

A COSMOPOLITAN PERSPECTIVE ON OBLIGATORY VACCINATION, MIGRATION AND MOBILITY

Andrew Onwudinjo

Institute of Humanities

Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos

aonwudinjo@pau.edu.ng

DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.21236.83849

Abstract

The compulsion of COVID-19 vaccination for citizens is an issue of conflict (and in some instances riots) in several countries. If governments are taking hard stance against their own citizens on vaccination, what would be expected against migrants? Reasoning from a perspective different from prevailing questions of individual or human rights on the compulsion policy, this paper seeks to offer a cosmopolitan critique of obligatory vaccination for migrants. Undoubtedly, the spread and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have led to the institution of heavy movement restrictions for unvaccinated citizens in several countries. The staggering rate of mortality from COVID-19 globally motivated scientists across the world to race to the production of vaccines in record time. With the approval of these vaccines by the World Health Organisation (WHO) different countries adopt different approaches to ensure their citizens are immunized thereby stemming the spread of the virus. Sadly, conspiracy theories (spread especially through social media) and rights campaigns have led to vaccine hesitancy. Migrants mostly do not enjoy such rights and are more likely to oblige or be denied entry or other privileges. How cosmopolitan is this? At the core of cosmopolitan thought is the awareness of global citizenry which ought to supersede nationalistic identification. Thus, through the theoretical and practical perspectives of cosmopolitanism, this paper examines migration, mobility and the policy of obligatory vaccination.

Keywords: Cosmopolitanism, COVID-19, Migration, Mobility, Obligatory Vaccination

Introduction

One of the scariest moments for citizens and states in recent history was the prevalence of the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide. Its spread, mortality rate and inability to immediately stem its tide caused global apprehension. Both residents of highly infected

countries and others less affected across the world who are inundated with information about the virus and its effects were not sure of what the next turn of events would be. As at the end of April 2022, the World Health Organisation (WHO) health emergency dashboard recorded that over 515 million cases of infection have been confirmed with over 6.2 million deaths. Europe had the highest confirmed infection rate of over 216 million and it is closely followed by the Americas with over 153 million cases with the United States of America at the top of the list.

On a country basis, the United States of America has the highest infection and mortality rate of over 81 million and 987 thousand respectively. India follows with over 43 million confirmed cases but it comes third in mortality rate with over 520 thousand. Although Brazil is third with over 30.5 million confirmed cases, it is second in death with over 660 thousand. These are not just numbers but human lives. They include families, loved ones, friends, colleagues, neighbours, acquaintances, strangers, tourists, guests, and the elderly (with care homes being one of the most affected institutions). More touching are care givers (including doctors, nurses, first responders, and other health professionals) who in their attempt to manage infected patients got infected and lost their lives. For instance, the Health Workforce Department of the WHO estimated that about 115, 493 healthcare workers died due to COVID-19.⁶⁴

Beyond the lives lost livelihoods were affected. To stem the tide of the pandemic, strict measures were imposed by countries based on internal severity of the cases and fear of introduction of the cases from external sources. Lockdowns were imposed, businesses were shut down and some had work online to keep operating. Economies were affected (and the world is yet to recover from the economic crunch of the COVID-19 pandemic). Apart from formal work life, people were emotionally affected by the consequences of the pandemic. Families and loved ones were stranded in different parts of the country or the world. The very idea of being restricted had its psychological effects. For instance, young people were reported to exhibit several mental symptoms due to restrictive lockdown measures taken. Such symptoms include anxiety, depression, mental distress, psychological wellbeing and issues with sleep habits.⁶⁵ These restrictions equally affected mobility as countries imposed stricter immigration measures.

⁶⁴ Health Workforce Department, World Health Organisation (WHO), The impact of COVID-19 on health and care workers: A closer look at deaths. *Health Workforce Department – Working Paper 1*, Geneva: World Health Organization; September 2021. Available at WHO/HWF/WorkingPaper/2021.1)

⁶⁵ Federica Cielo, Randi Ulberg, and Dina Di Giacomo, “Psychological Impact of the COVID-19 Outbreak on Mental Health Outcomes among Youth: A Rapid Narrative Review,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, Vol. 18, 2021, p. 13.

Like other facets of human activities affected by the pandemic, mobility was affected in an unprecedented way. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) report that by the middle of 2020 about 3 million migrants have been stranded and face several severe conditions due to border closures and other restrictions imposed by countries to arrest the spread of the virus.⁶⁶ Irregular migrants within the host countries did not fare much better during the peak of the pandemic. Specifically, migrants were exposed to several levels of vulnerability including their lack of entitlement to health care, exclusion from welfare programmes, and fear of stigmatization and/or arrest and deportation.⁶⁷ With such limited rights one would wonder if they can claim the human right of wanting or rejecting the vaccine. In the first instance the reason for wanting to vaccinate them would be to prevent them from spreading the virus and not a measure of extending health care to them. To further explore the issues from a cosmopolitan perspective the next section of this paper examines the question of obligatory vaccination policies and vaccine hesitancy among populations. Thereafter, cosmopolitanism as a concept will be briefly examined then employed to analyse the issues of compulsory vaccination, mobility and migrants.

Vaccination: Compulsion and Hesitancy

With determined speed, researchers and biopharmaceutical companies in some countries developed vaccines to arrest the global spread of the virus. These vaccines are primarily aimed at creating herd immunity against the COVID-19 virus. According to Cheng, the main function of the COVID-19 vaccine serves to develop antibodies and an immune response in order to lessen infection and transmission of this virus. Scholars are of the opinion that when a sizeable number of the population attains immunity through vaccination or recovery from being infected with the virus, the herd immunity will be achieved thereby protecting individuals and other people around them.⁶⁸ Vaccines are not new in the management of diseases and it has been an effective way to prevent viral infection, stop its transmission, and develop herd immunity. Vaccines have been employed to prevent life-threatening communicable diseases in children over the years. Using different immunization programs that suit their situation, different countries have been able to effectively manage diseases like polio, measles and tuberculosis.⁶⁹ In some

⁶⁶ Meghan Benton, Jeanne Batalova, Samuel Davidoff-Gore and Timo Schmidt. *COVID-19 and the State of Global Mobility in 2020*. Washington, D.C., and Geneva: Migration Policy Institute and International Organization for Migration, 2021, p. 2.

⁶⁷ Lorenzo Guadagno, *Migrants and the COVID-19 pandemic: An Initial Analysis*, Geneva: International Organisation for Migration, 2020.

⁶⁸ Fung Kei Cheng, "Debate on Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccination," *Ethics, Medicine and Health*, Vol. 21, 2022, p. 2.

⁶⁹ Yen Jun Wong and Shaun Wen Huey Lee, "A Call for Awareness or Mandatory Vaccination even in Pandemics?" *Journal of Global Health*, Vol. 11, 2021, p.1.

countries vaccinating children against these diseases is compulsory and parents can hardly reject immunization because it is backed government policies.

Sadly, the situation of the COVID-19 vaccine is different from immunizing children. The need to immunize children has been institutionalized over time and studies have shown it benefits. The same cannot be said of the COVID-19 vaccine. On the one hand the vaccine is mainly for adults and there is the question of individual rights. On the other hand, conspiracy theories and false news about the virus imparted its management. These theories are mostly born out of the speed with which the vaccines were developed, the lack of empirical knowledge and the low level of trust between the citizens and their governments. Attempts to mandate the vaccine by governments have been met with different forms of reactions.

Due to the increasing number of deaths globally, and the apparent failure of many countries to contain the pandemic without severely damaging or problematic lockdowns and other measures, there have been calls to make a vaccine, if it were approved, mandatory.⁷⁰ Cheng cites four conditions for mandatory vaccination: first, the disease is a stern threat to public health; second, the vaccines are safe and effective; third, mandatory vaccination proves a convincing cost-benefit profile compared with other alternatives; and lastly, the level of coercion is proportionate.⁷¹ Advocates consider herd immunity to be a common good and an altruistic procedure which justifies the exercise of mandatory injections. Furthermore, it is seen not only as a public health concern, but also as a social issue associated with the economic and societal burdens, socioeconomic disparities and health inequalities induced by this pandemic.

Graeber *et al* presents the free-rider problem to support a policy on mandatory vaccination. They contend that while vaccinated individuals have incurred private costs in terms of discomfort or money and receive the private benefit of a reduced risk of getting the disease, the major collective benefit, the reduced incidence of disease, is public. If enough other people produce the public benefit, and the circulation of the virus decreases accordingly, an individual might rationally decide to free-ride on others' decisions.⁷² Countries including France, Australia, the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany etc. mandated immunization for some categories of their citizens but this generated several reactions. For instance, the BBC reports that thousands of demonstrators also took to the streets in

⁷⁰ Julian Savulescu, "Good reasons to vaccinate: Mandatory or payment for risk?" *Journal of Medical Ethics*, Vol. 47, 2021, p. 78.

⁷¹ Cheng, *Op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁷² Daniel Graeber, Christoph Schmidt-Petri and Carsten Schroder, "Attitudes on voluntary and mandatory vaccination against COVID-19: Evidence from Germany, *PLoS ONE*, Vol. 16, No. 5, p. 2.

Austria, Croatia, Italy France, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Austria and other European cities as anger mounted over new curbs owing to vaccine hesitancy.⁷³

Irrespective of the potential benefits of vaccines, some scholars argue that mandatory vaccination policies are coercive—and a coercive measure is one that ‘involves the restriction of freedom (reduction of options), which causes that person to do what she does not want to do.’⁷⁴ Thus it now becomes a question of whether or not to mandate vaccines so as to reach desired levels of reduction and possibly ending the pandemic. The appropriate strategies for raising vaccination rates depend on the target rate, on how many are unlikely to be vaccinated willingly in a sufficiently timely manner, on the conditions under which opponents change their minds, and on the effect of the policies themselves on vaccination preferences.⁷⁵

Those refusing to be vaccinated for instance contend that respecting a person’s autonomy of self-determination, the principle of beneficence – the duty to do good and greater justice of protecting the community at large should be the driving force in achieving universal immunization.⁷⁶ Reluctance and anti-vaccination movements usually stem from insecurity and mistrust surrounding pharmaceutical companies, which have not, at times, shown the best of conduct, given their subjection to considerable economic interests. Mistrust is also expressed against science itself (with regard to its degree of independence), often precisely because of the existence of scientific controversies that end up dividing the public.⁷⁷ The origin and perceived deceptions about the COVID-19 virus heightened its rejection among the citizenry, including health workers in some instances. Our concern is that if the state is mandating its citizens what can be expected on the plight of migrants?

Cosmopolitanism and the Universal Citizen

Cosmopolitanism is a theory concerned with the belief that all people are entitled to equal respect and consideration no matter what their citizenship status or affiliations happens to

⁷³ “Covid: Huge protests across Europe over new restrictions.” Published 21 November 2021. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-59363256>. Accessed 10/5/2022.

⁷⁴ Daniel Rodger and Bruce P. Blackshaw “COVID-19 Vaccination Should not be Mandatory for Health and Social Care Workers,” *The New Bioethics*, Vol. 21, No. 1, p. 27.

⁷⁵ Katrin Schmelza and Samuel Bowles, “Opposition to voluntary and mandated COVID-19 vaccination as a dynamic process: Evidence and policy implications of changing beliefs,” *PNAS*, Vol. 119, No. 13, p. 1.

⁷⁶ Karthikeyan P Iyengar, Bijayendra Singh, Raju Vaishya, Vijay Kumar Jain, and Pranav Ish, “Should COVID-19 vaccination be made mandatory? *Lung India*, Vol. 38, 2021, p. 379.

⁷⁷ Fereniki Panagopoulou, “Mandatory Vaccination during the Period of a Pandemic: Legal and Ethical Considerations in Europe, *BioTech* Vol. 10, 2021, p. 2.

be.⁷⁸ According to Kleingeld cosmopolitanism is the view that all human beings share certain essential features that unite or should unite them in a global order that transcends national borders and warrants their designation as citizens of the world.⁷⁹ Scholars attest to the historical development of the idea of cosmopolitanism long before the idea of nation-states that gave birth to nationalism. While stating that cosmopolitanism started with the ancient Greeks and has since played a pivotal part within social and political thought, Fine explains that its basic presupposition is that the human species can be understood only if it is treated as a single subject, within which all forms of difference are recognised and respected but conceptualised as internal to the substantive unity of all human beings.⁸⁰

Cosmopolitanism thus reflects the revolt of the individual against the social world, for to be a citizen of the world was to reject the immediately given and closed world of particularistic attachments.⁸¹ In furtherance of this view, Held contends that cosmopolitanism connotes the ethical and political space which sets out the terms of reference for the recognition of people's equal moral worth, their active agency and what is required for their autonomy and development. It builds on principles that all could reasonably assent to in defending basic ideas which emphasize equal dignity, equal respect, the priority of vital needs.⁸²

There are basically three types of cosmopolitanism namely; cultural, political and moral. Cultural cosmopolitanism is a view about the conditions under which individuals can generate an identity and live a good life. It emphasizes that cultures are constantly changing and that individuals can benefit from mixing elements from different cultural traditions.⁸³ It teaches that human beings are not strictly products of culture irrevocably cast into a given cultural mold from birth but as agents free to roam the earth and assemble (or reassemble) for themselves a unique cultural concoction by choice or by chance.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Gillian Brock, "Cosmopolitanism," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, available at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/cosmopolitanism-philosophy>. Accessed 27/5/2022.

⁷⁹ Pauline Kleingeld, "Six Varieties of Cosmopolitanism in Late Eighteenth-Century Germany," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 60, 1999, p. 505.

⁸⁰ Robert Fine, *Cosmopolitanism*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. ix-x.

⁸¹ Gerard Delanty, "The Cosmopolitan imagination: Critical Cosmopolitanism and Social Theory," *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 57, No. 1, 2006, p. 26.

⁸² David Held, *Cosmopolitanism: Ideals and Realities*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), p. 45.

⁸³ Charles Jones, "Cosmopolitanism," in Donald Borchert (Ed.) *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 2, (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006), pp. 569-570.

⁸⁴ Adam Etinson, "Cosmopolitanism: Cultural, Moral and Political," in Diogo P. Autilio, Gabriele De Angelis and Regina Queiroz (eds.), *Sovereign Justice: Global Justice in a World of Nations*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co.), 2011, p. 27.

Political cosmopolitanism suggests an expression of a universal polis envisioned by early Stoic thinkers. Unlike any ordinary state, this polis, according to Etinson, was a cosmic polity (i.e., kosmopolites) that did not depend for its existence on human institutional structures or on any means of self-defence. Its boundaries were set by the sun and its laws were perfect expressions of the divine norms of reason.⁸⁵ In a similar vein, moral cosmopolitanism is the view that all human beings are members of a single moral community and that they have moral obligations to all other human beings regardless of their nationality, language, religion, customs, etc.⁸⁶ Moral cosmopolitanism affirms the equal worth of every human individual, quite apart from any subgroup to which they might belong, along with a commitment to impartial concern.⁸⁷

Cosmopolitanism, Obligatory Vaccination and Migration

Mobility, being an innate human feature, will continue to occur irrespective of situational conditions individuals find themselves. Within voluntary and involuntary reasons to migrate, the idea of thinking to move to another environment and residing with the people there portends the single human *beingness*. This is underscore in the concept that the cosmopolitan citizen is in many ways understood to be an ideal world citizen committed to principles of justice and democracy that are portrayed as universal, guided by a global sense of solidarity.⁸⁸ The COVID-19 pandemic has no doubt brought to the fore the plight of migrants within mobility discourse as every part of the world is affected though at different degrees. Chernilo rightly points out that this is arguably the first global phenomenon in human history in which the majority of the world's population is experiencing *a similar event at the same time*.⁸⁹

Citizens and residents are under regimes of restrictions to halt the spread of the pandemic. In the same vein borders are shut against travellers and migrants to reduce incidents of bringing the virus through borders since the initial spread from Wuhan, the epicenter of the virus resulted from human mobility. But Barnes and Makinda's argument can be seen as right to a large extent. Both scholars contend that COVID-19 has been exploited to try to normalize pre-existing migration deterrence policies with the primary aim not of

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 38.

⁸⁶ Kleingeld, Op. cit., p. 507.

⁸⁷ Jones, Op. cit., p. 568.

⁸⁸ Cindy Horst and Tore Vincents Olsen, "Transnational Citizens, Cosmopolitan Outlooks? Migration as a Route to Cosmopolitanism," *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2021, p. 4.

⁸⁹ Daniel Chernilo, "Another Globalisation: Covid-19 and the Cosmopolitan Imagination," in Gerard Delanty (Ed.) *Pandemics, Politics and Society: Critical Perspectives on the Covid-19*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2021), p. 157.

stopping the spread of the virus, but of hindering migration flows.⁹⁰ Some countries, including the United States of America (especially under the Donald Trump Administration), Australia, Malta and several European countries have enacted stricter policies against migrants even before the outbreak of the pandemic. The pandemic only solidifies their measures to reduce the number of persons coming into their countries. The amplification of populist and pessimistic rhetoric of nationalism tends to generalise the growing intervention of state machinery, justifying authoritarianism as the only viable alternative to control the spread of Covid-19.⁹¹

The cosmopolitan approach to this question of mobility and migration still revolves around the sense of humanity and the identity global citizenship which now takes a moral dimension more than ever before. No one can rightly criticize a country for taking measures to protect its population and stop the spread of the virus but motive when it comes to migrants can be questioned. International conventions of protecting migrants (including refugees and asylum seekers) cannot be totally ignored in the face of the pandemic. Following the canon of risk society, the philosophical approach to cosmopolitanism, according to Kataria and Qu, becomes much more significant to direct our attention to existing international inequality and the dire need to redress the inequitable distribution of resources.⁹²

My submission aligns with that of Kataria and Qu that the empirical supposition of the pandemic legitimises the metaphysical doctrine of cosmopolitanism as normative philosophy of shunning the differences and identify an individual as the optimum element of our moral and ethical responsibilities, emphasising on the principles of individualism (the individual is sovereign that need protection), universalism (subject to universal moral values without any distinction based on nationality, community or group) and generality (people are unit of moral concern for everyone and everywhere). Cosmopolitanism attempts to equalise and correct the unjust global structure to protect the rights of the least well-of.⁹³ Reasoning along this line it becomes evident that obligatory vaccination as a way of deterring immigrants is not the best approach. That sense of responsibility to the 'other' ought not to be neglected because of a global crisis.

The metaphysical modus operandi of cosmopolitanism demands an epistemological shift towards a hybrid account of moral responsibility, establishing reconciliation between national identity and global individualism. To reformulate the discourse on welfare and

⁹⁰ Jamal Barnes and Samuel M. Makinda, "A threat to Cosmopolitan Duties? How COVID-19 has been used as a tool to Undermine Refugee Rights," *International Affairs*, Sept. 2021, p. 2.

⁹¹ Sumiti Kataria and Hongmei Qu, "The Coronavirus Pandemic: The Growing Relevance of Moral Cosmopolitan Justice?" *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 15, 2022, p. 2.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

social progress, it is inevitable that we cogitate on the desire to move beyond the politics of populism, economic growth and profit-making approach of neo-liberalism emphasising on downsizing and disinvestment, purporting the reinterpretation of realist assertion international relations focusing on the conduct of inter-state conflict to the reflection on growing dependence and existing global inequality.⁹⁴ The multidimensional approach to cosmopolitanism attempts to construct a realm of fair distribution of duties and responsibilities that acknowledge the relevance of subsistence rights and the necessity of the global community to cooperate for creating an environment of social cohesion, providing the equal share of entitlements to all parts of the globe and allowing mobility and migration without the burden of compulsory migration.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.