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Cosmopolitanism and patriotism: questions of identity, membership and belonging

We now live in a globalized world which influences international relations, world economy and diplomacy. The individual also faces the challenge of imagining and feeling part of the world, besides the obligations he owes to the state he belongs to. This conception is based on the idea that each individual has a significant role in the sense that they represent a relevant contribution for the world problems, for peace maintenance, for the global and equal distribution of goods and resources, for humanitarian assistance and for the protection of the human rights. The world citizen is therefore asked to be part of a compassionate world project, in a tolerant and understanding outlook of our fellow citizens, despite all the skeptical positions regarding this ideal.

We are, in fact, growingly faced with a plurality of identities, promoting thus a cosmopolitan way of life. According to Robin Cohen (1999), taking into account the three great forces which define our current world: globalization, multiculturalism and nationalism, the solution lies in cosmopolitanism because, on the one side, there is no other way and it's part of our global contemporary conditions and, on the other, only cosmopolitanism represents the right choice seeing that it considers the individual in a universal perspective. (Cohen, 1999: 25)

However, the respect for difference and cultural diversity was seriously threatened by the terrorist attacks of 9/11, which created an atmosphere of suspicion and skepticism regarding the 'Other'. Consequently, kindness to strangers was replaced with mistrust about

foreigners. The contrast between North and South, between The West and poor countries in Africa, in America and in Asia has also been a social and political concern shared by both western states, NGOs and other humanitarian associations. The big issue here is the solidarity among States. We can ask then the following questions: Is there a moral duty of helping the nations in need?; Does moral cosmopolitanism represent the hope of a universal redistribution of justice?; Is local identity threatened by the ideals of a world citizenship?

It is therefore our main purpose to try to answer these questions, by centring on the relevancy of the concept 'cosmopolitanism' in contrast with other forms of dealing with the 'Other', such as nationalism and multiculturalism. We will then reflect on the similarities and differences of cosmopolitanism and patriotism, focussing on the problems of world citizenship and accounting for the role of local/national identities, nowadays. Finally, we will try to demonstrate that cosmopolitanism, in its ideals of absence of roots and belonging to a national state represents a myth and a utopia. Nevertheless, cosmopolitanism stands for a political project that should not be overlooked.

In reality, the plurality of cultures and the awareness and, eventually, acceptance of the 'other', of the unknown, eased by the advance of technology and transports, in addition to the huge economic disparities between rich and poor, between globalised countries and globalizing ones endorse the consciousness of a cosmopolitan condition which represents a cosmopolitan empathy concerning the 'Others'.

Aimed at this reality, cosmopolitanism has assumed a transnational humanitarian insight. However, the ideals of world citizenship, so proclaimed by the Stoics, that is, the nonexistence of roots and the absence of allegiance to a state, are currently questioned and revised under a patriotic outlook. The need of national or local roots is defended by some authors (Appiah, 2006), and for some others (Nussbaum, 1996) love of country does not come after love of humanity[1]. Pheng Cheah calls our attention to the fact that a definition

[1] For Nussbaum, cosmopolitanism represents an exile from the comfort of local truths and from the protector feeling of patriotism and from the symbols of national belonging. Cosmopolitanism only offers love of humanity. (Nussbaum, 1996: 15-

of cosmopolitanism as an elitist absence of roots is inadequate. Hence, the author argues that the intellectual spirit underlying the notion of a world citizen is not absent of roots. However, one imagines a sphere of universal belonging that goes beyond the ties to a country: (Cheah, 2006:487)

> *(…) what is imagined is a universal circle of belonging that involves the transcendence of the particularistic and blindly given ties of kinship and country. Cosmopolitanism therefore embodies the universality of philosophical reason itself, namely its power of transcending the particular and contingent.*

Anthony Appiah, defender of the liberal tradition, advocates the theory of rooted cosmopolitanism, that is, the individual owes obedience to a civil society, respecting the state institutions as a citizen of that state, but always valuing human rights and cultural difference: (Appiah, 1998:106)

> *I have been arguing, in essence, that you can be cosmopolitan – celebrating the variety of human cultures; rooted – loyal to one local society (or a few) that you count as home; liberal – convinced of the value of the individual; and patriotic – celebrating the institutions of the state (or states) within which you live.*

The cosmopolitan patriot can, for Appiah, look for the possibility of the existence of a world where everyone is rooted cosmopolitan, linked to their national roots and cultural specificities, but benefiting from the existence of different places that represent home for other culturally diverse people. (Appiah, 1996: 22) The respect for difference is uttered through the model of conversation: (Appiah, 2006: xxi)

> *The world is getting more crowded; in the next half a century the population of our once foraging species will*

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17). This theory is refuted by some scholars (Appiah, Cheah, Hillary Putman) who consider that cosmopolitanism and patriotism are not that distinct, or that the two feelings are not incompatible.

> *approach nine billion. Depending on the circumstances, conversations across boundaries can be delightful, or just vexing: what they are mainly are, though, is inevitable.*

The dialogue does not necessarily generate consensus, especially when we speak about values. Nevertheless, dialogue is important when it comes to helping people to get used to the presence of the 'other'. Appiah, in our opinion, does not clear out a form of concrete relationship between different people. This ideal of cultural communication beyond borders seems equally difficult to achieve, since the task of making the existence of the 'other' concrete reveals itself extremely complex. Even when we try to imagine other lifestyles and other communities we just picture them abstractly (*cf.* Scarry, 1996). Furthermore, Appiah explains the application of the real practice of world citizenship to which he constantly appeals to in a superficial and inconsistent way.

Cosmopolitanism and patriotism, more feelings than ideologies (Appiah, 1996: 23), complement each other in the sense that they represent forms of belonging and they share the same ideals of respect for the other and association with a more restrict sphere within other wider circles. Hence, living in adequate spheres of moral concern, as Appiah advocates, must uphold the cosmopolitan ideal of life: (Appiah, 1996: 29).

> *It is because humans live best on a smaller scale that we should defend not only the state, but the county, the town, the street, the business, the craft, the profession, and the family, as communities, as circles among the many circles that are narrower than the human horizon, that are appropriate spheres of moral concern. We should, as cosmopolitans, defend the right to live in democratic states with rich possibilities of association within and across their borders, states of which they can be patriotic citizens. And as cosmopolitans, we can claim that right for ourselves.*

However, we agree with Immanuel Wallerstein (1996) when he asserts the idea that the virtues of patriotism and cosmopolitanism are neither abstract nor universal and the consequences of acting as a world citizen can lead to different results, depending on the time and

on the space one lives in, defining, thus, the attitudes concerning diversity: (Wallerstein, 1996: 122)

> *Those who are strong – strong politically, economically, socially – have the option of aggressive hostility toward the weak or magnanimous comprehension of 'difference'. In either case, they remain privileged. Those who are weak, or at least weaker, will only overcome disadvantage if they insist on the principles of group equality. To do this effectively, they may have to stimulate group consciousness – nationalism, ethnic assertiveness.*

One must also take into account nationality and the feeling of belonging to a more confined sphere when the cosmopolitan ideal is intended to be applied. In a first plan, our ties are more confined and associated with a community. To go beyond these ties would mean risking the loss of belonging to a place, to a country and even to the world (Barber, 1996: 34). Gertrude Himmelfarb (1996) also calls our attention to the utopian and illusive character of cosmopolitanism, focussing on the essential qualities of nation, such as family, race, religion, culture, communities in the individual's life: (Himmelfarb, 1996: 76-77)

> *Cosmopolitanism (…) obscures, indeed, the reality of the world in which a good many human beings actually reside. It is utopian, not only in its unrealistic assumption of a commonality of 'aims, aspirations, and values', but also in its unwarranted optimism. (…) To pledge one's 'fundamental allegiance' to cosmopolitanism is to try to transcend not only nationality but all the actualities, particularities, and realities of life that constitute one's natural identity. Cosmopolitanism has a nice, high-minded ring to it, but it is an illusion, and, like all illusions, perilous.*

We agree with the author on this notion of utopia and illusion underlying cosmopolitanism. In fact, our roots are based on familiar, local and national specific contexts that unavoidably shape our identity. Moreover, the cosmopolitan dream of creating a unified global government represents a seductive idea, but difficult to accomplish because conflicts of values and nationalist ambitions and

ideals that distinguish and oppose the many nations of the world will always subsist.

Moving on to a more positive insight on the concept 'cosmopolitanism', Charles Taylor (1996), as well as other authors (Walzer (2004), Nussbaum (1996) and Wallerstein (1996), asserts the idea of a civic education in order to enhance the underlying values of patriotism to attain cosmopolitan solidarity and a common moral ethics: (Taylor, 1996: 120)

> *(…) we need patriotism as well as cosmopolitanism because modern democratic states are extremely exigent common enterprises in self-rule. They require a great deal of their members, demanding much greater solidarity toward compatriots than toward humanity in general. We cannot make a success of these enterprises without strong common identification. And considering the alternatives to democracy in our world, it is not in the interest of humanity that we fail in these enterprises.*

However, there are still many political and economic constraints and different theories as far as the social treatment of difference is concerned which represent rejection sources and a barrier for the accomplishment of the project of cosmopolitanism. Multiculturalism and nationalism, as political, philosophical and social ideologies, represent, in our point of view, strategies to deal with all types of 'difference', such as cultural, ethnic or social. Nevertheless, the ideals of both multiculturalism and nationalism are divergent from the ideals of cosmopolitanism. One the one hand, multicultural procedures base themselves on the assumption of difference and alienation of the 'other' and, on the other, nationalism stands for homogeneity and sameness.

Multiculturalism safeguards utmost cultural freedom for every community within the national space. That can lead to perverse consequences, such as the seclusion of communities: (Beck, 2006: 67)

> *(…) multiculturalism postulates an essentialist identity and rivalry among cultures, though in a very diluted form. The strategy of multiculturalism presupposes collective notions of difference and takes its orientation from more or less*

> *homogeneous groups conceived as either similar to or different, but in any case clearly demarcated, from one another and as binding for individual members.*

Multiculturalism, in opposition to individualism, stands for the prospect of the different ethnic groups living side by side in the same State. Multicultural tolerance means acceptance of the other, even if it becomes a burden and a nuisance: (Beck, 2006: 67)

> *According to multiculturalism, there is no such thing as the individual. Individuals are merely epiphenomena of their cultures. Hence there is a direct line leading from the duality between Europe and its barbarian others, through imperialism, colonialism and Eurocentric universalism, to multiculturalism and 'global dialogue'. In each case individuals are conceived as members of territorial-hierarchical and ethnic-political units, which then engage in dialogue with one another 'across frontiers'.*

Nowadays, the trans-nationalisation of values and of ways of life allows a cultural permeability and the human rights universality is much more valued and protected. Negative words such as 'diaspora', 'mongrelism', 'cultural hybridism' start to acquire a more positive and realist association in view of the fact that there is a more conscious appraisal of the individual. However, this cultural plurality only becomes real and fully acknowledged within a national frame. (Breckenridge, 2002: 6)

Consequently, nationalism, representing the celebration of a group national belonging, denies difference on the inside, but produces and stabilizes it externally. (Beck, 56) There is thus a political solidarity only to the national citizens, excluding the 'Others', who have dissimilar rights concerning social security, for instance. This is one reason why other nations can be stigmatized as inferior. The distinction between 'us' and 'the others' is therefore used to promote national unity. In this context, nationalism for Beck must be modified into a cosmopolitan course as a way of mitigating the difference and avoiding social and national prejudice: (Beck, 2006: 62)

> *Only a nationalism modified in a cosmopolitan direction can exploit the political potential for cooperation between states,*

> *and thereby regain the ability to solve national problems under conditions of interdependence. A fusion of national and international strategies is necessary to check the potential for ethnic violence created by globalization both internally and externally, but without dismissing the difference as a 'premodern prejudice'.*

In fact, the nation, as a frame of public culture and political symbolism and of a mass culture oriented to the mobilization of citizens for the love and defence of the nation (Smith, 2001: 35), still represents, on the one hand, a powerful institution in the regulation of the cosmopolitan ideals concerning social justice, given that the richest nations could, effectively, have a say in the distribution of wealth and in the security of human rights on a world scale.

However, on the other hand, national identity will still represent a powerful restriction between the members of the nation and foreigners who are steered clear of full citizenship. These constraints reject cosmopolitanism, contradicting the ideal of world citizenship asserted by the cosmopolitans. Last century and presently, the recurring ethnic conflicts – for example, in the Rwanda Genocide in 1994, and now, the most recent one, in Republic of Congo –, the economic competition, the environmental clashes and the protection of the national security all concur with a rejection of the 'others' and, in addition, promote national identity and culture.

Cosmopolitanism, in its Stoic definition, is utopian and illusory (cf. Himmelfarb, 1996) because, as verified, there are many constraints, inevitable in our society, which prevent the success of the cosmopolitan ideals in their full outline. According to Appiah (2006: xx), cosmopolitanism represents an ideal and an adventure which should not be repudiated, but it is still a relevant political project that questions the moral position of the political communities.

Despite all the resurgent nationalisms and the non-immigration politics, there is today a more cosmopolitan conscience of the 'Other'. Globalisation and the consequent development of transports and technology shortened the distance between people. What happens in the world, bad news or good news, has become visible through the media. Some of those images cause repulse, pity and human solidarity but that's all. In most cases, these feelings symbolize mere pity and solidarity for the ones in need and real help is not rendered concrete.

One can, however, think of two premises of moral cosmopolitanism, global justice and cosmopolitan hope, to try to help people in need. The moral obligation to help others, asserted by Benhabib and Arendt, must, in reality, represent not only a local and national ethic principle but also universal.

Despite our political and economic competitive world, we should follow Immanuel Wallerstein's advice (1996: 124). For the author 'the best way to deal with our social reality is to try to understand that we are not citizens of the world but that we occupy particular niches in an unequal world'. We consider, nevertheless, that the defence of our national and local interests is not at all incompatible with the cosmopolitan attitudes of seeing the world. To sum up, and presenting our definition of cosmopolitanism, the real cosmopolitan is the one who feels at home everywhere he goes, respecting and following, yet, the rules of every nation he visits or lives in. Moreover, a cosmopolitan does not feel at home in a nation that does not respect humanist values, assumed as universal in the dominant paradigm of the European culture.

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