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COSMOPOLITANISM: THREE FACES

Last October, speaking to her party conference, British Prime Minister Theresa May, told her audience that “if you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere.” When I read this, I felt that this was, as the saying goes now, “*déjà vu* all over again.” It reminded me uncomfortably of the old epithet of “rootless cosmopolitans”, used over the years to denounce certain people as unpatriotic – not least in Russia, in old imperial, as well as Soviet eras, as an anti-Semitic slur. I am sure the Prime Minister had no such intentions, but it made me think once more of notions of cosmopolitanism.

I have a thirty-year personal history engaging with these. In 1987, I wrote a paper entitled *Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture* for an international conference in Seoul, on global cultural exchange. That paper was later published, first in the journal “Theory, Culture and Society”, and then in a book on global culture.¹ It dealt with cosmopolitanism as an expansive stance toward human diversity, in the sense of dealing with knowledge and even appreciation of varied meanings and meaningful forms – a matter of cultural outreach.

With time I have come to think of that as one of the faces of cosmopolitanism. But that as in the 1980s. Then the Cold War ended, its great divide running through humanity disappeared, and in the 1990s “globalization” also appeared as a keyword. Here, then, a second face of cosmopolitanism made a notable comeback. This was cosmopolitanism as cosmopolitics, a notion of community and citizenship at a more or less global level. In Academia, this became the favored understanding of political philosophers, who could remind themselves of the Stoics of Greek antiquity, and return to visit Königsberg, and Immanuel Kant’s *Perpetual Peace*, inspired by European current events some 200 years ago. But toward the end of the 20th century, this second face of cosmopolitanism also showed itself in political activism. Partly because the passage of the Cold War order had not everywhere gone altogether smoothly, “human rights” now figured prominently on a cosmopolitan agenda. Environmental changes were also seen as matters requiring active handling at a level beyond the nation-state, as they could not be contained within its boundaries. And as much as

¹ See: U. Hannerz, *Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture*, “Theory, Culture and Society” 1990, vol. 7, pp. 237–251.

ever, the politics of cosmopolitanism could also stand opposed to nationalism, nativism, and xenophobia – extending shared moral principles to all humanity. This was “the world as a single place”.

The second face of cosmopolitanism could involve the bottom-up, border crossing activities of issue-oriented transnational movements, as well as top-down conceptions of “global governance”. But then the first decade of the 21st century was not equally encouraging for all varieties of cosmopolitan thought. Osama bin Laden, George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin hardly stood out as supporters of a large-scale cosmopolitical imagination. In the second decade, Donald Trump and a number of very visible European politicians, hardly do either.

So those are two faces of cosmopolitanism. I see one as a happy-face cosmopolitanism, enjoying the diversity of cultural forms in literature, music, cuisine or whatever. The other is a somber-face cosmopolitanism, confronting global warming, world poverty and hunger, the spread of nuclear arms, trafficking, terrorism.

Again, according to Prime Minister May, if you imagine yourself as a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere. As she spoke of an imagined kind of citizenship, it would seem she had basically that second, somber-face face of cosmopolitanism in mind. Yet it may be that there were overtones of that happy-faced cosmopolitanism as well, a cosmopolitanism of privileged frequent flyers, trained to enjoy the cultural wealth of the world.

Prime Minister May’s oratory had reminded me, too, of the old epithet of “rootless cosmopolitans”. In fact, as that 1990s return of cosmopolitan thought in political philosophy had also brought a debate over a presumed conflict between cosmopolitanism and patriotism, the point was made that this could be resolved by recognizing a middle road, that of the “rooted cosmopolitan”. It was entirely possible, argued the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah², to find satisfaction in one’s own country and its way of life, and yet appreciate the diversity assembled as others made their own choices. Appiah could speak with some personal authority here: he was an American academic, but he had been born and had grown up in what is now Ghana, with a West African father and a British mother (and a grandfather who had been a prominent minister in the British cabinet after World War II, some 70 years before that of Prime Minister May). It was especially his father, politically prominent at the time of the Ghanaian struggle for independence in the 1950s, who had impressed on his children the fact that one could be a patriot and a citizen of the world, too. And for members of the Appiah family, it became a fact of life that you could develop roots in more than one country.

Quite probably it is actually easier to be a cosmopolitan, with both a happy and a somber face, if you are rooted than if you are rootless – if you know that there is one milieu, or even more, where you can always feel at ease, competent, accepted,

² See: K.A. Appiah, *Cosmopolitan Patriots*, in: J. Cohen, M. Nussbaum (eds.), *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, Beacon Press, Boston 1996, pp. 21–29.

secure. Those who are forced into exile, or whose home countries are in chaos, might find it more difficult to embrace the entire membership of the species *Homo sapiens* and the diversity of the world.

We may wonder about the affinity, if any, between cosmopolitanisms of happy and somber faces. Are these merely different kinds of sentiments which, through a certain weakness of western languages, have come to share the same label? It may well be possible to be a cosmopolitan in one way but not the other. Yet one might hope that the enjoyment of the riches of world culture, the sense that people from everywhere contribute to it, can also be a resource when one has to show the worried face. That gives people some of the strength needed to confront the challenges of the troubles of the world, and some sympathy for fellow human beings, even when they are far away.

Recognizing two faces, we may already sense that we are dealing with a concept which should more often be used in the plural form: *cosmopolitanisms*. Yet even if the happy face and the somber face are those who tend to draw most attention and comment, I believe we must now also recognize a third face: I would call it “cosmopolitanism with a straight face”.

This is a matter of simply managing cultural diversity as a fact of life, coping with it without seeking it out, mostly without attaching particular intrinsic value to it. Straight-face cosmopolitanism is now quite widespread in the world. Migrants, whether labor migrants or refugees, may tend to become straight-face cosmopolitans, if given a chance. But in the present-day world we do not have to travel to experience diversity, because it tends to come to us in our work places and neighborhoods.

The third face of cosmopolitanism, however, should not only be recognized – it needs also to be cultivated, supported, and understood in greater detail. For it stands as a vulnerable alternative to the kind of uncertainty, fear, and distrust toward strangers which may lead on to outright hostility in a variety of personal and collective forms. And this is where various kinds of cultural studies, of contemporary everyday life in societies characterized by co-existence in diversity, focusing on everything from micro-habits of personal conduct to macrostructures of housing and transportation, can help create habitats where the third face of cosmopolitanism can grow – and perhaps offer pathways to those other cosmopolitanisms as well.

Notes

1. Apart from that 1987 conference paper published in 1990, the development of my thinking about cosmopolitanism can be traced, e.g. through Hannerz (2004), and to the most recent form, Hannerz (2016).

References

- Appiah K.A., *Cosmopolitan Patriots*, in: J. Cohen, M. Nussbaum (eds.), *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, Beacon Press, Boston 1996, pp. 21–29.
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