



COSMOPOLITAN CHALLENGES

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Why is the freedom to move and settle anywhere in the world not a fundamental human right?

Not even liberals, who ardently advocate the free flow of goods and information and abolishment of tolls and trade regulations, defend a corresponding free flow of human migrants across borders. Well, libertarians and some radical neo-liberals do, but pragmatic party politicians who often bow for (alleged) popular xenophobia deem them as extremists. The Danish case, where a formally liberal government is ruling with the support of a racist right-wing populist party, is an exception in Europe that may soon rather become the rule. And socialist internationalism is merely a nostalgic memory from a utopian past. Socialists and social democrats are in general more protectionist than their liberal and conservative counterparts are.

As a political project, *cosmopolitanism* seems forever stillborn. It certainly does not have any support in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations after the Second World War, at a time when a nation-state understanding of the world was all-prevailing, also as the guiding principle for the dismantling of European imperialism and liberation of the remaining colonies. The UN Charta of 1948 proudly states every individual's "right to a nationality" and clearly limits the right to freedom of movement and residence "within the borders of each state" (Article 13).

The very word 'cosmopolitan' has problematic connotations. "You imagine a *Comme des Garçons*-clad sophisticate with a platinum frequent-flyer card regarding, with kindly condescension, a ruddy-faced farmer in workman's overalls", as Ghana born philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah puts it in the introduction to his moral manifesto *Cosmopolitanism* (2006), which attempts at rescuing the disputed term and making it the basis for an "ethics in a world of strangers". He settles on the chosen title with some ambivalence, after dismissing the possible alternatives *globalization* –which "can seem to encompass everything, and nothing"– and multiculturalism –"which so often designates the disease it purports to cure".

The expression *cosmopolitan* –"citizen of the cosmos"– was coined in the 4th century BC by the Cynics as a rejection of the conventional view, then

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as now, that every civilized person belonged to a community among communities. It has remained an important undercurrent in Western philosophical thought and, although it has hardly ever exercised any real political influence, the cosmopolitan creed always seems to have provoked strong reactions. In the 20th century, its most deadly adversaries Hitler and Stalin made anti-cosmopolitanism synonymous with anti-semitism.

Although, as Appiah writes, the well-travelled polyglot is as likely to be among the worst off as among the best off –in a shantytown as well as at the Sorbonne, cosmopolitan retains its aura of mundane intellectualism. 'World citizen' is less image- and value-laden. Anyone can ascribe to that. But what does a world –or global– citizenship imply? The two thousand year-old question seems as propelling as ever.

In February 2008, the representatives of eight universities in Asia, Australia, Europe and North America met in Melbourne to lay the foundation for a joint international Master course in Global Citizenship. The meeting happened to coincide with the new Australian government's "national apology" to the country's aboriginal population, and in particular, to the still living "stolen generations" who were abducted from their black parents and adopted by white families, as part of the racist "White Australia" policy that informed immigration and all domestic politics until the mid 1970s. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's strikingly eloquent address could be regarded as mainly an act of national reconciliation, but the emotional power lay in its humanity, evoking "the elemental human tragedy of the removals". And as in the truth and reconciliation process in post-apartheid South Africa, the symbolic implications of the late Australian apology go far beyond the national borders.

Judd's urgent declaration that symbolism without substance becomes hollow sentimentality should apply to the notion of *global citizenship* as well. In order to become more than a mere symbolic gesture of global peace, love and understanding, it requires committed political action – and some tough challenges at that.

A citizen of the world. "How far can we take that idea?", asks Appiah. Are we really supposed to abjure all local allegiances and partialities in the name of the vast abstraction *humanity*? Doing so has often had, as history demonstrates, totalitarian and inhuman implications. Appiah's proposal is a "partial cosmopolitanism", which, by way of *conversation*, bridges the illusory divide between the West and the Rest, between locals and moderns, between "us" and "them". Certain values are, and should be, universal, and other values are, and must be, local. There is, however, no prospect for reaching a final consensus on how to rank and order these values: Therefore the insistence on a model of conversation.

This is where communication for development comes in. To some extent, global citizenship is necessarily, linked to the notion of global governance and a prerequisite for global governance is a global public sphere, as the

arena for the transcultural conversation and negotiation. It would seem obvious that the pursuit of a global awareness that informs political action not only requires communication; it is a process of communication.

However, the idea of cosmopolitanism may not be readily implemented in a field dominated by national agencies and bilateral cooperation, where the notion of 'community' has traditionally played a crucial role. Many ComDev practitioners would probably equal the empowerment of local communities with resistance against globalization, and they would most certainly not see their task as communicators as one of enhancing transnational flows.

Global citizenship may therefore become a challenging subtheme within the diverse field of communication for development, with the potential to move the field in a new direction. And, likewise, by means of strategic communication, cosmopolitanism may eventually at last appear as a feasible political alternative.



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