

International justice: a view of western communitarianism

Chris O. Abakare

Department of Philosophy, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Ifite Road, 420110, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria
e-mail: chrisabakare@gmail.com

Abstract

Does the communitarian perspective on politics offer a credible account of the conception of the relationship between the self and the other, which can provide a valid conceptual basis for justice among states? How does the understanding of the state as a nation-state impact the possibility of international justice? These questions constitute the primary concern of this work. It must be mentioned that although any attempt to analyze the international realm through the lens of communitarianism would necessarily entail invoking the politics of nationalism, this study deals with nationalism only to assess how communitarianism contributes to international justice. The study is not concerned with the validity or authenticity of a people's claims to nationalism; rather, the aim is to work out a communitarian perspective on international justice. This work argues that though the communitarian understanding of justice does offer a valid and credible account of the conception of the self and his relationship with the other, it fails to apply to the international context. Justice can only be required, negotiated, and implemented among members of a community. To understand international justice, what is required is the recognition of common humanity, a commonly shared conception of the good outside the boundaries of the nation-state. The communitarian perspective does not offer space for such recognition.

Keywords:

Communitarianism; international justice; community; global society.

1 INTRODUCTION

The phrase 'Western' is used to describe the version of communitarianism explained in this paper because of the different communitarian positions existing in different parts of the world. For instance, the African communitarian worldview found in the Ubuntu phrase 'I am because we are since we are. Therefore, I am' is vastly different in principles and articulations from the Western perspective. Even though the focus is on the community, African communitarian is not a reaction to individualism than the Western perspective. African communitarianism is said to be a way of life of the Africans and also tied to African ontology, whereas the Western perspective is ideologically driven. This paper aims not to expose the difference between diverse communitarian worldviews, but rather to expose Western communitarianism within the idea of international justice critically.

The communitarian perspective in politics centers its main focus on critiquing the liberal conception of the self as an individual. According to them, the individual's conception as the starting place of politics is neither possible nor desirable (Ioannides, 2018). Alternatively, they situate the community as the starting place of politics. By situating the community as the starting place of politics, Sandel (1984) opened a different way of reading both the conception of the self and the nature of the political. The community has always occupied a central place in political theorizing and practice. Beginning with Plato's idea of the republic, going on to the Aristotelian understanding of man as a social being, and moving to Hegel's perspective on the nature of the public space and Marx's idea of a communist utopia, the community has held a central place in political thinking (Cohen, 2018). However, the community as a conception of the self in politics did lose its validity and potency and for two main reasons: first, because the community, even though understood by many as a 'natural' assemblage of people, is an essentially political grouping which has for long justified the organization of persons into a hierarchical unequal unfree and somewhat irrational relationship. The arrangement of a person into communities of caste, race, and gender, for instance, remains inherently unjust, unequal, and hierarchical. For a modern rational organization of people, it was necessary to subvert the community's understanding of the starting place of politics.

Second, the community has more often been the source of incessant violence and hatred among people, and this is historically evident. For instance, the holocaust, ethnic cleansing pogroms, or even the practice of slavery was justified by using the community as the starting place. Ending the violent and unjust atrocities inflicted on peoples in the name of racial purity and supremacy or even abolishing caste discrimination could only be possible with the invigoration of a renewed conception of the self, one that did not depend on the community as a starting place. Perhaps, it may not be entirely incorrect to suggest that the community's idea has influenced the politics among states much more than within states, mainly through nation and nationalism ideas. The nation is certainly not an idea that continues from an asocial or non-collectivist premise of politics. Instead, it understands people as residing in a collective shared community. This understanding of the division of the world into nation-states lies at the heart of international relations theory and practice. In fact, in the international realm, states may be understood to act as independent entities. However, the state's conceptual basis is that of a nation – a collection of people bound together by common cultural, territorial, and historical values. Before exploring the possibility of a communitarian basis of international justice, it would be helpful to introduce the idea of communitarianism as well as underscore its underlying conception of the relationship between the self and the other. I must admit that the focus on communitarianism below is brief and introductory. A detailed study of communitarianism would entail a separate study if not several studies.

2 INTRODUCING THE IDEA OF COMMUNITARIANISM

The idea of communitarianism may not be regarded as a 'new' development in political theory. In fact, since the time of Plato and Aristotle, the community has been regarded as an important site for political thought and practice. However, the term communitarianism was espoused for the first time by Michael Sandel in his work *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (1982). In this work, while developing a critique of the liberal individualist foundations of John Rawls's theory of liberal justice, Sandel offered perhaps the most distinctive and rigorous challenge and critique of the theory of liberal individualism – a critique and challenge labelled as “communitarianism”. According to Sandel and almost all other communitarian thinkers, the starting place of liberalism – the individual – is flawed, false and asocial, therefore apolitical. Some of the other communitarian critics of liberal individualism are Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Walzer, Will Kymlicka and Amy Gutmann.

This idea of communitarianism, although somewhat influenced by Marxism was quite different. Marxists see community as something that a revolutionary change in society can only achieve by overthrowing capitalism and building a socialist society (Marty 1987). On the other hand, the new communitarians believe that community already exists, in the form of common social practices, cultural traditions, and shared social understandings. The community does not need to be built de novo, but rather needs to be respected and protected. According to communitarians, as social beings, each of us does develop our identity, conception of the good, talents and pursuit in life only in the context of a community and/or a collective. Our nature as social beings play a determining if not defining role in our understanding of the good as well as in the way we choose to live our lives. Since the community determines and shapes our conceptions of good and life choices, political practice and political thinking must start with a conception of the community, not the individual. In other words, the locus of philosophical concern in reflecting on the ideal and just state must be the community.

The conception of the individual advocated by liberal political theory, according to communitarianism, is then both mistakenly and irreparably individualistic (D'Ambrosio, 2016). The liberal conception of the relationship between the individual and the state is, according to communitarianism, unduly limited as well as misrepresentative of the true nature of the society. On the communitarian view, it is not enough to think in terms of a two-level relationship with the individual at one level and the state at the other. Groups and communities occupy an intermediate position between the individual and the state and should be included among the kinds of rights- and duty-bearing units whose inter-relationships are explored. According to communitarians, by emphasizing the rights and freedom of individuals over the society, liberal individualism neglects community membership and identity to social and political life. It ignores the extent to which it is the society/community in which people live that shapes who they are and their values. While the idea of communitarianism has developed into a wholesale critique of liberal individualism and has gone ahead to influence many recent developments in political theory, particularly the theory of multiculturalism, it would be helpful for this study to summarize the main points of its criticism.

A great deal of communitarian thought has presented itself in terms of an explicit reference to and a rejection of the self's individualistic conception. The general shape of this communitarian claim is that individualistic political theory takes us (as individuals) to be too distant/separate from our social ends and conceptions of the good in a way that simply fails to correspond to how we actually relate to these ends. Communitarians point to two main limitations of the liberal individualist understanding of the self as detached and separate from social ends: first, it devalues, discounts and downgrades the importance of community; and second, it presupposes a defective conception of the relation between the self and its ends (Essien, 2020). On the first criticism, communitarianism challenges liberal individualism for downgrading and discounting the importance of community and more specifically for ignoring the extent to which it is the society or community that people live that shapes who they are, and their values have. Individualism understands people to be self-sufficient outside of society and not in need of any community context in order to develop and exercise their capacities for self-determination. In other words, individualism does not recognize the importance of community membership in shaping a good life for the individual. For communitarianism, however, the community is a fundamental and irreplaceable ingredient in the person's good life. However, resilient and independent people may be human existence outside social and community life is unthinkable.

Communitarians criticize liberal individualism for producing a particular conception of the self, which is divorced from the social reality that constitutes it. On the second criticism, communitarianism criticizes individualism for holding a mistaken or false understanding of the relationship between the self and its ends - one that sees the individual's ends and conceptions of the good to be formed independently and prior to society. According to the idea of individualism, understands 'the self to be prior to its ends' in the sense that individuals reserve the right to question, revise and reject their most deeply held convictions about the nature of the good life if these are found to be no longer worth pursuing. Criticizing the individualist conception of the self, communitarians ask whether we can really step back from particular values that we have and change them for new ones, or are we rather made the very people that we are by the values that we endorse so that detachment is impossible. Human beings, they argue, are essentially social beings. As such, we neither choose nor reject our social and community ends and attachments; rather we discover them. We are neither free nor standing at a distance from our social and community ends; instead, we find ourselves located/situated in them. For instance, we do not choose our family, caste or nation; we find ourselves located in them. We then determine our conception of the good and ends given our place, position and situation in a family, religion and nation. According to communitarianism, we are never free from all social roles and community identities. Our membership of social groups and communities determines and constitutes our identity and understanding of the good life. We cannot always stand back and opt out of social relations and community membership. Our social relations and roles, or at least some must be taken as given.

Therefore, the communitarian perspective argues for the abandonment of liberal neutrality in favor of the politics of the common good. Communitarians conceive of the common good as a substantive conception of the good life that defines the community's way of life. Rather than being neutral to the good life's different individual conceptions, the common good provides standards by which individual preferences and values are evaluated. In other words, the common good forms the basis on which individual conceptions of the good are ranked, and the weight given to an individual's conception depends on how much it conforms or contributes to the common good. In response to the communitarian critique, many liberals have attempted to show that they, too, are sensitive to the importance of community and culture, and that they can accommodate at least the 'forward-looking' dimensions of communitarianism. Hence we have witnessed a proliferation of theories of 'liberal republicanism', 'liberal patriotism', 'liberal nationalism', 'liberal multiculturalism' and 'liberal civil society'. All of these are intended to show that a liberal society is not exclusively 'individualistic', and can accommodate and support a rich array of collective identities and associations, without compromising the basic liberal commitment to the protection of individual civil and political rights.

3 THE COMMUNITARIAN BASIS FOR INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE

The first position holds that to work out a credible account of justice, the community must replace the idea of liberal individualist justice; that is, the community values of love, benevolence and solidarity ought to replace the idea of justice. The second position understands the ongoing discourse on justice to be somewhat consistent with the idea of community, albeit a proper appreciation of the value of community requires a modification of the understanding of what justice is. There is then a differentiation within this position: while one group of scholars hold that community should be seen as the source of principles of justice, so justice should be based on the shared understandings of society, not on universal principles; the other group focuses on the content of principles of justice, such that justice should give more weight to the collective good than rights.

It would also be essential to summarize Hegel's position on international relations, mainly because Hegel is an important intellectual source for the communitarian perspective. According to G. W. F Hegel, the state is sovereign in the fullest sense and therefore there can be no authority higher to it (Dardot, 2018). Consequently, the notion of international law or any similar international institutional mechanism aimed at controlling state behavior and actions can only remain at the normative realm, rather than an actuality. In the words of Brown (2002), "the individuality of citizens demands the preservation of the individuality of the state; this is not, as it were, negotiable" (p. 66). Interestingly, Hegel sees war as a necessary feature geared towards the contribution and maintenance of the state's individuality, whereby citizens through acts of courageous self-sacrifice recognize the individuality of the state. This, according to Hegel, is an opportunity which peace does not provide (Hegel, 1991). Hegel's understanding of international relations is an understanding of how things really are, how they ought to be and to some extent how they will be.

It would be important before moving to the communitarian ideal of international justice to speak briefly about nationalism. In fact, according to Taylor and Gutmann (1997), recognition and demands for nationalist identities are intrinsically linked. In his words, "a number of strands in contemporary politics turn on the need, sometimes the demand, for *recognition*. The need, it can be argued, is one of the driving forces behind nationalist movements in politics" (p. 25). It would therefore be helpful to trace the relationship between nationalism, community and justice. The state is undoubtedly a political community, perhaps par excellence as suggested by Aristotle. However, the question is what holds this political community together? What is the binding force behind the state's idea, particularly the modern state which is devoid of a religious (read mythical) or theocratic legitimizing foundation? Why do citizens obey a single law in a modern setup wherein God's abiding force is absent in public life? Allegiance to a single law and solidarity among citizens has been mustered in modern political setups through ideologies of nationhood.

The understanding that co-citizens are, or perhaps should be, co-nationals is fairly recent. Earlier, the state (not nation-state) was simply a legal-territorial unit, with its jurisdiction unquestioned over the inhabitants of the city. In the Greek city states, for instance, the allegiance of the inhabitants was not dependent on a feeling of fraternal bonding or love; rather the state was considered competently sovereign to dispel its authority over the people and the people, in turn, did not question the legislation of the state over their lives. In the words of Kymlicka,

"In the past, the territorial boundaries of states had a purely legal significance: boundaries told us which laws people were subject to, and which rulers and institutions exercised authority over which territory. But in modern democracies, the boundaries of nation-states do more than this. They also define a body of citizens – a political community – which is seen as the bearer of sovereignty, and whose will and interests form the standards of political legitimacy" (Kymlicka, 2002, p. 261).

It is important to note that nationalism and nation were influenced by as well as did influence the trajectory of democracy. For a long time, the rulers, who were mainly from elite social and economic groups distanced themselves from the masses. In fact, the justification of the right to rule by the elites was based on this distance they maintained with the masses. It was not until the rise of nationalism that 'the people' in a fully comprehensive sense is marked, celebrated, declared and valorized. Today democracy is regarded as the rule of and for 'the people', and 'the people' is usually defined as all those individuals permanently residing within the state's territorial boundaries (Goel & Tillin, 2018). It may perhaps not be incorrect to state that the idea of nation, nationalism and national identity continue to remain strong and potent political tools in the modern era, mainly because of their inherent emphasis on the idea of 'the people' and the basis of equal dignity and self-respect associated with all people, irrespective of the class or social grouping. The boundaries of states are then, just not markers or signifiers of legal territorial jurisdiction, and characterizations of a people or a nation, a common political community with a sense of common belonging. Of course, the boundaries of states do not exactly coincide with those of the people's national/cultural identities, however, the nation is understood as most as an

assimilative space or a consensual one, even though there are instances of subversion and resistance in almost all nation-states. The feeling of nationhood has been promoted by various means, including the diffusion of a common national language, as well as various national holidays and symbols, and the construction of narratives of 'national' history, literature, music and so on.

The communitarian ideal of international justice is not a neatly defined one; rather it is marred by deep disagreements and differences, some of which influence the understanding of communitarianism in the mainstream. In fact, such has been the disagreements and differences that the idea of communitarianism has been manipulated and molded based on the position a thinker may hold and justify. Perhaps the most ardent critic of the idea of communitarian international justice is Miller. This influential nationalist theorist, which has not so much been regarded as a communitarian or multicultural thinker, denies the possibility of international justice because "justice assumes the form of a principle of equality only in certain contexts, and here the relationship between citizens of a nation-state is especially important as a context in which substantial forms of equal treatment can be demanded as a matter of justice" (1995, p. 11). Linking the idea of national self-determination to the impossibility of international justice, Miller argues that "to respect the self-determination of other nations also involves treating them as responsible for decisions they may make about resource use, economic growth, environmental protection, and so forth" (1995, p. 108). To quote Miller again, "in acknowledging a national identity, I am also acknowledging that I owe special obligations to fellow members of my nation which I do not owe to other human beings" (1995, p. 47).

From the foregoing, it is evident that David Miller argues that a sense of shared belonging and common history between the members of a nation is crucial for social justice within a country. As pointed out by Tan (2004), "common sympathies provide the motivation for ordinary individuals to extend the scope of their moral concern beyond the narrow and intimate circle of the family, kin, and tribe but to include also fellow citizens with whom they have no direct personal ties" (p. 181). Theorists like Sandel have often criticized liberalism for failing to recognize the imperative of a community or collectively held together by a shared conception of the good standing behind the idea of justice. The communitarian objection to global or international justice is then that justice is a virtue *within* political communities, not *between* them. This position continues even with the advent of globalization, whereby social processes have transcended territorial spaces and are now played in a global or meta-territorial realm. Communitarians assert that the main challenge in the way of global justice, and perhaps one that cannot be easily overcome, is the nonexistence of global society. For communitarians, as mentioned above, concepts of justice depend upon the prior existence of social relationships, which create obligations of justice by defining its principles, subjects and objects. In the words of Garica, "society is more than the field of application for justice: it creates justice itself. No society, no justice. To be more precise, some communitarians speak of the absence of community at the global level, as something "deeper" than mere society" (Garcia 2005, p. 6).

Generally, communitarians maintain that although we may share a common humanity and mutual interests, we do not share obligations of justice unless we already share certain kinds of social relations, usually identified with the nation, and generally expressed in terms of shared traditions, practices and understandings. According to the communitarians then, it may be possible to grant the existence of some kind of global society, consisting of associations for mutual self-interest, where nations, states and peoples engage and interact with each other freely. However, the authoritative or moral exercise of mutual obligations do not hold valid in such an association. Such an association, according to them, is clearly distinguishable from true "community," which requires something more – obligations and a commonly shared conception of the good. Justice is reserved for such "true communities". The communitarian position holds that arriving at principles of justice for states is not possible because the international sphere lacks the sort of social relations on a global level, which make justice possible. Only in nationally bound democratic societies do communities exist. Such societies hold the possibility of justice because they are characterized by shared practices, traditions, and understandings which help create an individual identity and the social solidarity and sense of common purpose necessary to support the sacrifices and obligations of justice. Also, for a conception of international justice, it is necessary that we care for each other or think politically about each other in the distribution of resources. Such a prerequisite is absent in the international realm. Unless these kinds of social relationships exist globally, there is no possibility of global justice.

Communitarian theories of international justice require *prior* social cooperation, or global community, and not necessarily global society. For them, society by itself is not enough for community or justice. What is required in addition to a notion of society is a common purpose, a common conception of the good and/or solidarity. Few communitarians do point explicitly to the distinction between community and society. Walzer, for instance, when detailing his account of community, marks a distinction between associations and communities, and this distinction is premised on the idea of self-interest. Society can exist as an association whenever two or more gather for a shared reason, but community exists, in his view, only when people gather or understand themselves as having gathered together, for a common purpose, a common good. Put differently, a community, unlike a society, is not created by nor premised on the idea of mutual self-interest; even though perhaps it may begin from self-interest, it must and often does grow and mature or develop into something more, something in excess: a view of the common good, growing out of shared traditions, practices and understandings rooted in a shared history. Within this community, justice consists of distributions made according to the community's shared understandings. For Walzer (2015), it is a people's shared life that determines justice, and not the other way around.

Justice, therefore, requires *a prior* community in which all relevant distributive decisions take place according to shared traditions, practices and understandings of justice. In Walzer's words, justice "is rooted in the distinct understandings of places, honors, jobs, things of all sorts that constitute a shared way of life." In a similar vein, distributive justice "presupposes a bounded world within which distribution can take place: a group of people committed to dividing,

exchanging, and sharing social goods, first of all among themselves” (2015, p. 314). For Miller (1988), this bounded world is the nation. According to him, nationality consists of the following: shared beliefs of a set of people; the feeling that each belongs with the others; the assurance that their association with each other is neither transitory nor instrumental but rooted in a long shared history of living together that will continue into the future; and a sense of loyalty adequate to justify sacrificing individual interests for the group. Recognizing that communitarians may regard this shift to a meta-state institutional level as a realization of global society and not global community. Holding a similar intention, although, with a different perspective, Tan (2004) draws from the communitarian challenge to international justice to develop a credible position, which I present below. Tan uses two arguments for offering a communitarian perspective on international justice: first the argument of national self-determination and second, the imperative to be committed to international equality as a prerequisite for the project of nation-building.

I begin with the first. The idea of nationalism and community is essentially linked to the principle of national self-determination. Nations have been the basis for state formation in the modern age. A people are recognized as being ruled by a sovereign state only after they are recognized as a nation and/or national collective. In fact, the principle of national self-determination, which constitutes the basis for state formation and legitimation today, regards the existence of a nation of people as a prerequisite for the constitution of a sovereign state. To this extent, it may be possible to argue that states are considered as just requirements only after people have molded themselves and regard and identify themselves as a nation. Also, to be recognized by others as a state requires such others to recognize and regard a people as a nation. In other words, the recognition of a people as a nation as a prerequisite for statehood is not only an issue of the internal dynamics of the politics of these people, it also involves an external recognition by others. In fact, the right to national self-determination is integral to the idea of nationalism. As Miller (1988) states, “the assumption of nationhood and the quest for self-determination are merely two sides of the same coin.” (pp. 657-658).

Rawls (1999), in spite of his liberal commitment, also reiterates the significance of self-determination, when he says: “it is surely good for individuals and association to be attached to their particular culture and to take part in it common public and civic life. In this way, belonging to a particular political society, and being at home in its civic and social world, gains expression and fulfillment. This is no small thing. It argues for preserving significant room for the idea of a people's self-determination and for some kind of loose Confederative forms of a Society of Peoples. Interestingly, Rawls is compelled to support the idea of national self-determination based on a collective communitarian understanding, despite him being a liberal, simply because one of the features of liberal nationalism is indeed the universalizability of the principle of national self-determination. For liberals, self-determination is a right that all nations, under appropriate conditions, are entitled to. The only limit on this right is that a nation's exercise of its right to self-determination does not harm or infringe upon another nation's right.

I now move on to the second argument of Tan which understands the commitment to international equality to be a prerequisite for the project of nation-building. All states are nation-building states, and in an attempt to *build* and *sustain* a nation, states often close their borders, thereby restricting the movement of people into their country (Edet, 2019; Ekurii et al., 2019). In Tan's words,

“the belief is that it could be a legitimate nationalist goal to regulate immigration in order to protect and preserve a certain national identity that is necessary for sustaining and preserving important democratic political and public institutions. It is not that outsiders cannot in principle be integrated into the national culture, so defined, but that the process of integrating outsiders into a common societal culture characterized by a common language and shared public institutions takes time and education, and, therefore, an absolutely open immigration policy might risk overwhelming a national culture at a given time. Regulating immigration thus allows a liberal state the needed interval of time to sustain and protect the national unity so crucial for grounding its democratic institutions” (2004, p.114).

However, it is sufficiently acknowledged that immigration is often undertaken for economic development whereby people move from poorer to richer countries. Some liberal thinkers have then questioned the restriction on immigration and the closing of national boundaries mainly because it denies some people the opportunities to improve their life conditions. However, Tan argues that this “tragic conflict” between the commitments to liberalism and the strategy of nation-building is not inevitable. In his words,

“it is not an inevitable fact of our world that border closure necessarily means that all individuals of the world cannot have equal opportunity. This happens to be the case in our world because of an antecedently unequal global distribution of resources and economic opportunities. The obvious thing ... to do, then, is to ensure that such a dilemma need not arise by striving for a world in which wealth and resources are more equally distributed, to begin with. Once a more egalitarian international order is achieved, the ... strategy of regulating immigration needs no longer be in conflict with the ... commitment to equal opportunity. Barring disadvantaged people from coming into one's borders need not violate equal opportunity if one is willing to move some resources from within one's borders out to them. Indeed, in such a world much of the motivation for immigration in the first place would be averted” (2004, p.114).

Although this is a morally stimulating argument, it may not be seen as a politically viable one. Tan gives no reasons why an economically advanced country should move its resources to a comparatively lesser developed country when it can easily restrict immigration by closing borders. Why should a country which has absolute sovereign jurisdiction over its territorial boundaries, willingly offer its resources to another?

From the above, it is clearly evident that the communitarian perspective on international justice is deeply contentious. In fact, there seems to be little clarity about how a communitarian principle of justice for states ought to be discerned and justified. While communitarians have been rather vehement and convincing regarding their position on justice within the nation, and to some extent, although rather problematically, within the home, they fail to offer a credible account of

international justice for the relations among states. Above, I have attempted an examination of some of the important positions on communitarian international justice. In the next section, I offer an analysis of the idea of the conception of the self, underlying the communitarian principle of international justice as well as a reading of the relationship between the self and the other. In doing so, I hope to begin to respond to the question raised by this study, namely, which account of international justice carries a credible account of the self's conception and its relationship with the other.

4 THE COMMUNITARIAN SELF AND OTHER

In this section, I explore the communitarian conception of the self and its relationship with the other. The main concern in doing so is to discern the communitarian perspective's viability for arriving at political principles of justice for states. The communitarian understanding of the relationship between the self and the other is developed in opposition to and critical of the self's individualist conception. The individualist conception of the self, as mentioned above, has remained rather dominant in political theorizing since the advent of modernity. Originating in the arguments of Locke and Kant and growing fully in Mill's writings, the idea of the self as an individual emerged as central to the politics of the modernizing social structure.

On the individualist view, people are free, rational and capable of self-determination. This understanding of the self is mainly Kantian in nature. Hence, Kant identified the individual as free, rational, and capable of self-determination to promote and sustain the Enlightenment project. People are *free* in the sense that they possess the ability as well as the right to question their participation in existing social practices and opt-out of them should these practices seem no longer worth pursuing. Individuals in other words are free to question and reject or revise any particular social relation. We as individuals have the ability to detach ourselves or step back from any particular social practice and question whether we want to continue pursuing it or not. No particular task or end is set for us by society; no end is exempt from possible revision or rejection by the self. A person's goals, aims and ends are always things that he *chooses* to attach himself to and therefore detach himself from when they are no longer worthy of such attachment. A person is thus related to his ends, goals by an exercise of will.

The communitarian understanding of the self is radically different from the liberal individualist one. It holds that the conception of the self is the collective – the community, which is constituted by a shared conception of the good. As mentioned above, the community is the site wherein we as persons discover ourselves – wherein we are located, and which influences our life choices and conceptions of the good. The communitarian conception of the self is that of the community. The community or collective remains the main starting point for politics. According to communitarians, we start our lives as members of communities, whose ends and choices are determined by our collective existence and shared understanding of the good. For the communitarian perspective, the community is a bounded unit, held together by mutually agreed upon notions of the good. Here, the communitarians are influenced by Rousseau, particularly Rousseau's conception of the General Will. The other, in communitarian political theory, does occupy a space within the political. The 'communitarian other' – if it were possible to use this phrase, is understood in terms of two perspectives, namely first the minor or minority grouping *within* the community, which may be constituted by a common identity which is not sufficiently represented or promoted by the community or a group of persons who are victims of cultural alienation and therefore being compelled to accept an alien culture and are thereby distanced from their cultural understandings and shared conception of the good, and secondly, *outside and alongside* the community, which may include such communities and groupings who are not equally recognized by the state, in terms of its holidays or official language and who may therefore be victims of cultural exclusion and oppression. In both cases, communitarianism regards such groups as others. In fact, if communitarianism has led to the development of the theory of multiculturalism, it is mainly because of its' identification of the other, within the community, on cultural grounds. The main concern of multiculturalism is to render the public/political space accommodative and respectful of minority cultures, whether such minority cultures are constituted on language, gender, race, history, and even nationality and migration.

Communitarianism, therefore, holds that the other is both within the community as well as outside it. However, the other like the self is manifest in the form of a community. There is a common conceptualization of the nature of the self and the other, however, there is a difference in terms of the politics underlying such conceptualizations: while the self is satisfactorily represented and accommodated in public and political institutions, the other is denied such representation and accommodation and even sometimes respect in such spaces. It is important to note that the understanding of the self and the other as conceptualized by communitarianism has contributed substantially to identifying the minority culture in societies that are multicultural and guaranteeing minority rights, as measures of compensatory and/or corrective discrimination for redressing such injustice. In fact, the different theories of multiculturalism have offered a varied set of responses and possibilities for correcting the injustice experienced by minority cultures in the political space. The political space has for long been mono-cultural since it inevitably has to speak a common language, foster common values and express itself in a common shared culture. According to the theory of multiculturalism, this necessarily puts other cultures at a disadvantage, to be guaranteed minority rights as compensatory measures for correcting such disadvantages. Such compensatory measures include the rights of cultural minorities to preserve and protect their culture in the public space dominated by the dominant culture.

The other in a communitarian perspective is thus rather contested. In fact, the communitarian perspective's politics has been understood in two radically different ways and for obvious reasons. Holding the community as a valid and valuable entity in public/political life is acceptable so long as it does not slide into conservative, traditional or regressive proposals. To illustrate, it may be acceptable and even valid for a community to demand minority cultural rights to preserve its culture in the face of the onslaught of the dominant culture. However, the rights to protect and preserve one's

culture often regress into a conservative regressive proposal, whereby cultures that are essentially patriarchal or racist and thereby deny rights to some community members within.

There are thus two different notions of the politics of communitarianism: the first which offers a nostalgic yearning for the community even if it is at the cost of individual rights and freedom; and the second which argues for balancing individual freedom with cultural rights by arguing in favor of a social context for individual freedom. Such differentiation is made by Walzer (1999a) when he differentiates between “thick” and “thin” moralities. Similarly, Phillips (2014) categorizes these two positions as ‘looking backward’ and looking forward’. As explained by Kymlicka,

those who look backward typically offer a nostalgic lament for the 'decline' of community, which presupposes that our social institutions functioned well in the 'good old days' but have been eroded by the increasingly aggressive assertion of individual and groups diversity. Such movements as feminism, gay rights and multiculturalism are having undermined the sense of community. It is said that we have 'gone too far' in accommodating individual choices and cultural diversity.... Such nostalgic communitarians seek to retrieve a balance between diversity and unity by 'retrieving' a conception of the common good and containing or reducing the sort of diversity that would undermine the common conception of the good.... Forward-looking communitarianism accepts these facts but worries that our traditional sources of social unity cannot bear the weight of all this diversity.... It seeks new ways to build bonds of community that integrate and accommodate our diverse choices and lifestyles" (2002, pp. 271-271).

This categorization may also be understood in terms of the way in which the community is perceived. Forward-looking communitarianism would perceive the community as a site or a context for addressing the injustices meted out to its members. For this understanding of communitarianism, the community per se is not to be recognized, rather it provides a context for adjudicating over the distribution of its resources and recognition of its values. Contrarily, backward-looking communitarianism perceives the community as something to celebrate and applaud, irrespective of its inherent injustices. It is apparent that backward-looking communitarianism may not prove effective in the international realm. However, the question is: Can forward-looking communitarianism offer a credible understanding of the conception of the relationship between the self and the other for international justice?

In the international realm, communities either as the self or the other, when understood in terms of a forward-looking communitarian perspective could offer a somewhat credible understanding. The balance between the social context and individual rights is an important contribution to understanding a credible relationship between states as it facilitates a space that recognizes the distinctiveness of each state and the imperative to construct and maintain a common international public space. States would be able to regard themselves either as self or the other as well as engage with the need to associate with other states. More importantly, the communitarian perspective does offer space and value to the idea of the nation and nationalism. Particularly, forward-looking communitarianism, as mentioned above, does recognize the value and contributions of the idea of nationalism, when it upholds the community – read nation – as the context of political activity among people of the same territorial entity. This understanding of communitarianism/nationalism that scholars like Miller (1995) and Etzioni (2001) uphold for understanding the cultural context of the relationship among states. However, there are some other scholars who choose or prefer to use the idea of patriotism over the idea of nationalism. Nationalism, they argue, is enforced, somewhat “imagined” as well as territorially dependent; patriotism on the other hand, is more ethical and emotional in its appeal to the attachment and affect for the political community. Some of such scholars who offers such arguments are Tan, Simon Keller and Stephen Nathanson.

The problem with the communitarian perspective on the conception of the self and other, however, is that it offers a fixed or closed understanding of the relationship between the self and the other. By recognizing the need of the other – the minority – to preserve its right and by recognizing the self as the dominant, communitarianism closes the possibility of a shift in such positions. It locks the other in a situation of a disadvantage even if it guarantees compensatory minority rights towards the correction of such disadvantage. In the international world, where states are equal in terms of their sovereign status, it would be politically incorrect and undesirable to lock a state in a position of the other to award it compensatory treatment. There has already been sufficient criticism of some countries' labeling as less developed (LDCs), which has led to such countries being referred to as developing countries: while the former label locks the state in a position of disadvantage, the latter leaves the positioning open and flexible. Another equally compelling issue with the idea of the communitarian conception of the self and the other is that communitarianism crystallizes the idea of a collective shared understanding. While this may be appropriate for groups within the nation-state, employing this perspective in the international realm may be somewhat harmful as it could result in a hard form of nationalism. States may see themselves fully justified in limiting the movement into their borders of citizens of other states, on the grounds that this would weaken if not dilute their understanding of a commonly shared conception of the good.

Although valid and credible for principles of justice within the boundaries of the state, the communitarian conception of the relationship between the self and the other seems somewhat inadequate when employed for working out principles of justice for states. Understanding this relationship from a communitarian standpoint seems to lock a state in the other's position, thereby placing it at a formidable disadvantage vis-à-vis other states in the international realm. Although the communitarian perspective does foster and promote the nationalist position, this position does hamper the determination of international justice principles, mainly because it expects that societies would remain isolated in their understandings of nation and nationalism, with little necessary contact or establishment among states. Nationalism although a potent device within states, and a legitimate necessity for order within states, as well as for relations between states, does put forward some substantial limits in the process of arriving at principles of international justice.

5 CONCLUSION

Evidently, international justice or justice for states would require at a preliminary level, the feeling of mutual concern and affect going beyond state borders. State borders are certainly meant to be closed and inflexible when defining the concept of the nation and limiting the ideal and identity of citizenship; however, when discerning principles of justice for states, it would be minimally expected that the borders of the state are somewhat pliable, at least to the extent that they allow a sense of care and concern beyond borders. Contemporary understandings of statehood however do not encourage or facilitate such a feeling of mutual concern beyond borders. The borders define not only the feeling of nationalistic sentiment and belonging, but more importantly, they offer a limit to the need to demonstrate and display a concern of justice beyond them. Borders encircle and close the realm of justice so that instances and issues of injustice outside the borders of the state are not the concern or responsibility of the inhabitants or citizens of the state. As pointed out by Tan, "in a world marked by injustices, patriotic concern among citizens in well-off countries is at odds with the idea that people use only resources that are rightly theirs to realize their special commitments and ties (2004, p.199).

This is then the main obstacle in the understanding of a communitarian conception of international justice. Even though the communitarian understanding of justice does offer a valid and credible account of the conception of the self and his relationship with the other, it fails to be applicable to the international context. The understanding of the community as the context for justice is indeed convincing. Justice can only be required, negotiated, and implemented in among members of a community. For an understanding of international justice, what is required is the recognition of common humanity, a commonly shared conception of the good outside the boundaries of the nation-state. The communitarian perspective does not offer space for such recognition. By locking people into communities and recognizing persons only as members of a community, communitarianism curtails the space for a conception of international justice. What is missing perhaps is a conception of an "international community" or "trans-nation state community". Were this to be theorized by communitarians it could result in the possibility of an understanding of international justice. However, this would require a rethinking of the idea of the nation-state, a reconceptualization of the self and possibly the other in international politics. It would perhaps entail rethinking the sovereign state system's concept, which regards each state as a national community and yet regards all states to be somewhat living in a relationship of sovereign independence with each other. Justice requires a relationship between its claimants – a social relationship, which ought to be worked out for the international state system. In other words, it is necessary to rethink the international state system for arriving at the possibility of international justice.

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