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From National Citizenship to Cosmopolitan Citizenship and the Problem of Cultural Particularity in Jürgen Habermas

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Abstract

This study examines Jürgen Habermas's conception of cosmopolitan citizenship and its relationship to the problem of cultural particularity. It analyzes the transition from national citizenship, traditionally grounded in ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural belonging, toward a post-national model based on constitutional patriotism, democracy, human rights, and communicative rationality. The study highlights Habermas's critique of the nation-state under globalization and his call for political integration through shared constitutional principles rather than cultural homogeneity. Particular attention is given to multiculturalism, immigration, and the recognition of cultural rights within democratic societies. The analysis shows that Habermas does not seek to abolish local identities, but to reorganize them within an inclusive legal and political framework founded on equality, dialogue, and mutual recognition. The study concludes that his cosmopolitan project seeks to reconcile the universality of human rights with respect for cultural diversity, although tensions remain concerning implementation, sovereignty, and global power inequalities in practice.

Keywords: Cosmopolitan Citizenship; Constitutional Patriotism; Cultural Particularity; Human Rights; Jürgen Habermas.

Introduction:

As a result of the transformations that the world witnessed after the First and Second World Wars, and the acceleration of globalization in its various forms and dimensions, the nation-state came to face many challenges at all levels. This prompted many thinkers to reconsider the ability of this political organization, namely the nation-state, to respond to these transformations. Among them was the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who called for moving beyond the traditional conception of political belonging based on nationalism and ethnic and cultural affiliations, in favor of constitutional patriotism and cosmopolitan citizenship grounded in democracy and human rights. However, this philosophical proposal raised many problems and criticisms, including the issue of the cultural particularities of peoples and groups, in addition to intellectual currents that reject globalization and the universal model of human rights. What, then, does cosmopolitan citizenship mean for Jürgen Habermas? What are the main foundations of his universal project? And what solutions did he propose to the problem of cultural particularities in light of his call for the universality of human rights?

1. The Concept of Cosmopolitan Citizenship

The term citizenship, in its linguistic derivation, goes back to the quadrilateral Arabic verb *wāṭana*. According to Jamil Saliba's dictionary, "*wāṭana al-qawm*" means "to live with a people"; from it comes *al-muwāṭin*, the citizen, "who enjoys the rights enjoyed by the members of his state or city."¹ The citizen is thereby entitled to the rights and duties resulting from that membership. In its political meaning, citizenship refers to the rights guaranteed by the state to individuals who hold its nationality, such as the right to work, education, and participation in political life, and so forth.

¹ Jamil Saliba, *Al-Mu'jam al-Falsafi [The Philosophical Dictionary]*, vol. 2, Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani, Beirut, 1982, p. 439.

Linguists distinguish between two concepts of homeland. There is the original homeland, which constitutes the individual's identity, and the homeland of residence. Al-Jurjani states: "The original homeland is the place of a person's birth and the country in which he is, while the homeland of residence is a place where he intends to stay for fifteen days or more without taking it as a permanent dwelling."¹ In Ibn Manzur's *Lisan al-ʿArab*, the homeland is the dwelling in which one resides; it is a person's place and residence. The plural is *awṭān*. It is said that a person *awṭana* a certain land, meaning that he took it as a place and dwelling in which to reside; and one may say *awṭantu al-arḍ*, *waṭṭantuha tawṭīnan*, and *istawṭantuha*, meaning that one took it as a homeland.²

In terminological usage, citizenship is the status of the citizen who enjoys rights and complies with the duties imposed by belonging to the homeland. Among the most important are the duty of military service and the duty of financial participation in the state budget.³ Citizenship also rests on the consolidation of public rights and respect for individual freedoms, such as freedom of opinion and expression.

As for the term cosmopolitan citizenship, although it has become strongly present in contemporary international politics as a result of globalization and the development of information and communication technologies, the idea has deep roots in Greek philosophical thought, with Socrates and the Stoic school. Universality (universal) derives linguistically from the word *univers*, meaning the world, and has several meanings, including inclusiveness, consensus, and globalization (globalisation), in contrast to the particular and the local. The "cosmopolitan citizen" (cosmopolitan, cosmopolite) is composed of two Greek elements: *cosmos*, meaning world, and *polites*, meaning citizen. A view advanced by the Stoics holds that "the human being is by nature a citizen of the world, although by convention he belongs to a particular community."⁴ Thus, the cosmopolitan citizen is not merely an idea proposed by the human mind. By nature, the human being has characteristics shared with everyone, and the term refers to every individual capable of interacting at a global level.

As noted above, the idea of cosmopolitan citizenship goes back to the Stoic school. This philosophical school held that reason and wisdom are not possessed by the gods alone; human beings also possess a share of them. Through reason, people know what they should do and what they should avoid. In this regard, Chrysippus states: "Natural law is the ruling authority over the actions of gods and human beings alike. It must be the guide, ruler, and leader toward what is noble and sound, and the criterion for what is right and what is wrong."⁵ Cosmopolitan citizenship, or the world state, is therefore founded on natural law derived from reason. Stoic philosophy also rejects the closed view that divides human beings according to their geographical or ethnic affiliations. Stoic ideas about cosmopolitan citizenship found an echo in modern thought: "Spinoza's doctrine is nothing but Stoicism in Cartesian dress, and Kant's ethics are Stoic ethics."⁶

For his part, Immanuel Kant considered that the idea of universality should be a constitutional principle for all states. The first reference point of the constitution must take into account the cultural particularities of peoples. The second reference point lies in international relations, where the idea of universality must necessarily be incorporated. Human beings, in his words, are cosmopolitan citizens of a human city.

2. The Concept of Cosmopolitan Citizenship in Habermas's Philosophy

The idea of cosmopolitanism, which had long seemed a utopian dream, still remains present in contemporary philosophical thought. This is evident in the philosophical project of the German thinker Jürgen Habermas. Seyla Benhabib considers Habermas one of the most prominent contemporary figures in the long cosmopolitan tradition. Habermas proposed conditions for a cosmopolitan citizenship that transcends the borders of states and also goes beyond the narrow determinants of identity and belonging represented by sex, color, race, and even culture. The cosmopolitan citizenship that Habermas sought to establish reorganizes local and regional ties of belonging and calls on individuals to exercise their rights as human beings.

On the occasion of the two-hundredth anniversary of the publication of Kant's famous work *Toward Perpetual Peace*, Habermas wrote an article on Kant's project and his thesis on cosmopolitan citizenship, taking into account historical circumstances, different political transformations, and current scientific and intellectual developments. In this article, entitled "Perpetual Peace: The Bicentenary of a Kantian Idea," he called for standards and laws removed from Kantian moral obligations, to be framed and applied by global institutions. Habermas states: "The establishment of cosmopolitan citizenship should not proceed from moral standards. Likewise, the prosecution of human-rights violators and war criminals must take place within international legal institutions in accordance with institutionalized judicial procedures."⁷

¹ Al-Sharif Ali ibn Muhammad al-Jurjani, *Kitab al-Taʿrifat* [Book of Definitions], Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, no edition specified, 1995, p. 253.

² Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-ʿArab*, Dar al-Maʿarif, Cairo, vol. 1, no edition specified, p. 4868.

³ Abd al-Wahhab al-Kayyali et al., *Mawsuʿat al-Siyasa* [Encyclopedia of Politics], vol. 5, Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, Beirut, 3rd ed., 1996, p. 373.

⁴ Murad Wahba, *Al-Muʿjam al-Falsafi* [The Philosophical Dictionary], Dar Quba al-Haditha, Cairo, 2007, p. 629.

⁵ George Sabine, *Tatawwur al-Fikr al-Siyasi* [The Development of Political Thought], vol. 2, trans. Hassan Jalal al-Arusi, Dar al-Maʿarif, Egypt, no edition specified, 1996, p. 220.

⁶ Previously cited source, p. 310.

⁷ Habermas Jürgen, *la Paix perpétuelle*, (le bicentenaire d'une Kantienne), trans. from German by Rainer Rochlitz, les éditions: du cerf, Paris, 1996, p. 95.

It may seem that Habermas introduced nothing new concerning these global institutions. They have existed since the former League of Nations and the present United Nations, alongside international institutions and organizations concerned with human rights and international courts such as the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice. However, Habermas believes that these global organizations remain, to a large extent, subject to balances of power and to the influence of the great powers. This limits their capacity to achieve a world order based on universal principles. He therefore called for moving beyond the current international organizations and for rebuilding the international system on universal legal foundations that consolidate the principles of cosmopolitan citizenship. To achieve this transition from an international order based on cooperation among states to a universal order with legal foundations, Habermas argues that the traditional conception of the nation-state must be transcended and the absolute sovereignty of states limited by subjecting it to international law.

3. From National Citizenship to Cosmopolitan Citizenship

The model of the nation-state established under the Treaty of Westphalia is experiencing an unprecedented crisis because of globalization, which has affected the sovereignty of the nation-state internally and externally. Habermas acknowledged the declining validity of the nation-state in its traditional form, in which citizenship was granted on the basis of race, religion, language, common destiny, or other historical considerations. He also called for moving beyond the narrow conception of local or regional citizenship toward a universal horizon that grounds citizenship in the recognition of human rights and universal values. To achieve this goal, Habermas stresses the need to separate the state from the nation, because the integration of citizens is no longer based on a single culture or on nationalism. On the contrary, constitutional citizenship requires citizens to unite around abstract legal principles.¹

Major transformations, especially with the emergence of globalization, led Habermas to reconsider the relationship between citizenship and the nation-state, which he considered to be in a process of disintegration: "This becomes clear if we quickly review the emergence of this nation-state since the beginning of the modern era."² Starting from the foundations of his communicative theory, Habermas sought an alternative to the nation-state in light of the decline of some of its functions under the pressures of globalization and the growing influence of multinational corporations.

As an alternative to classical national identity, Habermas proposes a transition toward a post-national identity based on the principles of constitutional patriotism. Whereas loyalty within national patriotism had been directed toward the national community, loyalty becomes based on constitutional principles, democratic values, and human rights, rather than on belonging to the nation, tribe, or religion.

3.1. Constitutional Patriotism as a Basis for Political Integration

In his broader political project, Habermas calls for what he terms constitutional patriotism, or post-national patriotism based on the constitution. He presents it as a conception intended to move beyond closed and extreme national identities based on ethnic, linguistic, and cultural foundations, which may end in the exclusion and rejection of the Other. "The stake of constitutional patriotism is the construction of an abstract bond based on law, in which the members of the political community organized according to this approach understand themselves not through ethnic, linguistic, and cultural references, but as subjects of law."³

Constitutional patriotism is based on non-ethnic principles and seeks a form of social integration that takes shape within a shared political culture. In this context, Habermas states in *Republican Integration*: "The thesis of constitutional patriotism acknowledges the absence of any conceptual link between nationalism and republicanism, that is, between the ethnic community, *ethnos*, and the political people, *demos*, beyond historical facticity."⁴ Through this conception, constitutional patriotism seeks to move beyond the narrow territorial framework associated with the nation-state toward a post-national horizon. Individuals' political belonging is thus based on shared constitutional and legal principles that transcend the determinants of ethnic and cultural belonging. A political identity is thereby formed whose legitimacy is not derived from notions of origin, race, language, and culture, but from participation in political life and commitment to constitutional principles that guarantee equality in rights and freedoms.

This constitutional national identity is also established through a series of procedures that open the way for communication among different forms of shared life, in order to achieve a form of coexistence by guaranteeing everyone's right to be present and to enjoy the fundamental rights stipulated by the constitution.⁵ The constitutional state also seeks to realize individual and collective freedom. Since this is its aim, it must arise from the communicative power of citizens, which must be linked to democratic procedures that facilitate conditions for communication, dialogue, and discussion. The basic criterion of democracy should be founded on free agreement rather than on national identity. This democracy should also rest on discourse ethics. Habermas states that "the mode of procedure defined by deliberative politics is the

¹ Habermas Jürgen, après l'état nation, une nouvelle constellation politique, trans. Rainer Rochlitz, Fayard, Paris, 1998, p. 106.

² Jürgen Habermas, *Al-Muwatana wa al-Huwiyya al-Qawmiyya* [Citizenship and National Identity], trans. Rand al-Mallah and Yasmin Jamal Hajar, Nohoud Center for Studies and Publishing, Beirut, no edition specified, 2018, p. 6.

³ Abd al-Aziz Rakah, *Ma Ba'd al-Dawla al-Umma* 'inda Jürgen Habermas [Beyond the Nation-State in Jürgen Habermas], Manshurat al-Ikhtilaf, Algeria, 1st ed., 2011, p. 145.

⁴ Habermas Jürgen, *l'intégration républicaine, essai de théorie politique*, trans. Rochlitz, Fayard, Paris, 1998, pp. 71–72.

⁵ Muhammad Abd al-Salam al-Ashhab, *Akhlaqiyyat al-Munaqasha fi Falsafat al-Tawasul* [The Ethics of Discussion in the Philosophy of Communication], Dar al-Ward al-Urduniyya lil-Nashr wa al-Tawzi', Amman, 2013, p. 225.

heart of the democratic process.”¹ This conception of the constitutional state differs from the liberal conception of the state, which is based on economic relations that govern social relations. Habermas retained the classical contractual model inherited from theories of the social contract, but reconstructed it through his communicative theory, which places its wager on a higher level of encounter between subjects through democratic procedures or within the communication networks of political public spheres.² Yet Habermas's ambition for a cosmopolitan or universal citizenship based on shared constitutional legal principles required him to find a solution to the question of identities and cultural particularities, which would inevitably confront any attempt at concession, integration, or even transition to a global level at the expense of their cultural heritage.

3.2. Cultural Pluralism and Constitutional Integration

Habermas acknowledges that the plurality of national identities and cultural and linguistic particularities, together with differences in ways of life and interests, makes the achievement of integration within a comprehensive and unified political system a highly complex and difficult task, especially in culturally plural societies. Individuals and groups differ in their conceptions of shared life and may adhere to their cultural particularities and ways of living. This makes the construction of an inclusive political identity on the basis of cultural homogeneity impossible. However, this difficulty does not mean that integration itself is impossible.

To overcome this impasse, Habermas called for the necessity of cultural diversity (*diversité culturelle*) in all states. At the same time, however, he insists on the need to make concessions concerning questions and issues of cultural particularity in order to formulate constitutional citizenship and establish cosmopolitan citizenship. “As long as priority is given to democracy over loyalties, strengthening the democratic process in societies based on pluralism requires strengthening the fundamental rights of citizens stipulated by the constitution, regardless of their cultural identity. Moreover, constitutional patriotism founded on a democratic constitution does not mean abolishing cultural rights, but rather guaranteeing the coexistence of these multiple cultural forms.”³ Habermas gives the United States of America as an example of a multicultural society whose citizens are nevertheless subject to the American Constitution.

Habermas holds that whenever we examine any culture, we find conflicts and differences within that same culture. From this standpoint, cultural particularity should not be used as a pretext for rejecting constitutional patriotism. In multicultural societies, the process of social integration is not based on the material components of identity. What is required in this type of society is coexistence among cultural forms within a democratic community in which every individual enjoys the same rights.⁴ In other words, integration in Habermas's post-national state is based on the constitution, in order to guarantee individual rights and achieve justice and social reconciliation.

Jürgen Habermas's interest in questions of identities and cultural particularities goes back to the end of the 1990s, when he put forward the idea of multicultural citizenship, which he took from the Canadian philosophers Charles Taylor and Will Kymlicka (1962). They addressed the question of cultural identity as Canadian citizens, and in Canada this issue was raised sharply because of immigration.

Starting from the works of the two philosophers mentioned above, Habermas considered that immigration does not constitute any danger. Rather, a way must be found to integrate immigrants in accordance with constitutional laws. He also stressed the need to protect the cultural rights of the Other who enters the community, because this makes it easier for that person to integrate into the constitutional state and the political community. Inclusion, for Habermas, means that the political community remains open. It should therefore not close itself to the immigrant or to a person who carries a culture different from that of the native citizen.⁵

Habermas calls for the recognition of cultural pluralism and for the preservation of individuals' cultural particularity. Cultural rights should also be integrated with civil rights in order to facilitate the process of social integration. In *The Ethics of Discussion and the Question of Truth*, Habermas states: “Citizenship is a status expressed in the form of civil boundaries. Nevertheless, we should not lose sight of the fact that citizens are persons with individual identities that have grown and developed within particular traditions and in specific cultural environments.”⁶ A state of democracy, rights, and law should therefore guarantee not only civil, political, and economic rights, but should also protect the cultural rights of individuals.

In the introduction to *Republican Integration (L'intégration républicaine)*, Habermas stresses that the boundaries of society must remain open to everyone, including, specifically, foreigners.⁷ The integration he advocates is characterized by:

- Unconditional openness of the boundaries of society to the Other.

¹ Habermas Jürgen, *droit et démocratie entre faits et normes*, trans. Rainer Rochlitz, Gallimard, Paris, p. 320.

² *Ibid.*, p. 323.

³ Muhammad Abd al-Salam al-Ashhab, previously cited source, p. 225.

⁴ Previously cited source, p. 225.

⁵ Habermas Jürgen, *Après l'état nation*, op. cit., p. 66.

⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *Itiqa al-Munaqasha wa Mas'alat al-Haqiqa [The Ethics of Discussion and the Question of Truth]*, trans. Omar Mehebel, Manshurat al-Ikhtilaf, Algeria, 2010, p. 44.

⁷ Denis Goeldel, *la société multiculturelle selon Jürgen Habermas*, presses universitaires de Strasbourg (open Edition), 04-12-2018, p. 71.

- Recognition of the Other, or the foreigner, together with granting that person the right to remain if he or she wishes to do so.
- Full respect for all differences, since respect is a condition of equal coexistence among different societies, linguistic groups, religious communities, and all forms of life.¹

Integration under constitutional patriotism is based on a set of principles and a series of procedures that open the doors of communication to different forms of shared life, in order to achieve coexistence that guarantees everyone's right to be present and to enjoy the fundamental rights stipulated by the constitution.

The integration of citizens under constitutional patriotism is based neither on a single culture nor on nationalism. On the contrary, constitutional citizenship requires citizens to unite around abstract legal principles.²

Habermas defended these theses and insisted on them in his later research, calling for the establishment of a political-cultural unity that includes subcultures. For this purpose, he devoted several philosophical works to questions of democracy, solidarity, and integration at the cosmopolitan level.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it becomes clear that Jürgen Habermas's attempt to construct a conception of cosmopolitan citizenship begins from the idea of moving beyond the traditional model of the nation-state and the closed forms of national, ethnic, and cultural belonging associated with it, in favor of a political and legal organization based on constitutional citizenship, democracy, human rights, and rational communication among citizens. For Habermas, citizenship should not be founded on unity of common origin, language, religion, or culture, but on participation in the shared political sphere and on recourse to constitutional and legal principles that guarantee equality, freedom, and fundamental rights for all citizens. The cosmopolitan citizenship advocated by Jürgen Habermas does not seek to abolish local affiliations and cultural particularities. Rather, it means reorganizing them within a universal framework based on mutual recognition and shared coexistence.

The strength of Jürgen Habermas's project lies in his attempt to present a vision that combines two different aims: the universality of human rights, on the one hand, and respect for cultural particularities, on the other. He argues that cultural difference should not be a justification for exclusion or the violation of rights. Nor does he see universalism and constitutional patriotism as an abolition of cultural identities and particularities. In addition, he proposes deliberative democracy and public dialogue as two mechanisms for overcoming differences and reaching rational agreement on the universal principles that should govern shared civic life. His defense of a political community open to immigrants, and of integrating their cultural rights into the system of fundamental rights, gives his philosophical project a human dimension that goes beyond the traditional boundaries of national citizenship.

However, despite its importance, this project is not without limitations and critical problems. If Habermas criticizes national closure, he may in turn face another problem concerning the extent to which a single constitutional and democratic model can be generalized to societies that differ in their histories, cultures, and political frames of reference. Likewise, recourse to human rights as universal values raises a question about the source of their universality and the extent to which different cultures agree on them, especially in light of the continuing tension between Western conceptions of human rights and other cultural and civilizational frames of reference. Moreover, the transition from the nation-state to a universal order founded on international law remains connected to a practical problem represented by inequalities of power among states and the persistence of political and economic interests that limit the effectiveness of international institutions.

It can be said that the value of Jürgen Habermas's project lies neither in abolishing particularities in the name of universalism nor in consolidating particularities at the expense of universal rights. Rather, it lies in the attempt to construct a democratic universalism that can be achieved only through dialogue, mutual recognition, and political participation. The success of this project, however, remains dependent on its ability to achieve an actual balance between the universal and the particular.

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