its indicators are gaps between women and men in overall employment rates, and in the education, human health and social work sectors, in job quality, in mean monthly earnings, among graduates of tertiary education, in participation in caring and educational activities outside work, in cooking and housework, in sporting, cultural or leisure activities outside the home, in voluntary or charitable activities, among Ministers, members of Parliament, and in company boards, and in life expectancy, healthy life years, and unmet medical needs.

regards the freedom of individuals as primarily protected within the state structure. International law and human rights are central for regulating global interaction, according to this conception, but involvement in multilateral institutions must take place on a voluntary basis, and states must recognise each other as equal and refrain from interfering in the affairs of other states.

Global justice as *impartiality*, however, regards the autonomy of individuals as a universal normative concern across political and cultural contexts, and states as having relative value depending on the extent to which they ensure and enhance individual rights. Interference in the internal affairs of states may thus be required when the freedoms of individuals are at stake. Accordingly, this global justice conception prescribes the establishment of effective legal instruments and supranational institutions beyond the state.

Finally, global justice as *mutual recognition* shifts the focus from blueprint solutions for all to mechanisms that recognise difference. Actors are different; contexts are different; experiences are particular, and vary; and there exists a plurality of equally reasonable values and worldviews. In this situation, global justice as mutual recognition requires that all perspectives are given due hearing. Only in this way, this justice conception contends, can we know what justice properly means and requires, and develop solutions that are adequately sensitive and relevant in a variety of contexts and among differently equipped and situated actor groups.

In this paper these global justice conceptions are in part utilised descriptively to map the normative ideas underlying the Beijing process and the EU's promotion of gender equality in this UN context. In addition, the GLOBUS typology is treated as a template for a normative discussion of the merits and problems of different approaches to global justice and gender equality.

Which conception of global justice could we expect to prevail in the EU's approach to gender equality in its external affairs? The EU is known to have a democratic deficit and to rank output above input legitimacy (Majone 2014; Scharpf 1999). Despite some significant variation, previous studies have also highlighted the limited participatory credentials of the Union's external affairs procedures (see Sjursen 2011, 2012 for overviews). Furthermore, the EU's internal decision-making processes in the gender equality area have tended to score relatively low on democracy indicators (for example Galligan 2014; Holst 2014; Seibicke and Holst 2018), and there is little reason to expect higher inclusion and participation when gender equality is pursued in external affairs.

However, among organisations and countries on the international scene, the EU is regarded as a promoter of both women's individual civil and political liberties and their social and economic rights. Despite criticisms of limitations and recent setbacks feminist scholars have highlighted the EU as 'one of the most progressive gender regimes in the world' (Jacquot 2015: 1, see also Kantola 2010; van der Vleuten 2008; Walby 2011). We can add to this the common assumption that gender equality is a low

salience issue,⁵ and the risks involved in interfering with low salience issues across borders are, presumably, relatively modest, since the states' core interests and concerns are left untouched. Finally, there is general reason to believe that the Union itself exemplifies an ambitious attempt to institutionalise structures and decision-making above state level and will therefore be better equipped and more inclined than many other political actors to push for supranational solutions, at least under favourable conditions.

On this background, one could expect the EU to: (1) push a human rights-oriented, top-down notion of global justice on occasions such as the Beijing process venues; (2) to be relatively unaffected by considerations of state sovereignty; and (3) to favour procedures more structured to achieve fixed end results and 'right' answers, than to foster inclusion and sensitivity to difference. In other words: Global justice as impartiality would prevail, whereas global justice as mutual recognition would play a limited role. At the same time, global justice as non-domination is a powerful normative principle that tends to structure international politics, and a principle the EU will need to take into account in its norm and interest promotion. Furthermore, the Union is a hybrid multi-level polity that combines supranational principles with intra-state processes and negotiations (Bartolini 2005; Fossum 2015). Accordingly, an underlying notion of global justice as non-domination would presumably compete with the impartiality impetus in EU's external affairs. However, we could reasonably expect the latter to be stronger in the gender equality policy domain than in many other policy domains, due to the relatively limited risks and the EU's considerable track-record when it comes to women's rights advocacy in international politics.

Equipped with the GLOBUS framework and the above expectations, we will in the following section assess the constellation of global justice conceptions that the Beijing consensus seems to have been built on. This assessment will be made on the basis of a close reading and interpretation of the 1995 Beijing Declaration. Primarily, this Beijing consensus document indicates a rare agreement reached among UN member states on an ambitious gender equality agenda. However, several studies have firmly established the EU as a key designer and promoter of this agenda, and the Beijing Declaration – and will in this paper – be read as proxy for what the EU's approach to gender equality in external affairs amounted to in global justice terms at the time.⁶

In the section after, a follow-up study of the Beijing +20 process and the EU's role in it – two decades after the 1995 success – will be scrutinised on the basis of a broader

5 That a policy issue is low salience implies that citizens and politicians rank its importance as low (Oppermann and Viehrig 2011). Gender equality is seldom mentioned among topics with high salience – it is therefore considered as typically falling outside the domain of core state interests (Moravcsik 2002).

6 This move is not unproblematic, as the EU's more detailed primary positions are likely to have differed from the Beijing declaration and platform on some or more points. Closer scrutiny of the particularities of the relationship between the agenda the EU promoted at the 1995 event, and the agenda that was ultimately agreed upon, will however be left for another occasion. This paper takes it, rather, that the Union supported and promoted key features of the Beijing declaration and platform, an assumption that is firmly supported by several previous studies.

set of data. What remains to be investigated for this later stage of the Beijing track is not only the underlying constellation of global justice conceptions and whether this constellation had shifted, but also what the EU did and did not push for. Both questions will be addressed on the basis of a combined use of documentary sources, media reports and interviews with representatives from the women's movement and gender experts.⁷ The analysis of the relative prevalence of different global justice conceptions relies on UN Beijing +20 public documents, including the final statement from the New York 2015 conference, in combination with media coverage of this event and interviews with experts and stakeholders. The establishment of the EU's role and approach has been made on the basis of reading official EU documents from the Beijing +20 process,⁸ documents produced by the European Women's Lobby (EWL) and EWL national member organisations that were active in the mobilisation up to and after the Beijing +20 process, and the interview material.

The Beijing Consensus: Global justice conceptions in the Declaration and Platform for Action

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is the 130 page concluding document that 'we, the Governments participating in the Fourth World Conference⁹ on Women' recommended for endorsement by the UN General Assembly (Beijing Declaration 2015: Annex I, 1.).¹⁰ That the declaration and platform were stated in the name of 'we, the Governments', with the governments of the General Assembly or 'States' as a main addressee, can come as no surprise. This is a reminder of the significance of the state system and the principle of state sovereignty in international politics, and thus also the considerable relevance of the idea of global justice as non-domination. Consistently throughout the document these 'Governments' and 'States' and their responsibilities

⁷ Five interviews were conducted with two high level staff members at the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), two representatives from the European Women's Lobby (EWL), and a European Parliament staff member involved in the Beijing +20 process. The following newspapers were searched: The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Guardian, Financial Times, Die Zeit, Le Monde and El Pais. In addition, Scandinavian newspaper's reporting on the process and event were included in the material. The searches were made in these newspapers' public web archives in the period from January 2014 to June 2015. This time span captures coverage of UN Beijing +20 during the 2014 national and regional review processes, and media reports and debates in the aftermath of the New York proceedings (March 9-15, 2015).

⁸ Documents relied on to establish the EU's position in the Beijing +20 process have been reports and preparatory documents produced by EIGE and the FEMM-committee of the European Parliament. These have been checked against CSW reports from the regional Beijing +20 review processes.

⁹ The previous UN women's conferences were in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985).

¹⁰ The conference's recommendation is split into Annex I, the Declaration, and Annex II, the Platform of Action. The Annex I is a four page statement. Annex II consists of six chapters, where three brief introductory chapters, 'Mission statement!' (Chapter I), 'Global Framework' (Chapter II.) and 'Critical Areas of Concern' (Chapter III) are followed by the substantive fourth chapter, 'Strategic objectives and actions', which elaborates on the twelve selected target areas: women and poverty, education and training of women, women and health, violence against women, women and armed conflict, women and the economy, women in power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, human rights of women, women and the media, women and the environment, and the girl child. The two final chapters are 'Institutional Arrangements' (Chapter V.) and 'Financial Arrangements' (Chapter VI.).

are given primary importance: in a self-evident manner, ‘the actions to be taken by governments’ are listed first – and before ‘actions to be taken’ by other parties – when measures to be taken under the twelve critical areas of concern are elaborated (Annex II, IV.). Similarly, both the chapters on ‘institutional arrangements’ and on ‘financial arrangements’ start out with addressing ‘the national level’ (Annex II, V. and VI.).

However, a notion of global justice as impartiality also holds a central position in the declaration and platform of action. For one thing, the expected impartiality approach is visible in a range of passages that stress how individuals, and not communities or states, are the primary normative units. The vocabulary is that of human rights, ‘women’s rights’ as ‘human rights’, and ‘the inherent human dignity of women and men’ (Annex I, 8., 14.), and the goal is ‘equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of all humanity’ (Annex I, 3.). To be sure, global justice as non-domination would also allow for such declarations in UN statement documents, but one would have expected precautions to be added that emphasised the autonomy and sovereignty of states. The Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, however, presents a rather unconditional, person-oriented, rights-based approach. It is granted that ‘the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind’, but stressed that it is ‘the duty’ – no less – ‘of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms’ (Annex II, Chapter II, 9.).

Secondly, the 1995 Beijing consensus pursued ambitious ideas of individual autonomy and human flourishing, as well as substantive notions of gender equality. In addition to ensuring rule of law and political rights for women, the declaration and platform recommend redistributive measures that address ‘inequality in economic structures and policies’ (Annex II, Chapter III, 44.) and legislation and policies to protect women from physical, sexual and environmental harm, damaging stereotypes and cultural oppression. It also recommends the establishment of ‘gender-sensitive’ institutional mechanisms and administrative principles (such as ‘gender mainstreaming’) and structures (such as ‘machineries for the advancement of women’) to actively promote all women’s and men’s equal standing and ‘the empowerment and advancement of women’ (Annex I, 19., Annex II, Chapter IV.H.). Once more, this is more in line with global justice as impartiality than with a notion of justice as non-domination. The latter would typically and more explicitly balance substantive gender equality ambitions with a concern for the right of states’ to design policies and institutions and to pursue their own definitions and ranking of interests and goals.

Thirdly, and yet again in accordance with the impartiality expectation, the Beijing 1995 consensus emphasised the role of international bodies and binding legal mechanisms. The focus is consistently on the key role of ‘international law’ (for example Annex I, 33.), ‘international organisations’ and ‘institutions’ and ‘regional organisations’ (Annex II, V. and VI.). Accordingly, the elaboration of measures to be taken under the twelve critical areas of concern addresses governments, but also explicitly, in detail and in area-specific ways the international and regional levels (Annex II, Chapter IV.). In addition, the chapters on institutional and financial arrangements include non-

trivial sections on the 'international' as well as the 'regional and sub-regional' levels (Annex II, Chapters V. and VI.). Unsurprisingly, these elaborations include references to UN treaties, agencies and regional structures. However, there is also repeated reference to international and regional organisations outside the UN, and to the need for deeper international cooperation and cross-national institution-building in the gender equality area.

It is far from self-evident that a statement document of this kind designed by the participating 'Governments' in Beijing and addressed to the UN General Assembly government representatives would provide such a prominent place to international treaties, structures and mechanisms. That being said, the notion of impartiality central to this document could also have been stronger. Significantly, there is no explicit call for more supranational decision-making in international organisations neither in the declaration nor in the platform, even if the global order that is sketched out is arguably one that would be friendly towards supra-nationalism. Moreover, and importantly, not least in the context of this paper's discussions, the list of international organisations and bodies mentioned outside the UN family (the World Trade Organisation, the World Bank, etc.) does not include the EU. This is noteworthy in a document produced in a process where EU institutions and member states are known to have played a decisive role. At the same time, it may have been regarded as inappropriate for the EU to promote itself too outspokenly in a UN document signed by 'we, the Governments'. The relatively strong focus in several of the platform chapters on an unspecified 'regional level' and unlisted 'regional organisations' (in addition to UN regional structures), however, does suggest the Union's presence between the lines.

Finally, the conception of global justice as mutual recognition is also remarkably present in this declaration and platform document, and more central than expected. The relatively strong participatory features of the proceedings at the 1995 event already hints at this, but a textual analysis of the Declaration and Platform of Action also reveals a noteworthy concern for context and pluralism. For example, it focuses on how gender equality must be defined and developed bottom-up, through democratic and inclusive procedures, and in partnership with movements and organisations in civil society. Early on, the declaration states the need for 'acknowledging the voices of all women everywhere' and 'the diversity of women and their roles and circumstances' (Annex I, 4.). It also highlights how 'women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental' (Annex I, 13.). More concretely, this implies 'the participation and contribution of all actors of civil society, particularly women's groups and networks and other non-governmental organisations and community-based organisations, with full respect for their autonomy' (Annex I, 20.). Throughout the platform for action this key role of civil society – and women's organisations in particular – is consistently elaborated on as vital for inclusion and democracy, as well as for 'equality, development and peace' (perhaps most extensively in the chapter on institutional arrangements, see Annex II, Chapter 5.).

Passages of this kind also make visible latent conflicts between the global justice conceptions that our discussion relies on. To be sure, these conceptions are not inherently ‘mutually exclusive’ (Eriksen 2016: 4), and can be combined in ways that are more or less sound. However, central concerns for these justice notions also seem to draw in opposite directions, like when global justice as non-domination prescribes respect for state sovereignty as principle, whereas justice as impartiality regards states as having relative value depending on how well they ensure equal individual rights for all. Similarly, an idea of mutual recognition that regards global justice as constituted bottom-up does not necessarily go well with an idea of impartial justice understood as a pre-defined moral scheme of individual rights. Or to put it in the vocabulary of the Beijing Declaration: It is not completely straightforward to both bear properly in mind ‘particularities’ and varied ‘backgrounds’, while at the same time disregard these particularities and backgrounds as a ‘duty’ when they complicate the implementation of the rather substantive notion of gender equality underlying many of the Beijing 1995 recommendations (Annex II, Chapter II, 9.)

Beijing +20: A new constellation of justice conceptions

What then had happened two decades later? In what ways had the composition of global justice conceptions changed? Did the EU still fill a position as norm and policy promoter in 2015 – and if so, what exactly was promoted? Notably, the UN Beijing +20 conference held in New York in 2015 did not take place as the Fifth World Conference on Women, but was organised as the 59th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW59). The aim of the session was double. First, it sought ‘to undertake a review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action’ from 1995, but also of ‘the outcome documents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development, and peace for the twenty-first century”’. Secondly, it aimed to ensure ‘the acceleration of the implementation’ of the Beijing 1995 recommendations into the ‘post-2015 development agenda’ (Political Declaration on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of the Fourth Conference on Women 2015). Moreover, there had been multiple review processes prior to the New York conference: UN member countries had reviewed their efforts to implement the Beijing platform and made reports;¹¹ the regional commissions of the UN had organised regional intergovernmental meetings, including one for Europe;¹² and UN organisations as well as civil society groups and the women’s movement had convened review activities (CSW 2015a: 3).

¹¹ See ‘Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000) in the context of the twentieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action 2015. Guidance note for the preparation of national reviews.’ (2015) [online] UN Women. Available at: <https://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-documents/Beijing20/beijingguidancenote-en.pdf> [Accessed 11 May 2018]

¹² The Beijing +20 Regional Review Meeting Co-hosted by ECE and UN Women was held in November 2014 under the heading ‘Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls for sustainable development in the ECE region’.

The document from the Beijing +20 process most directly comparable to the 1995 Declaration and Platform of Action is the agreed upon five page Political Declaration from the CSW59 session (Political Declaration 2015). Early on in the process, it became clear that this declaration would be formulated as a brief statement without the attachment of a more detailed action platform. Women's organisations' representatives and gender experts report both in interviews and through media coverage that they all in all supported this brief format, fearing that a more extensive document would contribute to reverse the Beijing 1995 agenda further. Still, this stripped down final statement is characterised by interviewees as a 'disappointment', as lacking 'substantive conclusions', as being 'without progression', and as a 'backlash'.

From the perspective of our global justice conceptions, these grievances must be read in light of what could be interpreted as a weakening of the impartiality and mutual recognition approaches in the 2015 Political Declaration compared to the Beijing Declaration. To be sure, initially, the 2015 Declaration does 'reaffirm' the Beijing agenda (Political Declaration 2015, 1.). However, the impartiality impetus identified as fundamental to the Beijing consensus twenty year earlier arguably has a much weaker presence. First, the idea of 'women's rights as human rights' is visibly toned down. Whereas the Beijing Declaration and Platform talked consistently of the 'duty' of and 'obligations' to ensure women's 'human rights' and 'human dignity' and spelled out different more concrete implications, the New York declaration commits to the realisation of women's and girls' 'human rights and fundamental freedoms' in passing in an introductory passage.

Secondly, as noted by both civil society representatives and expert observers, the 2015 Declaration is written in a different vocabulary: 'the language was changed', 'the Beijing language was gone', to quote from one of the interviews. The toned down human rights framing is one example. Another example is how the gender relationship, gender inequalities and women's oppression are conceptualised. On this point, it is illustrative to compare the New York declaration draft initially put on the table by the CSW (2015b: 45-47), to what 'we the ministers and representatives of Governments' in the end came to subscribe to in the Political Declaration. From this comparison we see how certain conceptualisations, such as the aim of 'gender parity' in political processes and the ambition to 'transform the economy to achieve gender equality' are deleted from the final statement (CSW 2015b, 7.). However, there are also some noteworthy additions, such as the Political Declaration's emphasis on recognising 'the positive role and contribution of women' and a new section on 'the importance of the full engagement of men and boys' (Political Declaration, 6. and 11.). The combination of the relative absence of a clear human rights approach, and the retreat from more radical notions of redistributive and political equality and women's empowerment that was underlying the Beijing documents, as well as the less accentuated criticism of male dominance and institutional and structural shortcomings, all contribute to a notion of justice that stands out as more distanced from ideas of impartiality.

Thirdly, the level of commitment is arguably lower in the 2015 Political Declaration compared to the original Beijing consensus. 'It was just a list of "We need to..."', "We

must recognise...”, as it is put by one of the interviewed civil society representatives. Moreover, a comparison between the draft from CSW and the final Political Declaration is yet again clarifying. We find for example that formulations about committing ‘to achieve measurable results by 2020’ and of ‘accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform’ are removed (CSW 2015b 7. and 8.). Once more, there is a move away from the idea of a duty to pursue impartial justice

Finally, international law, international bodies and supranational processes are key to the conception of global justice as impartiality, and the shift from the Beijing to the New York consensus also represents a shift from a consistent focus on international and regional commitments, institutions and organisations to almost full silence on the role of international cooperation and international bodies. The exception is a very general ‘reaffirmation’ of ‘the primary responsibility of the Commission on the Status of Women for the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women’ (Political Declaration 2015: 1).

At the same time, we also find fewer expressions of the conception of global justice as mutual recognition in the 2015 Political Declaration. An early indication of this was the many complaints in the media from civil society and women’s groups present at CSW59 on the lack of broader participation during the conference. One of the interviewed remembers the event as ‘a super-frustrating experience. There was one open meeting Monday morning, we had ten minutes. After that, access to what happened was closed, and we received no information’. This experience contrasts sharply both with the inclusive mode that facilitated the Beijing success twenty years earlier, but also more generally with a bottom-up, pluralist idea of global justice built on the recognition of different voices and perspectives.

Unsurprisingly, this lack of dialogue with and real presence of civil society during proceedings is translated into a final statement where the role of civil society groups and organisations, grass-root initiatives and the women’s movement in ensuring global justice and gender equality is considerably less pronounced. Illustratively, longer passages in the CSW draft that ‘welcome the major contributions made by civil society, including women’s and community-based organisations and feminist groups to the implementation of the Platform of Action’, and oblige states to ‘commit to increase resources and support’ (CSW 2015b, 13.), are deleted from the final declaration.

On top of this, the Beijing +20 conference agreed on an additional statement on the future organisation of CSW proceedings, heavily criticised by activists and feminists both in media reports and in our interview material, for leaving non-governmental organisations and women’s groups with a marginal role. The statement embeds the CSW’ main responsibility for the post-Beijing review and implementation process in a broader organisational structure where a prominent place is given to ‘a ministerial segment’ that will include ‘ministerial round tables or other high-level interactive dialogues to exchange experiences, lessons learned and good practices’ (Resolution of future organization [Resolution] 2015, 4.). In addition, input under each session is to be taken from ‘not more than two interactive expert panels or other interactive dialogues to identify key initiatives and strategies’ (Resolution 2015, 8.). Clearly, ‘the traditional

importance of non-governmental organisations' is not completely overlooked; 'such organisations should be encouraged to participate to the maximum extent possible in the work of the CSW', although within the designated limitations (Resolution 2015, 18.). They should also be allowed 'to deliver statements on themes relevant to the discussions' under CSW sessions (Resolution 2015, 19.). Yet, the overall impression is that the role of broad participation is to be rather minor. Once more, the global consensus of gender equality seems to have become further removed from the mutual recognition approach to global justice and the participatory promises of the 1995 Beijing agenda.

Correspondingly, while the justice notions of impartiality and mutual recognition seem to have become less prevalent in global gender equality politics, at least if we are to judge on the basis of the UN Beijing +20 event and process, we witness a revival of global justice as non-domination. When ambitious ideas of equal individual rights, substantive gender equality, international duties, pluralism and broad participation give way, the alternative is a world order and global approach to gender, equality and women's empowerment that emphasises the primary role of states to make definitions and decisions and sees international cooperation as an essentially voluntary activity. The introduction of 'the ministerial segment' and 'high-level dialogues' in CSWs future proceedings is an expression of this (Resolution 2015, 4.). The de-institutionalised way in which international relations are described in the Political Declaration and the limited reference to international law is another. To be sure, global justice as impartiality and as mutual recognition are still present in a rudimentary form and as non-trivial opportunities for the future through the reaffirmation of the Beijing Declaration. However, contrary to the 1995 consensus where justice as impartiality and mutual recognition prevailed, while justice as non-domination remained in the background, the 2015 Political Declaration uses impartiality and recognition as more of a backdrop, while non-domination has become more central.

The question then is whether there is reason to think that this shift in the relative weight placed on different global justice conceptions was pushed forward by the EU. The EU was a central norm and policy promoter in Beijing, but what was the role of the Union before and in New York? Generally, the EU seems to have played a rather active role also in the Beijing +20 process. National review processes took place in EU member countries previous to the CSW 59th session, and both documentary sources and interviews highlight the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) in a major coordinating role. EIGE has over several years been central in the EU's work with monitoring both gender equality developments and the implementation of policy in member states after Beijing. The institute delivers, as part of this work, an annual Beijing report for discussion in the Council of the European Union. In 2015 EIGE's report on progress and challenges based on Beijing agenda criteria measured key developments in the EU and the member states from 2007 to 2012 (EIGE 2015) Also the Standing Group on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) was active in preparations and review processes before the CSW59,¹³ and the list of speakers at the Beijing +20 Regional Review Meeting in 2014 organised by UN Women and UN Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) included both the Director of Equality, DG Justice, from the European Commission (Salla Saastamoinen) and the

¹³ See for example Debusscher (2015)

Director of EIGE (Virginija Langbakk).¹⁴ Finally, a delegation representing the Union including representatives from the European Commission and the FEMM committee took part in the New York meeting.

Our data does not include detailed information on the EU delegation's role and the actions and interactions of EU member states' representatives during the behind closed doors proceedings. This makes it hard to assess both the level of activity and the more exact positions taken by the EU and state representatives at this decisive stage of the Beijing +20 process. What we know from the different publicly available EU documents produced in preparation for the New York conference is that, officially, the EU's ambitions were high: the aim was to both reaffirm and contribute to the progression of the Beijing agenda and for the EU to take a global 'leadership role'.¹⁵ Thus, in these documents global justice as impartiality and the familiar Beijing vocabulary still dominate. Interviews also confirm the impression of the EU as 'a very progressive actor, together with countries such as Norway and Sweden'. Importantly, it is argued that the EU manages 'to talk with one voice' on gender equality issues in international affairs. 'There are of course different opinions among the 28 members', one interviewee notes, 'but, I mean, internationally Ireland is good on sexual rights. It is the same with Hungary, Poland, Malta, and Cyprus. They take on the most inclusive position on sexual rights as part of the EU voice'. In short, based on the investigations conducted as the basis for this paper, there is little evidence that the EU actively pushed for a shift from a conception of global justice as impartiality to a conception of non-domination during the Beijing +20 process. Rather, the Union seems to both advocate the former conception, and to exemplify it in the way it sometimes takes on a supranational role in global gender equality politics.

As for the conception of global justice as mutual recognition, the original expectation was that it would not have the most central place in the EU's norm promotion. However, previous studies and our analysis of the 1995 Beijing agenda showed that this justice notion was after all quite prevalent at that point. In the Beijing +20 process, the EU's merits with respect to pluralism and inclusion seem to be mixed. On the one hand, the cooperation between EU units such as EIGE and FEMM, civil society and women's organisations is reported to be extensive and substantive. This is confirmed both by interviews with representatives of the European Women's Lobby (EWL) and a systematic review of EWL documents on this organisation's Beijing +20 activities and mobilisation. Furthermore, interviewees also mention the EU as one of few remaining allies in the struggles to uphold a firm role for civil society and women's organisations in international politics in a situation where proponents of gender equality say they experience an increasingly rough and less friendly environment for progressive advocacy. On the other hand, even if the EU comes out comparatively well in the eyes of the European women's movement, there is frustration with the EU delegations' lack of openness during international negotiations due to 'diplomatic concerns'. One interviewee states on this background that in processes such as the UN Beijing +20 it is better for organisations such as the EWL to work more cross-regionally on a movement

¹⁴ Beijing +20 Regional Review Meeting Co-hosted by ECE and UN Women 6-7 November 2014.

¹⁵ The expression is used several times in the FEMM commissioned study (Debusscher 2015).

level, mobilising from below, rather than striving for a too close partnership with the EU. Several of those interviewed also question the lack of direct contact between EU organisations and delegations and non-European non-governmental organisations. 'Instead they ask us to contact like-minded NGOs in other countries to get information about their position and ask them to push their governments, in Chile or Russia say. Then they can use this as pressure in their diplomacy', one EWL representative notes, and comments: 'This is imperialistic, I mean, to work on civil society in Latin-America, Asia, Africa, for them, it is not part of our mandate.'

Concluding reflections

We can thus conclude that our analysis in part confirms and in part disconfirms our expectations. The Beijing 1995 agenda reflects a notion of gender justice as impartiality – as expected, given the EU's role in its formulation and promotion. The notion of global justice as non-domination has more of a secondary role. However, more unexpectedly, the notion of global justice as mutual recognition is given a central position as well, and is a reminder that the EU's focus on inclusion and participation, which is known to be limited, may vary between policy areas and occasions. In the UN Beijing +20 process, the EU was considered an ally for civil society and women's organisations compared to other global players. However, non-governmental organisations also have grievances, and call for more transparency and information from EU delegations and representatives during international proceedings, and more direct EU-level contact with non-European civil society in the gender equality area. The considerable impartiality impetus in the EU's promotion of gender equality in global politics seemed to persist during the 2015 process. However, our data material is limited, and actors promoting gender justice as impartiality and mutual recognition in the end had limited success at the New York event. The Political Declaration and other statements from the conference reflect primarily a conception of global justice as non-domination.

We can thus identify a shift in the relative importance of different global justice conceptions on the international gender equality scene from 1995 to 2015. On the basis of this study, we can only speculate, but this shift likely reflects changes in global power politics, where China is on the rise, EU-Russia conflicts have intensified, and alliances among both catholic countries and conservative Christians, and Muslim countries, show persistence. Several of our informants reflect on this 'new power game' that is characteristic of international politics, and the role of countries such as Russia and Iran, and particular actors, such as the Vatican, in pushing for standstills and setbacks. Media coverage also confirms the picture of an event and a process where powerful international players were more concerned with restricting and narrowing down the women's rights agenda and emphasising the prerogative of states to manage gender, sexuality and equality issues as internal issues, than with enhancing the Beijing consensus and ambitions from 1995.

The prospects of achieving global agreement on demanding gender equality requirements and policies are unlikely to have increased after Donald Trump's victory in the US presidential election. 'There is certainly a before and after', one interviewee notes, 'and the US used to be relatively progressive'. Maybe it has also become harder

to separate low and high salience: gender policy seems to no longer be a soft area on the side-if it ever was—but is increasingly becoming ‘big politics’. Scholarship has already established the 1995 UN Beijing conference as a significant event where established and emerging normative actors and actor coalitions on the global scene, the US, the EU, China, coalitions of Muslim countries, the Vatican etc., clashed over key interests. Impressions from the Beijing +20 process suggest similar and even intensified clashes, including the occurrence of new constellations and conflict patterns.

All this may make it harder for the EU and other actors to push the gender equality agenda beyond global justice as non-domination—if, indeed, this is what they aim at. The latter years’ economic stagnation and austerity policies, in combination with a rise in votes for populist and conservative parties across Europe, has pushed gender equality further down on the agenda in several EU countries, as well as in EU-level institutions (Kantola and Lombardo 2017). Over time, we cannot be surprised if this spreads to the EU’s external affairs.

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