Citizenship in global perspective

Political identity has become increasingly detached from its ‘monogamous’ association with a single nation-state, and replaced for some with a system of fluid, multiple citizenships. Chris Armstrong examines the nature of the relationship between ‘global’ and ‘local’ forms of citizenship.

Introduction

The major task of this paper is to examine the prospects for, and nature of, a putative regime of global citizenship. As such it aims to examine whether the dichotomy between curse (globalisation) and cure (global citizenship) bears up under scrutiny. Section 1 examines the ‘politics’ of a putative global citizenship regime, and specifically the character of the much-vaunted ‘global civil society’. Section 2 addresses the relationship between ‘global’ and ‘local’ forms of citizenship. It is shown that, despite the claims made on behalf of the discourse of global citizenship, certain parts of the emerging citizenship order remain resolutely non-‘global’. Rather than ‘local’ sovereignty and citizenship being displaced by ‘global’ forms, the current global order seems to be characterised by a complex inter-relation between the two, and the political and economic effects of this division of labour are broadly conservative. This does not confirm the view of Rawls, Marshall, et al that the value of citizenship cannot organise egalitarian commitments at the transnational level, but it does imply that such a project is more complex and difficult than has often been imagined. Just as there are many possible globalisations (to echo the name of a recently-launched journal), so there are many possible global citizenship forms, some of which will have more radical implications than others.

For theorists such as Rawls and Marshall, it was taken for granted that citizenship as a practice and as an identity would be tied to the institution of the nation-state. Although the ideal of equal citizenship has a great deal of critical value, that ideal simply ceases to apply beyond the borders of the nation-state. Even if there were reasons for objecting to inequalities on a world scale, these reasons would not relate to citizenship as a value or an aspiration. Although such a view has a number of contemporary adherents, it is increasingly challenged on two related grounds.

Firstly, politicians, journalists and academics increasingly tell us we live in an ‘interdependent’, even ‘cosmopolitan’ age, the by-product of an
inexorable process of ‘globalisation’. We now share, we are told, what Held and McGrew (2002) call a single “community of fate”, such that actions in one part of the planet inevitably impact on others, and we face common problems that can only be dealt with by means of common political action. Given the increasing economic and cultural interpenetration of societies, the resolutely state-centric approach to justice and equality of communitarians and nationalists is naïve and politically disabling.

Secondly, for many commentators the dominant nation-state based model of citizenship is in the process of disintegrating as a focus of political identity and power, and as a conduit for egalitarian politics. Although the political project of citizenship has been successfully “fixed” at the level of the nation-state in recent centuries (Behnke, 1997), this link is under threat on a number of fronts. The growth of transnational identities and mass migration, the vagaries of the global economy, or the collapse of the vision of the homogenous nation-state have led to a progressive unwrapping of the citizenship “package” that characterised much of the twentieth century, based on state sovereignty, social protection and a common identity (Sassen, 2003). Political identity has become increasingly detached from its ‘monogamous’ association with a single nation-state, and replaced (at least for some) with a system of fluid, multiple citizenships. The state, we are told, is simply no longer the only meaningful player on the world stage, and although this may not imply the death of the state, it does suggest a changing role for the state, and a change in the nature of citizenship.

Assuming that both of these trends are indeed evident, the question that is posed in response is how we might ‘tame’, ‘domesticate’, ‘civilise’ or otherwise respond to these processes, thereby to recapture political control over a ‘runaway’ world. One increasingly common answer suggests that the same forces that have led to an unbundling of the project of national citizenship have opened up possibilities for imagining forms of solidarity and belonging less marked by the exclusionist histories of the modern nation-state (Purcell, 2003). On this version of events whilst globalisation is both a blessing and a curse, global citizenship offers an antidote to the inegalitarian and undemocratic tendencies of global integration. Iris Young (2000, p.273), for example, argues for “a global citizenship status for all persons, so that they would not have to depend on a state for acknowledgement of their basic rights”.
Global citizenship and democracy: The role of ‘global civil society’

“only ‘global civil society’ can be posed as a counterweight to globalisation” (Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor 2001, p.17).

“the advantage of the language of civil society is precisely its political content, its implications for participation and citizenship. It adds to the human rights discourse the notion of individual responsibility for respect of human rights through public action” (Kaldor, 1999, pg. 211).

If a global regime of citizenship is in the process of emerging, at what sites does the political participation of citizens take place? For most cosmopolitan theorists, the role of the nation-state as the locus of real power is fast eroding if not altogether terminated, and the real focal points of power in the contemporary world lie with international organisations and powerful economic actors (see Held, 1995). If this is the case, national citizenship can no longer operate as the site of a viable form of democracy or equality, and other possibilities, which are closer to the seats of real power, must be found. One possibility lies with democratic reform of existing institutions such as the United Nations (UN), taking the form perhaps of a directly globally-elected UN Parliament (Linklater 2002, p.329; see also Young, 2000). Such a project is worthwhile, but could be expected to have radical implications only if we assume that bodies such as the UN are crucial sites of transnational power. However, in the current global order multinational corporations and institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organisation (WTO) appear to many to represent the embodiment of such power. For a growing number of commentators, the democratic participation of citizens is and should therefore be expressed through the intermediaries of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), which are able to interact with, and hopefully influence, such international governmental institutions. In re-linking global power with the concerns of individual citizens across the globe, and injecting an element of accountability and transparency into ‘global governance’, these INGOs represent the crucial focus of an emerging ‘global civil society’. For Linklater:

“Attempts by INGOs to build a worldwide public sphere by participating, albeit sporadically, in global events, running parallel to
major United Nations conferences such as those held in Beijing and Rio de Janeiro advance the claim that global institutions should comply with principles of democratic legitimacy” (2002, p. 329).

Whereas the executives who attend global summits represent the real princes of global power, the colourful eruptions of popular democratic will that picket them represent their consciences, and sometimes at least succeed in making their voices heard.

A newly emerging global civil society (hereafter GCS) is usually constituted as a ‘third zone’, beyond formal politics and the market, or at least a zone where “civic initiative” mingles with “market forces” and the power-play of “state interaction” (Keane, 2001, p.35). This GCS forms an essential counterbalance to the exclusionary, inegalitarian and undemocratic nature of global power. Some rather grand claims have been made about the potential of GCS to ‘civilize’ globalisation: that it produces the key to the delivery of human rights, by supplementing that discourse with an effective account of individual responsibility (Kaldor, 1999), that it supplies an “answer to war” by defusing conflict between major powers, and that it can provide “a check both on the power and arbitrariness of the contemporary state and on the power of unbridled capitalism” (Kaldor, 2003, p.21). Indeed civil society at the global level is ethically superior to its seedbeds at the national level, for GCS overcomes the exclusionary tendencies of nation-state-based citizenship (Linklater, 1998). Such is the potential legitimising role of GCS within global politics that, for Daniele Archibugi (1998) it is the existence of GCS alone that provides the authority for global institutions to interfere in the domestic affairs of nation-states. Whereas global institutions such as the UN suffer from obvious ‘democratic deficits’, the democratic energies of GCS can act as a legitimating force for their actions and recouple economic and military power with the authority of democratic citizenship.

If a global citizenry is emerging, then, GCS is said to represent one of its primary manifestations. Naidoo and Tandon (1999, pp.6-7) have described it as “the network of autonomous institutions that rights-bearing and responsibility-laden citizens voluntarily create to address common problems, advance shared interests and promote collective aspirations”. GCS is the place where human rights connect with human responsibilities, as individuals and groups seek to mediate the terms of global integration and interdependence. This much is also proclaimed by many of the component organisations of GCS which explicitly use the language of citizenship to frame their concerns and mode of operation. There is an odd slippage in the literature, however, on the question of whether global civil society expresses
the emergence of global citizenship, or in fact engineers that emergence. Here prominent accounts of global civil society become somewhat circular, for many defenders of global civil society do see it as playing a role in creating global citizens. As Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor (2001, p.17) put it, “global civil society can be seen as an aspiration to reach and include citizens everywhere and to enable them to think and act as global citizens”. This implies a critical (and very liberal) distancing from national traditions and identities: in the new globalised world, Held and McGrew (2002, p.107) tell us, “[e]ach citizen of a state will have to learn to become a ‘cosmopolitan citizen’ as well; that is, a person capable of mediating between national traditions and alternative forms of life”.

For Linklater (1998, p.81) transnational political communities are necessary to “promote a transnational citizenry with multiple political allegiances”, and not just to give expression to those allegiances. For Keane (2001, p. 43), even more bluntly, global public spheres “enable citizens to shake off bad habits of parochialism”. Although GCS begins to look like a tremendously powerful and progressive force on this dominant narrative, its supporters do feel the need to address three tricky issues. The first is the Western bias of the nascent global civil society. As Gideon Baker (2002, p.937) puts it:

“most ‘global’ civil society organisations are actually thoroughly Western [...] and the majority of the world’s ‘citizens’ are more adequately conceptualised as objects rather than subjects of such organisations”.

Even its champions admit that the INGOs that constitute GCS are “heavily concentrated in north-western Europe” (Anheier, Glasius & Kaldor, 2001, p.7; see also Linklater 2002, p.329). Keane (2001, p.24) in fact tells us that there are “no-go areas for civil society” at the global level, where GCS has barely been able to put down roots at all (and where “parochialism” presumably still rules). However, for supporters of GCS this is generally identified as a transitional problem: in time, the organisations and practices of GCS will become more vocal and powerful in the global South, thereby confirming its legitimacy. The second tricky issue concerns what ‘counts’ as GCS and what does not. Do we include right-wing organisations such as transnational fundamentalist and even terrorist organisations, or organisations that challenge the basic principles of human rights, for instance? Opinion here is divided; some are happy to boldly define GCS as “a complex multiorganizational field that explicitly excludes reactionary - racist, fascist or fundamentalist - organizations and movements” (Taylor,
2004, p.4), whereas others are more circumspect. However, a commitment to existing ideals of human rights does seem to be hardwired into the definitions of theorists such as Kaldor and Linklater.

Finally, just how independent from the powers-that-be does GCS have to be to represent a corrective to their undemocratic tendencies? Should financial organisations, corporations and/or economic lobbying organisations themselves be included in the definition of GCS? Held and McGrew (2002, p.70) themselves point to “a significant privatisation of aspects of global governance [representing] the expanding influence of private interests in the formulation as well as the delivery of global policies”. Some have responded to this fact by defining GCS in such a way that it does not include these private voices, but it is not clear that its independence can be secured by such “ definitional fiat” (Munck, 2004). On a related theme, should the INGOs considered to comprise GCS be autonomously organised by citizens, and funded by concerned individuals, or may they be sponsored, organised or even paid for, by states and transnational organisations (as many are) and still preserve their role as the democratic ‘policemen’ of world politics? For defenders of GCS these are difficult questions, but their claim remains that GCS - however constituted - represents the best hope for achieving some form of democratic politics in the contemporary global order.

**Either/or? The politics of global citizenship**

If a commitment to equal citizenship is to provide a framework for struggles against global inequalities, such a project in fact appears highly precarious. The claim that a meaningful global regime of citizenship is emerging - and that it represents the seedbed for a new global democratic egalitarianism - should be treated with caution, for two reasons. Firstly, to the extent that such a citizenship regime is represented by the discourse of human rights and the vibrancy of so-called global civil society its egalitarian credentials look far from certain, and as a whole the global order exhibits what Santos (1999) calls “low intensity human rights [plus] low intensity democracy”. Secondly, the supposedly ‘global’ elements of global citizenship turn out on closer inspection to be far less universal and transcendental than is often implied. The imperatives of the current world order suggest not a world in which all is global, but a world in which some things (capital, goods, information, economic elites, human rights) are constituted as ‘global’, but some things (national borders, the poor, responsibilities for ‘development’ and human rights) remain resolutely ‘local’.

By the same token globalisation appears to have transformed the terms
of national citizenship, rather than rendering it obsolete as a category of political and economic life. To be sure the social rights of the Western welfare state are becoming more and more conditional and incentivised, and social solidarity is increasingly secured instead by emphasising the common threats posed by insecurity, lawlessness, immigration and the competitive global economy. However, the relation between state power and the power of transnational economic forces is complex and variable, and some states—notably the United Kingdom—have been far more ‘proactive’ in ‘meeting the challenges’ of globalisation than others. In many Western countries the narrative of globalisation has been deployed as a lever with which to legitimise recent transformations of national citizenship, and even such equality and diversity as the modern state can still muster often serves as a useful tool for the ‘rebranding’ of its workforce. It may well be that the logic of state sovereignty has been transformed, but proclamations of the death of the state and of nation-state citizenship are premature, and eager acceptance of such ideas may be all too convenient for the political leaders beloved of the rhetoric of global necessity, peddling what Ulrich Beck has called “the rebirth of Marxism as management ideology”.

It seems, therefore, that what best characterises the contemporary world is not a move from national to global citizenship as such, but the (often shifting) coexistence between a variety of citizenship forms, which enable mobility and choice for some, but which imply ‘stability’ and compulsion for others. There are differing degrees of mobility between these citizenship regimes, and such mobility may be stratified according to class, gender and ethnicity. Although this sounds like a dystopian version of Held’s (1995) world of “multiple citizenships”, it might be closer to the reality for many of the world’s people.

All of this suggests that recourse to the ideal of equal citizenship will not be a straightforward affair at the global level, but this is not to reject the idea, as some theorists have done. Thus communitarians and liberal nationalists remind us that the nation-state remains a crucial locus of identity, social meaning and to some extent political power. Such theorists object to a regime of global citizenship because of sincere concerns over the dangers of theoretical imperialism: in a diverse and pluralist world, adherence to an abstract cosmopolitan citizenship regime amounts to complicity in the erasure of cultural difference. However, the communitarian position is vulnerable to a series of powerful criticisms itself: communitarians offer no adequate response to the genuine power of multinationals and global economic institutions, and defend images of the nation that deny the (new but also very old) fact that the nation-state has never been a simple container for political identity. The assertion of the
‘unnaturality’ of global citizenship depends on a naturalisation of national citizenship which does not bear up under historical scrutiny (Behnke, 1997). Moreover, such theorists inexcusably neglect the strong connections between the citizenship privileges enjoyed in wealthy Western democracies and the place of rich states in a hugely unequal global economic system.

Although mainstream discourses of globalisation often obscure, legitimate or even facilitate the brutal realities of global ‘interdependence’ (and displace more longstanding concerns with capitalism, imperialism and domination), the autarchy supposed by communitarian theorists remains untenable in the current global order. Even if a revolt against global capital appeared on the communitarian horizon, and all the lines of global cultural interpenetration and inter-definition were severed, the trump card of many cosmopolitan theorists - the challenge of ecological degradation - would still demand both global principles of justice and a transformation of ‘domestic’ citizenship practices. This is not to downplay the importance of ‘local’ action, but it is to say that the world ‘out there’ is in practice a world of grand narratives and transformative visions; it just happens that the dominant visions are those of neoliberalism and the new world order. In this context even national borders are global institutions, and require defending by force as well as by moral argument.

In fact, it is likely that global inequalities cannot be adequately tackled at either the nation-state or the global level, and instead demand action at both levels simultaneously (see Harvey, 2000, p.50; Sassen, 2003). As a result, it may be that the opposition between cosmopolitanism on the one hand and nationalism/communitarianism on the other is deceptive and unhelpful. Rather, the suspicion is that an attack on the inequalities that characterise the global system does not by definition necessitate an attack on ‘the nation’ in all its forms. It may turn out that, if it is a useful political term at all, cosmopolitanism makes sense not in terms of resistance to nationalism per se, but in terms of resistance to racism, sexism, capitalism, and the reckless transformation of the ecology of the planet we live in.

As Bhikhu Parekh (2003) puts it, this does suggest that even if we reject a system of global citizenship, some form of “globally-oriented citizenship” is a minimal requirement. One component in this turn to ‘globally-oriented’ or ‘worldly’ citizenship is likely to be a far more substantial account of responsibility than we find in the communitarian literature, and even in much of the dominant cosmopolitan literature. We might, for example, argue for the salience of the concept of ‘privileged irresponsibility’ found in feminist theory, and apply it to issues of economic justice, care, and ecological justice, and Iris Young has more recently developed an account of ‘structural responsibility’ which shares many of the same concerns. For
Young (2004), individuals who benefit from global inequalities of wealth and power have a responsibility to act in order to combat such exploitative relations, regardless of national boundaries. Such responsibilities cannot easily be traced back to individual actions, but derive from the facts of ‘interdependence’, from privilege and from complicity in oppression. Such an idea could potentially be interpreted much more broadly; certainly parallel arguments are also common in ecological theory, where ideals of (citizenly) “ecological virtue” have recently been defended that strongly challenge the consumption and production choices of “private” individuals (see e.g. Dobson, 2003). We could also apply the notion of “privileged irresponsibility”, as Tronto (1993) intimates, to reveal and to frame the struggle against processes of racial and sexual hierarchy at a transnational level.

Whilst the prospects of a truly global form of citizenship may appear quite distant, it has become increasingly common for political theorists to stress the importance of education as a vehicle for its development. Even a sceptic about global citizenship, such as Rawls, stressed that the ‘sympathies’ of human beings were not inevitably limited to members of their own nation-state, but might - and perhaps should - expand over time to take in all of humanity. The idea that educational institutions have a primary role to play in this expanding of sympathies is perhaps most closely associated with Martha Nussbaum. For Nussbaum, educationalists have a key role to play in breaking down the barriers between distinct nationalities and ethnic groups, and more positively to help in developing a global “community of dialogue and concern.” As she puts it (2002, p. 9):

“In educational terms, this means that students in the United States, for example, may continue to regard themselves as defined partly by their particular loves - their families, their religious, ethnic, or racial communities, or even their country. But they must also, and centrally, learn to recognize humanity wherever they encounter it…and be eager to understand humanity in all its strange guises”.

Nussbaum herself gives little indication of what the content of a curriculum designed to foster a feeling of global citizenship might look like (and there is, predictably, controversy over whether a feeling of global citizenship is all that is necessary to constitute citizenship as an identity and as a legal/political status). But her suggestions are reflective of a great deal of recent work on citizenship education on the global scale (see Osler & Vincent (eds.) 2002 for a survey of some European perspectives), and controversies are currently raging over the precise content of education for
global citizenship (see Hicks 2003 for an overview). If, as seems quite possible, the development of some very thin version of ‘global citizenship’ is a feature of the coming decades, then theorists need to critically engage with this development in order to seek out the points of tension, and to make the most of the potential it offers for egalitarian change. And in this endeavour, the contribution of educationalists may prove to be very significant.

References and Bibliography


**Chris Armstrong** is a lecturer in politics at the University of Southampton, and until recently lectured at Queen’s University, Belfast. He has written a number of articles on the political theory of equality and of gender, and is the author of *Rethinking Equality: the Challenge of Equal Citizenship* (Manchester University Press, 2006).

Chris Armstrong,
Division of Politics,
University of Southampton,
SO17 1BJ

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