Chapter 5

Conclusion: From Parts to Whole

> God loves from Whole to Parts: but human soul Must rise from Individual to the Whole. Self love but serves the virtuous mind to wake, As the small pebble stirs the peaceful lake; The centre mov'd, a circle strait succeeds, Another still, and still another spreads, Friend, parent, neighbour, first it will embrace, His country next, and next all human race. –Alexander Pope (cited and discussed by Sissela Bok)[1]

5.1 Spheres of Freedom: "From Part to Whole"

The foregoing examples show how it is possible to reconcile national and global citizenship from different philosophical standpoints. Both authors, though, acknowledge that the ethical influence of nationality is not necessarily positive. The counterpart to Miller's view that the nation functions as the collective equivalent of individual autonomy is that it can also mimic egoism. The pursuit of national identity can override universal human values and jeopardize both individual and collective liberties. In fact, the main problem with nationalism is its exclusivism, which Miller does not cover thoroughly. But if, on the one hand, it is obvious that nationality plays a positive role when, among other appreciable outcomes, it strengthens internal bonds and facilitates solidarity and redistribution, it is on the other hand all too clear that when the importance of nationality is exaggerated it removes from sight different and perhaps more significant kinds of considerations. As sufferers of totalitarian regimes experienced, and as the victims of colonial empires that played one ethnic group against the other knew all too

[1]Sissela Bok. "From Part to Whole". *Boston Review*, 01.10.1994.

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well, nationality can serve the cause of unfreedom through *divide et impera* ("divide and rule").[2]

The problem with nationality and exclusion is not, of course, that some people are denied access to the "subjective" experience of believing to be the offspring of a common past and the forerunners of future progress. If it is true that the *background* myths of national origins sometimes contribute to strengthening, or are only a byproduct of, the *constitutive* and valuable practices of special affection, other times these very bonds act as obstacles against nonnational and supranational developments. Myths can easily become dogmas, and dogmas can fuel intolerance.

Human rights are affected only in the gravest cases: arts, sciences, sports, personal relations and many other spheres of human life can be jeopardized when the concern for national identity is given an undeserved urgency. To explain this, it is sufficient to reverse Miller's example: familial affection *can* be diminished by the suspect that a child or a parent is not actually biological: this is the plot of countless novels and tragedies. It is important to notice that, differently from the case made by Miller, there would be many instances in which whether myths of common origins prove true is relevant.

The problem with nationalism, in other words, is not that nationality and national forms of citizenship should be replaced by global citizenship. The problem is thinking and acting as though there were no grounds for the equal endowment with the compact of rights we call (national or global) citizenship other than nationality. It is, in other words, the *confusion* between nationality and citizenship itself, between national practices and human rights, between the cause of a nation, or of its country, and that of humankind. In this latter case, if my interpretation of Agamben's argument on the "state of exception" and the "Arendt's paradox" is correct, "constitutional faith" would paradoxically legitimize a "war of civilization" and support not only "cosmopolitan patriotism," but nationalism with global ambitions and an ideologically cosmopolitan flavor.[3]

The cause of human rights *cannot* be conflated with the cause of this or that individual nation-state. But this also implies the more counter-intuitive implication that when we claim allegiance to our country in opposition to others, its commitment to equality or freedom does not suffice to explain why. These are not one country's defining prerogatives. There are of course cases in which it is more reasonable to hold allegiance to a state, or to a coalition of states, because of the pragmatic recognition that this or those are in fact favoring the advancement of human rights, or the "least worst." The Second World War is probably one of the best examples of this possibility, but in the majority of cases, the "axis of evil" will cut across states, and not coincide

[2]See for instance Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Gulag Archipelago*, trans. Harry Willetts, foreword by Anne Applebaum (New York: Harper Collins, 1992) volume III chapter 11 pp. 249–284. Ethnic divisions get in the way of breaking free from a *gulag*.

[3]On this crucial concept see for example the reply to Nussbaum by Benjamin Barber in *For Love of Country*, pp. 30–37.

with one or some of them. Even during the Second World War, eugenics, racial discrimination, colonial domination, and in some cases, totalitarian oppression cast many shadows on the heroes fighting the villains. Human rights and a state's or a nation-state's identity *cannot be yoked in principle*. This would generate a kind of political messianism reminiscent of Napoleon or the Crusades. One's allegiance to a state can be justified only by the state's commitment to the protection of fundamental rights when reasonably conceived, but this should hold toward *every humane state.* One's *national* allegiance to the state one is a citizen of needs a different and additional justification. When on the surface we have an opposition between patriotism and human rights, what we have in fact is one sole conflict or dilemma about the ultimate injunctions of justice. In fact, it is consistent with our moral intuitions that in case of open conflict between national practices and human rights, as in Nazi Germany, the general and deeper allegiance to humanity should prevail. A national project can be morally salvaged only when it does not make itself incompatible with humanity. It is therefore important to avoid the confusion between allegiance to *the* state, which must be grounded in human rights, and allegiance to *a* state under all and every circumstance.

Special national rights, duties, practices, and traditions are thus justified, but only in so far as this hierarchy is respected. Only *natural duties,* in the sense that Waldron gives to this term, can justify the substantial and general allegiance to the state; only *national duties,* and other implications of citizenship in this or that nation-state, justify one's affiliation to one's individual nation-state. The two forms of relations are not only hierarchically ordered but often substantially different: national rights are at best *instantiations* of human rights, as one's individual and specific free expression can be an instantiation of the right to freedom of expression.

The confusion between national identities and the defense of justice in itself is mirrored in the debate over citizenship, a debate that current conditions make so urgent in many Western countries. But this debate is set on disputable premises, namely on those of states that defend their citizens' rights *independently*, as though all these rights were on an equal footing, and as though non-nationals were of no importance for the state itself. Conversely, many cultural issues – such as the right to wear the *hijab* – are securitized as if they had to do with oppression and terrorism. Nation-states are not separated universes. Not only they *are* affected by the conditions of human beings in general: but they *should* also share the legitimation provided by *natural duties* (again, in the sense given to these by Waldron). More gravely, issues of human rights, and the lack of objective global citizenship, are confused with issues of national rights and local citizenship when we confront the tragedies of mass migration and asylum flows, from the Mediterranean to the Sonora desert. These phenomena are symptoms of a world that is structurally destabilized and unjust and result in the failure of the peaceful integration of national and individual freedom. Their toll can be quantitatively compared with the greatest tragedies of history, such as the

Atlantic slave trade.[4] This shows what is at stake, but it is relevant also for another reason here: the current "citizenship gap" has to do with inequality of fundamental rights and of economic prospects, which are inextricably intertwined.

The dilemmas we are left to face as citizens of democratic "non-dominating" countries are: is it possible to endure a system of differentiated citizenship that allows phenomena like these? Is there a contradiction between each *national citizenship*'s internal legitimation and its proving incompatible with the guarantee of equal rights for all (*global citizenship*) a few meters from of the national borders, or even inside them? Is national citizenship working for global citizenship in these cases and improving the capacity of the collectivity to react to rights violations? When we assess our country's legitimacy in view of its respect for human rights, do we also consider its policies toward other countries, including private actors that are permitted to elude taxes, exploit and pollute as long as these happen abroad?

Citizenship is best understood if its maximal meaning is recalled: being a citizen essentially does not mean to have this or that set of rights, but to have rights at all. The establishment of an international and even intercontinental standard in human rights protection has at one time developed and obscured the significance of citizenship. And the irreflexive conflation of national rights with human rights has worked in the same way. There is nothing new in distinguishing national practices from human rights. Similarly, there is nothing new in constructing a civilization in which different nationalities can coexist while retaining their unique characteristics. They may perhaps give origin to a better civilization, a broader "nationality" over time. The ancient *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* informs us in the very first chapter that "This island at present[...] contains five nations: the English, Britons, Scots, Picts, and Latins, each with its own particular dialect."[5] History is full of "hyphenated" identities like the Anglo–Saxon nation or the Austria-Hungary empire. As successfully argued by Miller, one of the most relevant merits of the nation is that it surpassed the parochial identity of ethnicity. But this would be no merit at all if there was not a deeper, underlying presupposition in favor of a *global* ethical conscience. If the merit of national citizenship over tribal ethnocentrism is its inclusiveness, why stop there? The nation, even in Miller's account, is a positive achievement only if it allows to overcome morally

[4]According to Patrick Manning, as many as 1.5 million died in about five centuries while being deported to the other side of the Atlantic Ocean for slavery. The death rate per year is therefore comparable to that of contemporary flows (Patrick Manning, "The Slave Trade: The Formal Demographics of a Global System" in Joseph E. Inikori and Stanley L. Engerman (eds.) *The Atlantic Slave Trade: Effects on Economies, Societies and Peoples in Africa, the Americas, and Europe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), pp. 119–121). But of course migrations across the Mediterranean and from Mexico to the US is only a tiny part of the movement from the less to the more developed countries (see Benhabib, *The Rights of Others*, pp. 4–7; cf. also *People Out of Place*, p. 6).

[5]David and Hilary Crystal, *Wordsmiths and Warriors: The English Language Tourist's Guide to Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), chap. 4.

indefensible divisions. It becomes an obstacle, though, if it prevents from pursuing, or even from envisaging, a political system compatible with the inherent dignity of any and each human being. In many countries there are heated debates about the special liberties of some regions or people, debates that sometimes come to the point of discussing secession. Those who want to invent or restore some local state shaped according to an "identity" rediscovered or reinvented are sometimes dismissed as supporters of medieval tribalism. It is important to note that there are almost no grounds for such a dismissal unless we consider citizenship as a *process* that moves from egoistic, familistic, tribalistic, and finally nationalistic pretensions toward a fairer and morally more consistent ideal of universal "siblinghood." But there is no reason to think that this centuries-long process has reached its end. If this were the case, we would be bereft of any hierarchical order to judge particularistic claims: Italian and European identity are left to compete with Milanese, Bavarian or, why not, also Roman Imperial identity. If citizenship is to mirror any pre-existing national identity, and national identity cannot be in turn nothing but the "subjective phenomenon" described by Miller, then there is no large difference between claiming to belong to an actually recognized group or to a national group of a mythical past. There are also particularly feeble reasons to argue that states of the scale they are now are the best arrangement for self-determination. However, the reality is that citizenship cannot be a merely backward-looking process.

In many processes of state-building the main ideal focus was not nationalization but rather unification: *e pluribus unum* ("out of many, one"). This ideal is still desirable, not in the sense of sanctioning one national cause as superior to the other, and therefore entitled by "destiny" to subdue nonnationals for egoistic advantage. This was as extreme nationalism put it, but this is not the ideal of unification *in itself.* Unification may imply, as the European motto suggests, "unity in diversity." Also, it should be unity in freedom, as citizenship within each individual democratic state is supposed to be. A desirable unification in itself means "only" the positive integration between different "liberties," or rather between different free agents, be they one country's government, one country's nationals, or even stateless and displaced people. In other words: it means peace, a condition that is far from being secured by present international disparities (in power, wealth, in cultural and diplomatic influence).[6] The many peculiar ways that this unification could take, from an "Anarchical Society" to a "Community of a Shared Future," should be determined only by a truthful understanding of human nature, the nature of international relations, and the need to eliminate present injustices. There is nothing

[6]It is eerie to return to this note 10 years after I wrote its previous version and read what I had written in 2013: "we are still lacking a proportionate procedure to deal with conflicting interests without the threat of direct or indirect international domination. As long as this state of affairs persists, the threatening possibility of a "world war" will not be either eliminated (which is hardly conceivable of) nor limited as strictly as possible and desirable."

destructive in requiring substantiality for global citizenship, as there was nothing. destructive in establishing the United Nations or the European Union.[7] National identities are *not* to be eradicated by their integration into a broader sphere. On the contrary, the threat of engulfment by "McWorld" has delayed if not devastated the prospects for global progress in the recent past.

Historically, families were neither substituted nor abolished by ethnic clans nor individual identity by families, and the establishment of the nation-state maintained both. In many cases, the definition of the limits of each sphere proves useful, and not detrimental, to their preservation. It is easier for a nation to disappear at present when the human rights regime and objective citizenship are not substantial enough to secure its members' fundamental rights than in a stronger international community that considers nationality to be relevant, but not overriding the common good.[8] The pragmatic remark that there is no such thing as a cosmopolitan community at present is also not to be overstated. True that this may be, depending on the requirements one set for a "community," again it is not to be forgotten that culture is, as Dora Kostakopoulou defines it, a process, a project, a practice.[9]

As mentioned with regard to the "domestic analogy," analogies in this sphere work only if they are very loose. The world community certainly needs to be as different from a unified nation-state as the EU is, and probably much more. As was the case with ethnic groups, nations, and families, it is expected that the international regime of objective citizenship functions in a specific fashion: it certainly needs to be *horizontal* rather than *vertical* in the free and equal relationships between sovereign states. Furthermore, this can be only the counterpart of a development of human rights theories and practices whose complexity exceeds by far any individual's political reasoning and imagination. And this is perhaps one of the most urgent and important world dialogues to engage in, as an alternative to the "clash of civilizations," which is often artificially intended for reasons that have nothing to do with culture.

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[7]The two organisms are admittedly *very* different. The world does not present the cultural and socio-economic similarities that facilitated European integration. Nor would it be necessary to develop such an institution over every region or across regions. Yet the UN are still too conditioned by their origins right after WWII, and need a radical reform to reestablish free and equitable relations between countries (especially considering the Global South). This reform will only be possible if a number of conditions are met. There is an internal process to be started within the UN itself – and proposals abound – but there is also a need for the establishment and working of other, supportive international bodies with the same goal. Finally, an honest and objective reassessment by states that inherited the disproportionate influence of colonial empires is also a requirement for a comprehensive and effective transition toward a more just world order.

[8]It is possible to argue that it is the present state of international deregulation that jeopardize identity rather than conscious cosmopolitanism: see Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld* (New York: Times Books, 1995).

[9]I believe that the uniformity one finds in Europe could possibly be greater than in some large multinational states.

What is presently at hand, though, and needs stating and stressing once more, is that the global horizon of political development is not antagonistic and all the less opposite to the thriving of the nation-state. Most leading philosophers writing on cosmopolitanism agree on that.[10] It would be very unrealistic and harmful for any cosmopolitan vision to forget, or even worse to oppose, loyalty to a nation and to a country. Once again, it would be as if the state contested one's affection for one's own family or neighbors. This is a litmus test for the reasonability of its authority. There can of course be occasional tensions between these institutions, but the normal dynamic is that of mutual cooperation: the state is strengthened by sound social ties like those provided by a favorable social environment.

Human experience has an inner impulse to move "from part to whole": from individual well-being to socialization, from socialization to universalization.[11] This is why we would not contradict our national identity and the allegiance to our states by establishing a more substantial cosmopolitan citizenship: the very opposite, we would contradict these affiliations and their principles, all so vital to human thriving, by not striving after its establishment. Each culture has a unique understanding of, and tension toward, universality. In the worst cases, this is perhaps part of the reason why sometimes cultures find it so difficult to withstand the very existence of alternatives and even try to resolve the challenge of pluralism by annexation. In the past this legitimized nationalism, but it is important to recognize that in recent times we have come closer to a situation when only one state retained full sovereignty.[12] So a very partial and peculiar form of "global sovereignty" has been limitedly realized already, and what we need, through the dialectic process I recalled in Section 1.2.2, is not to bring something to existence but to rectify and develop what exists. This is because, if we have global sovereignty, we cannot settle into a condition of global subjects. The passive entitlement to human rights is not enough: the enforcement of these very rights requires active citizenship to avoid domination. The main purveyor of this empowerment can be the state only, but this does not imply for it to be the sole form of

[10]See a few examples from the responses to Martha Nussbaum contained in *For Love of Country:* "The nation [. . .] *is* arbitrary, but not in a way that permits us to discard it in our moral reflections[...] Nations matter morally [. . .] as things desired by autonomous agents [. . .] There is, then, no need for the cosmopolitan to claim that the state is morally arbitrary in the way that I have suggested the nation is." Kwame A. Appiah, pp. 28–29; "If Sheldon Hackney wants to recreate a sense of such patriotic rhetoric among ordinary Americans, he surely is more likely to strengthen than to imperil the civic fabric and the American commitment to cosmopolitan ideals," Benjamin R. Barber, p. 33; "In sum, we do not have to choose between patriotism and universal reason; critical intelligence and loyalty to what is best in our traditions, including our national and ethnic traditions, are interdependent" Hilary Putnam, p. 97.

[11]"Without learning to understand the uniqueness of cultures, beginning with one's own, it may be impossible to honor both human distinctiveness and the shared humanity central to the cosmopolitan ideal," Sissela Bok, "From Part to Whole", in *For Love of Country*, p. 44. See ibidem the quote from Tagore.

[12]This according to Sebastiano Maffettone, *Giustizia globale* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2006), p. 57.

mediation between the local and the global. The attainment of global peace, namely the positive integration of national and individual liberties in a way that they do not restrain but sustain each other, is certainly worth some effort, experimentation, and risks. If not historically, states are theoretically justifiable only for the sake of greater freedom. But in the present conditions of the world, it is again for each human being's freedom that substantial international citizenship has become necessary. Coherence with the past and courage in front of our possible futures require us to step across this border also.[13]

[13]On the anthropological and existential meaning of frontiers-crossing see Salman Rushdie, *Step Across This Line,* Tanner Lecture on Human Value delivered at Yale University, February 25–26, 2002.