

TOWARDS GLOBAL POLITICAL COMMUNITIES AND NEW CITIZENSHIP REGIMES

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Abstract: Until now, attempts to identify a meeting point between the preservation of a universal political identity and maintaining national forms of belonging seem to find little application in the policies of world governments. Consequently, the idea of the individual as a citizen of the world is exposed to the risk of becoming an aspirational ideal devoid of practical and objective translations. In this regard, Theresa May's recent criticism of a concept of world citizenship separate from any ethnic or national membership is an ideal starting point for reflecting on the intrinsic tensions of cosmopolitan political thought regarding citizenship. In response to the distant origin of the conflict between the universalist vision of man and the particular dimension of political participation, the article opens with a brief historical excursus of the principles of cosmopolitanism from classical antiquity to modern political thought, before arriving at a series of reflections on the changing of these values in today's globalized scene. This study allows us to describe the evolution of the long tradition on which the universal human rights enshrined after the end of the Second World War are established. Universal human rights seem to be closely connected to the Age of Enlightenment's cosmopolitan principles of hospitality and solidarity. Although today's increasing social and political integration seems to facilitate the observation of the right to Kantian hospitality, it is noted that the right to asylum and the physical vulnerability of the individual are increasingly suspended or canceled by the same States who claim to be custodians of the universal values of man. Well known evidence of these contradictions are the tragic living conditions of migrants hosted in European hotspots, but also the treatment of the so-called Dreamers in the United States. Exploring the worthiness of the problem of the civil and political status of the growing number of migrants in the world, the need to guarantee access of citizenship benefits to foreigners is emphasized, in the hope that international solidarity practices on which cosmopolitan thought is based will continue to find application in current and future societies.

Keywords: global citizenship, political communities, cosmopolites, migrations, solidarity.

During a conference of the Conservative Party held in October 2017, the British Prime Minister, Mrs. Theresa May, is quoted as having said: "If you believe you're a citizen of the world, you're a citizen of nowhere. You don't understand what the very word 'citizenship' means" (Bearak 2016). Commentators were quick to parse the meaning of this sentence in terms of right-wing populism, xenophobia, and in particular, May's signal to the conservative party base that immigration from the EU and elsewhere to

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Britain would be stopped and the “British” way of life would be protected.

Surely, all these subliminal messages may have been suggested by Mrs. May’s claim. But ironically this sentence also gave expression to long-standing – and by no means easily dismissed – anxieties in western political thought as to whether citizenship could be reconciled with globalism, as to whether a citizen of the polis could also be a citizen of an empire of a *globus*. *Globus et locus* – are they reconcilable?

A brief excursus into the history of political thought will illuminate the tensions that are intrinsic to cosmopolitanism.

The term *cosmopolites* is composed of *kosmos* (the universe) and *polites* (citizen), a tense unity which runs through centuries of political thought. Montaigne recalls that Socrates was asked:

Where he came from. He replied not “Athens”, but “the world”. He, whose imagination was fuller and more extensive, embraced the universe as his city, and distributed his knowledge, his company, and his affections to all mankind, unlike us who only look at what is under foot (Montaigne 1965: 116)¹.

Whether or not Socrates said anything of this kind is in dispute, but the story is repeated by Cicero in *Tusculum Disputationes*, by Epictetus in his *Discourses*, and by Plutarch in *De Exilio*, where he praises Socrates for saying that “he was no Athenian or Greek, but a Cosmian” (Montaigne 1965: 7)².

What does it mean to be a Cosmian? To live outside the boundaries of the city, according to Aristotle, one needs to be either a beast or a God, but since men were neither and since the *kosmos* was not the *polis*, the *kosmopolites* was not really a citizen at all but some other kind of being.

To cynics such as Diogenes Laertius this conclusion was not particularly disturbing, since he claimed that rather than being at home in the city, the cosmopolitan was *indifferent* to all cities. The *kosmopolites* was a nomad without a home, at peace with nature and the universe but not with the city, from whose follies he distanced himself.

The negative vision of cosmopolitanism as a form of nomadism without attachments to a specific human city is transformed by the Stoics who turn away human follies to contemplating the

wisdom of the *kosmos*. By drawing attention to the absurd and incompatible plurality of human *nomoi* and customs, Stoics argue that what human share is not their *nomoi*, but their *logos*, that in virtue of which they are capable of reason. In his *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius wrote: “If we have intelligence in common, so we have reason (logos) [...] if so, then the law is common to us and, if so, we are citizens. If so we share a common government. And if so, the universe is, as it were, a city” (McMahon 2008: 9). In the centuries that follow, the Stoic doctrine of natural law merges with the Christian ideal of *the city of God* as distinguished from *the city of men*, and eventually finds its way into the modern natural right theories of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Kant.

The negative and positive dimension of the term *kosmopolites*, which we first encounter in Greek and Roman thought, accompany the term across the centuries, and reverberate even into the 19th and 20th centuries with expressions such as “rootless cosmopolitanism”. But it is first Kant who gives the term *kosmopolites* a new meaning by placing the concept of “world-citizenship” at the heart of the Enlightenment project. In the Third Definite Article of his famous treatise of 1795 on “Perpetual Peace,” Kant wrote: “The law of world citizenship shall be limited to conditions of universality hospitality” (“Das Weltbürgerrecht soll auf Bedingungen der allgemeinen Hospitalität eingeschränkt sein”) (Kant 1923). Hospitality is then defined as “the right of a stranger not to be treated as enemy when he arrives in the land of another”. It is notable that “hospitality” is not a moral virtue such as generosity or solidarity we may show to the other, but a “right” to which all human beings are entitled in virtue of “having common possession of the surface of the earth” (die Erdkugel). But this right is not unlimited: the intentions of the stranger must be peaceful in coming upon the land of another; furthermore, hospitality only gives one a right to seek contact and commerce with strangers; it is a right of visitation and not a right to stay upon the land of another. This can only be granted through a special “beneficent agreement”.

In the 18th century, then world-citizenship meant in the first place commercial expansion and the search for contact with other cultures. The entanglement of European Enlightenment and western imperialism, particularly the forced opening of China and Japan to western trade, after the colonization of the Americas, is

central to this story. The story of cosmopolitanism and that of western imperialism are intricately woven together. But in this period we do not only encounter the belief in “le doux commerce”, as a force uniting and bringing peoples together but also the idea of a “world public opinion”, through which, as Kant formulates it, “injustices committed in one part of the world affect us all”. Enlightenment and imperialism; expanding horizons of commerce and exchange and the growth of world public-opinion – are all in tense fashion and paradoxically linked with one another.

The conclusion I want to draw from this brief excursus into the history of political thought is that the contradictions between universalist visions of human reason and solidarity, and particularistic attachments to city, language, ethnicity and religion must be renegotiated and mediated anew in every age. Mrs. May unwittingly raised a serious question when expressing her doubts that global citizenship was possible. *Globus et locus* – how can they be mediated? How can they co-exist and productively influence one another – Or is the local already global as the title of our journal implies? What does cosmopolitanism mean in our days?

In the early decades of the twenty-first century, exile, statelessness and migration have emerged as universal experiences of humanity. In 2000, there were 175 million migrants out of 6 billion of the world’s population. In 2015 the number of international migrants – persons living in a country other than where they were born – increased by 41 per cent to reach 244 million worldwide (IOM 2016). It is not the absolute number of migrants or their proportion of the world’s population that merits attention but the fact that the number of migrants has grown *faster* than the world’s population in this period. There has been an intensification of migratory movements in the past decade and a half of the twenty-first century, and the condition of refugees has reached the crisis proportions first encountered after World War II. A report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees finds that 65.6 million, that is, one out of every 113 persons in the world, was displaced by conflict, violence, economic and ecological disasters in 2016 (UNHCR 2016).

The meaning of world citizenship and global political communities must be considered against this background: while in terms of absolute percentage, the ratio of migrants to the world population estimated to be around 7 billion, is a little under 4 per

cent, there is a sense of world-wide crisis about migratory movements, be they undertaken for the purposes of economic livelihood or to seek refuge. In an age when the movement of everything across borders, from capital to fashion, from germs to news, from “fake news” to bitcoins has accelerated, the movement of the human body across borders is jealously controlled and criminalized. The migrant’s body becomes the site of the manifestation of states’ power. But not only changing migratory patterns, but developments in international human rights law as well, have created new normative practices of citizenship. To understand these changes, it will be first useful to disaggregate citizenship into its three components. Analytically, citizenship is a status that entails certain institutional practices. These are: *a) Political membership and agency*. This is the core and oldest meaning of citizenship, defining the *polites* as the one who has the right to vote, to stand and run for office, to form political organizations, perform jury duty, and serve in the military; *b) Citizenship as belonging*. Citizenship also implies a more or less permanent form of historical and emotive attachment and a sense of belonging to a specific human community, be it an ethnic or a religious group, a nation or an empire, a federation or a city-state; *c) Social citizenship*. In most industrial liberal democracies and in many non-democratic regimes, having the status of citizenship implies access and entitlement to certain social rights and benefits. First theorized by the British sociologist, T.H. Marshall (1965), this dimension of citizenship brings with it in most liberal post WW II democracies, entitlements such as social security and old age pensions, health care benefits, unemployment insurance, child care and schooling subsidies, provisions for education in one’s own language etc. Most contemporary economic and political struggles in liberal democracies center around the entitlement to and distribution of these rights and benefits.

How are these analytical dimensions – political membership, belonging and social citizenship – to be reconfigured when considered from the perspective of the long and short-term migrant, temporary resident, refugee and asylum seeker? What rights and benefits are those who do not have the full status of citizenship entitled to?

The answer to this question leads to a consideration of the various universal and regional human rights regimes created in the

wake of WW II with the establishment of the UN and the success of anti-colonization struggles. One of the biggest transformation of the post-WW II sovereignty regime is the *uncoupling* or *unbundling* of the entitlement to human and some civil and political rights from the status of nationality and citizenship³. Since it is the *person qua human being* and not the *citizen* who is entitled to universal human rights – although disagreements abound about what should or should not be included in this list – the institution and practices of citizenship today are further disaggregated. To take some examples: most long-term residents of European Union countries, if they are EU citizens residing in a country other than that of their citizenship, are entitled to all the rights laid out in the Charter of European Rights and Freedoms. They can vote for local and regional parliaments in their countries of residency as well as for EU elections; but they cannot vote in the national elections of the countries involved. Heavily and bitterly contested is the question of an equivalent package of “socio-economic rights” for EU citizens. As is well-known, one of the biggest reasons behind the Brexit vote in the UK was resentment about having to grant equal entitlements to health care, unemployment benefits etc. to other EU country nationals and the burden this imposed on the UK budget.

The status of so-called “third country nationals”, i.e. residents in EU countries which are not citizens of countries belonging to the European Union (American, Turkish, Afghani, Mexican citizens, etc.), is often dependent upon the length of their residency. If they are long-term residents (say over 5 years), they are entitled to an almost equivalent package of socio-economic rights; in some EU countries, such as Germany, they cannot vote at any level of elections, whether municipal, regional or national, but in the Netherlands, Denmark, and the UK they can vote at the municipal, and in some cases, regional levels. Here we see the disaggregation effect of rights at work.

In the United States, permanent residents are likewise entitled to many social rights, such as social security and old-age pensions, unemployment benefits and health care, which accrue to them partially through their employment status; they have no voting rights except in local school boards, and do not serve in juries. Before the US abolished the draft, however, many permanent res-

idents served in the US army, and even today some still serve in the US volunteer army without having the proper status of citizenship.

Access to citizenship via naturalization procedures is an area that international law has not regulated very much; this domain remains a privilege of sovereignty and great human rights abuses can ensue from being an undocumented migrant or a temporary worker without the proper passport. This is an area of particular vulnerability for women originating in the Philippines, Malaysia, Bangladesh, etc. who work as maids, nannies, nurses in wealthy countries of the Gulf region, or in Singapore Malaysia, Hong Kong, and other countries (Ong 2009).

Let me conclude by turning to the status and rights of refugees and asylum seekers. Though universal and regional human rights regimes have led to a disaggregation effect of the “rights of others” who have the status of long or short-term residency in some country, the rights of asylum seekers, refugees and of undocumented migrants are “up for grabs” except for the supervision of UNHCR agencies and the largesse of receiving countries. What human and civil rights are these individuals entitled to? Are their due process rights respected? Are they provided proper legal counsel and even advice and instruction in their own language when they appear before Asylum Boards and Immigration officers? The refugee is increasingly treated not only as an alien body but as the enemy who is interned in detention camps, held in deportation sites, or in absurd Euro-bureaucratic parlance, gathered in “hotspots”.

It is surely a supreme historical irony that the European Union, emerging as it did out of the ashes of the Holocaust and with the bitter memory of two world wars behind it, should find itself at the point of unraveling in recent years because of the desired entry into Europe – among other factors to be sure – of 2 to 2.5 million Syrians and refugees from other countries. Surely, no one is being sent to labor or extermination camps although the number of detention camps is increasing. Furthermore, the European Union has failed to live up to its own human rights commitments by stamping refugees’ arms with indelible ink (as the Czech and Hungarian police did); by having them chased by police dogs and water cannons (as the Macedonians, Slovenians and Hungarians did), by subjecting them to excruciating limbo about their future lives, which Greece still does with the 50,000 unprocessed refu-

gees housed on the islands, and which France and the UK have done shamelessly by creating the now dismantled “jungle” in Calais.

In the United States which had always been considered the country of immigrants, a dangerous erosion of rights of due process, bodily integrity as well as right to privacy is beginning to take place for those held in detention centers for undocumented migrants (Resnick 2016). This was a process that began under the Obama Administration and has accelerated with the Presidency of Donald Trump. Even the rights of those who are full members of American society, in the sense of having grown up, having been socialized and educated in this country after they were brought here as children – the so-called DREAMERS, or in legal terminology, DACA’s or Deferred Action Childhood Arrivals – is greatly endangered today. Unless an immigration deal is reached by the US Congress in the coming months, many young people face the danger of deportation to countries of origin with which they are hardly familiar and whose languages they hardly know.

In conclusion then: global citizenship and the building of global political communities are aspirational ideals which in our world reflect the transnational reality of people’s lives. Yet, the tensions between the global and the local can only be resolved via acts of solidarity with the rights of strangers and others who are our neighbors and who come upon our shores to escape persecution and poverty and in search of a better life. And as citizens, we all have responsibilities in our respective republics to question the boundaries of our demos and ask why or how the stranger can become a co-citizen. This has to be one of the central missions of *glocalism* in our times.



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NOTES

¹ For a more detailed discussion from which this material is drawn, see S. Benhabib (2011), *Dignity in Adversity. Human Rights in Troubled Times* (Cambridge, UK and Malden, Mass.: Polity Press), pp. 3-6.

² For further references and discussion to these classical authors, see also D.M. McMahon (2008), *Fear and Trembling: Strangers and Strange Lands*, in “Daedalus”, 137, 3, pp. 5-17; A.A. Long (2008), *The Concept of the Cosmopolitan in Greek and Roman Thought*, in “Daedalus” 137, 3, pp. 50-58.

³ I have dealt with this question in greater detail in various writings of the last decades. See S. Benhabib (2004), *The Rights of Others. Aliens, Residents and Citizens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Italian translation (2006), *I diritti degli altri. Stranieri, residenti, cittadini* (Milan: Raffaello Cortina Editore); S. Benhabib (2005), *Another Cosmopolitanism. The Berkeley Tanner Lectures*, with J. Waldron, B. Honig and W. Kymlicka, ed. by R. Post (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

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