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Global Citizenship Education: Red herring or dead duck

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ABSTRACT This paper argues that global citizenship education is self-defeating because it assumes that universal values, such as universal human rights and global human solidarity can be achieved without the need to secure national citizenship, and without explicit reference to nation states at all. It argues that concepts of national citizenship have been developed in such a way that cultural homogeneity is seen as a natural component of national identity and national citizenship. This is at the heart of the concept national citizenship and needs to be challenged. But it is unlikely to be challenged effectively while attention is focused on global citizenship.

Keywords: Global Citizenship Education, National citizenship, United Nations

Introduction

Any review of global citizenship education (GCE) starts with an acknowledgement of the complexity of the idea; global citizenship (GC) is a contested area, and there are diverse interpretations (Andreotti, 2011). It has been argued, for example, that the narratives of neo-liberalism and open democracy are pulling the field of GCE in different directions, but that, while the two narratives are not compatible, they co-exist, possibly providing cover for each other (Camicia and Franklin, 2011). In this article, I will argue that this complexity, and the apparent blending of incompatible elements, arises from the essential flaw in the concept of GC, namely that citizens are citizens of specific nation states, not of a global order.

Global citizenship education

The development of GCE has run in parallel with, if not directly connected with, an increasingly widespread idea that the nation state is becoming irrelevant to the understanding of globalisation and international relations. We all consume world culture, whether as the product of Hollywood, Bollywood or Nollywood. We celebrate world music, and buy products that are promoted by global capital. On the positive side, there has been growing awareness and advocacy for the universality of human rights, impelled by the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations in 1948 (United Nations, 1948). The universality of human rights points to a sense of solidarity with humankind as a whole, a commitment to removing discrimination of the basis of gender, race, religion, language or ethnicity, and an appeal to values that go beyond self-interest and petty localism. "GCE is not and should not be a promotion of citizenship models of a particular country or region" (UNESCO, 2014, 18).

"Today, all United Nations member States have ratified at least one of the nine core international human rights treaties, and 80 percent have ratified four or more, giving concrete expression to the universality of the UDHR and international human rights".(United Nations, no date) While such consensus about the importance and universality of human rights is very positive, it should not blind us to the brute fact, that having a right is pointless unless one can assert, defend and enjoy that right. And that

means that we need to pay close attention to the mechanisms, courts and tribunals in which rights can be asserted, and in the very vast majority of cases these arrangements are national and not international. (There are exceptions to this general rule, such as the European Court of Justice and the International Court of Justice, but these are somewhat limited in their geographical coverage or general scope, and in most cases rely on states to implement their decisions.) Indeed, in the quotation cited in the opening of this paragraph, the number of states ratifying international human rights treaties was given as the benchmark of success.

In explaining how international law protects human rights, the United Nations (no date) state that, "International human rights law lays down obligations which States are bound to respect. By becoming parties to international treaties, States assume obligations and duties under international law to respect, to protect and to fulfil human rights". Given this central role of states in the implementation and defence of human rights, it would be a mistake to ignore the role of states in GCE, or to suppose that reliance on state intervention had somehow been superseded by global citizenship.

This explains the importance that the UN attaches to eliminating statelessness; being a member of a state is crucial to the process of having universal human rights, protection of those rights, and access to the mechanisms that can be used to assert and defend those rights. The UNHCR (2005) handbook for parliamentarians, *Nationality and Statelessness*, on the back cover, cites Chief Justice Earl Warren as saying, "Citizenship is man's basic right for it is nothing less than the right to have rights". Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that, "Everyone has the right to a nationality. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality". Citizenship is thus at the heart of the system of universal human rights which is supposed to underpin global citizenship. And the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been followed by various conventions designed to reduce statelessness, and to ensure that stateless persons can acquire citizenship, and with it the protection of their rights. In particular, Article 8 of the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (1961) makes clear that, "A Contracting State shall not deprive a person of its nationality if such deprivation would render him stateless".

Two recent cases in the UK illustrate the issues related to questions of citizenship and the protection of human rights. In one case Shamima Begum had her UK citizenship revoked. This was the case of a young woman who had fled the UK in order to join the Islamic State in Syria, and who, when she wished to return to the UK, had her citizenship rescinded by the Home Office (the UK ministry of the interior responsible for issues of citizenship and law and order). This action would have been illegal under the terms of the 1961 Convention, but for the fact that Ms. Begum's parents are of Bangladeshi extraction and, as a consequence, she has a putative right to claim citizenship of another country, even though she has neither lived in that country nor previously asserted that claim to citizenship. With that slim excuse, the UK Government argued that withdrawal of citizenship would not render Ms. Begum stateless (Sabbagh, 2020).

Of course, as a sidelight on this decision, which was upheld in the courts, the price of that victory was the creation of a distinction between UK citizens who could have their citizenship withdrawn, and those who could not. Second and third generation immigrants to the UK are effectively given a special, and inferior, status, which permits the removal of their citizenship if they cross some threshold of social or legal acceptability. Given the nature of migration to the UK over the last century it is hard to see how this position can be regarded as anything other than institutionally racist, and it is to be hoped that steps will be taken to rectify the situation in the near future.

A second case there the UK Home Office applied similar reasoning, that it was acceptable to deny UK citizenship to people who had lived most or all their lives as law-abiding and tax paying residents of the UK, on the grounds that they could plausibly be assumed to have citizenship of another country and could not reach the ridicu-

lously high standards of evidence required by bureaucrats, resulted in what became known as the Windrush Scandal (Gentleman, 2020).

However, for the purposes of the discussion of global citizenship, the important message here is that these cases were fought through the UK courts, reported by the UK press, discussed in the UK Parliament, and were subject to pressure from UK public opinion. This last element, which was present in the Windrush Scandal but absent in the case of Ms. Begum, was probably decisive in producing the outcome in the two contrasting cases. Where the courts upheld the government case in the former case, in the latter the Home Secretary was forced to resign. Most significantly, an approach by twelve heads of government from the Caribbean to meet with the UK prime minister, in an attempt to avoid the worst excesses of the Windrush Scandal, was rebuffed by the UK Government, and consequently ineffective (Gentleman, 2018). That is to say, the one point where global influence might have been effective proved not to be so.

These examples from the UK point a number of important lessons, the most significant of which is that universal rights depend on and are intimately related with the nation state. It is the nation state that is given the responsibility, under international law, to secure the rights of its citizens. It is true that the record of the UK is not particularly glowing in this regard, although it is much better than some. But if we ignore the mechanisms for claiming and protecting rights that nation states offer, we leave the question of universal human rights at the level of an aspiration, with no hope of a concrete mechanism that has a chance of producing results.

Certainly, we need to be critical, and we must not be fooled by show trials and re-education centres, where the purpose of the nation state may be to deny the rights of its citizens, but neither can we imagine that global citizenship can be conjured up without a firm foundation in the courts, tribunals and legal process of individual countries.

We might have arrived at this conclusion via a different route. In *The Making of Citizens*, Merriam (1966) argues that the nation state is too large an entity for a young person to develop patriotic attachment to it directly. The first attachments that a young person makes outside the home are to a school, to a religious community, or to a youth organisation. Gradually, through a process of education, the child comes to recognise his or her place in a wider community, and only at last develops a sense of being a citizen of a country. What is posited in GCE is that this attachment to country is not the last step, but an intermediate step before recognising that one is part of a global humanity with common interests and rights. But to imagine that global citizenship can survive without a firm foundation in national citizenship is as foolish as Merriam would have imagined the idea of national citizenship that was not mediated by other social groupings. To talk about global citizenship as though it were somehow independent of national citizenship makes as much sense as constructing a ladder with only a top rung.

These arguments may seem rather abstract, and based on logic rather than on practice of jurisprudence or political engagement. But in practice, these are matters of the first importance. Many national constitutions around the world enshrine the equal rights of citizens before the law in fine words and flowing phrases, but if there is no process whereby a citizen can assert those rights through the courts and tribunals of the land, then they are empty words and hollow phrases. There is no point in having the equal rights of women or other identifiable groups spelled out in legal terms unless there is a way for those rights to be asserted and secured.

In order for "global citizens" to have rights, it must be possible to defend those rights in national courts and tribunals, which necessarily means there must be no obstacles to accessing those legal processes, including making due legal process too costly. National citizens not only have rights under their own legal system, but also have responsibilities, one of which is to form a personal judgement about the legitimacy of the laws they are subject to. If a law is unjust, citizens not only can, but should cam-

paign for its overturn, including such methods of passive resistance as seem proportionate. This does not, of course, mean that individual citizens who take the high moral ground are above the law; breaking the law has consequences, and citizens who oppose a law must face the consequences of their actions. But in the end the law must be held to a higher and overarching moral judgement, and the laws must be those which, by and large, the citizens of the nation consent to. In the absence of this ultimate constraint on legal process, rule by law rather than rule of law would result, in a way suggested by the words of Bob Dylan:

> Although the masters make the rules for the wise men and the fools
> I got nothing, Ma, to live up to...

Which is to say, without moral judgement, legal process alone does not necessarily produce standards of justice.

Incidentally, it is worth mentioning that the "rule of law" is cited in the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as an important element in the stability of nations. Once again, the roots of universalism go deep into the organisation of nation states.

Hannaford (1996) argues that the forced conversion of Jews to Christianity in Spain in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was a turning point for the concept of citizenship. It introduced the idea of cultural homogeneity into the notion of citizen. In the ancient world, citizenship, membership of the polity, was a simple exchange; citizenship conferred certain rights in return for accepting certain responsibilities. Although some people were excluded from citizenship, notably women and slaves, no distinction was allowed among citizens on the grounds of religion, ethnicity or social origin. Hannaford further argues that it is a mistake to project our current views of race onto the ancient world, as the word "slave" was a description of political status, and had not yet acquired the associations with race that it has today; freed slave could become a citizen on equal terms with any pure-blood aristocrat.

The ultimatum given to Spanish Jews, essentially to convert to Catholicism or die, changed all that. It introduced a motivation to simulate cultural conformity, and with it the possible distinction between "real" citizens and those who are only pretending to be "one of us". We can trace this, as Hannaford does, to the present day, and the idea of criteria to test for citizenship, such as whether one supports the right football team in international competitions. And the practical outcome of such attitudes can be seen in the cases of Shamima Begum and the Windrush scandal described above. This contrasts sharply with the political concept of citizenship, that membership of the polity is not qualified. And in the modern world the polity, the population that elects the legislative body that sets the rights and obligations of citizens, is the nation state.

The notion of global citizenship does nothing to dispel the idea of cultural citizenship and the need for social homogeneity in its definition, as the following passage shows:

> In countries where identity is a sensitive issue and solidifying the national identity itself is a challenge, room for promoting a sense of citizenship at the global level could be limited. This is particularly the case in settings where national citizenship identities are conflicted or under threat. These concerns often arise from a belief that national citizenship is an essential precursor to global citizenship (UNESCO, 2014, 19).

This suggests that global citizenship education has little to say in circumstances where "national identity itself is a challenge", and where "national citizenship identities are conflicted". But national citizenship identities are conflicted because the idea persists that citizenship depends on conformity to some cultural, ethnic or linguistic standard, and we have seen where that leads in Bosnia, Rwanda and Myanmar.

Moreover, the tone of the passage implies that the "belief that national citizenship is an essential precursor to global citizenship" is false. Yet, as noted above, Chief Justice Earl Warren and Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights beg to differ. As a consequence, the aspiration to global citizenship embodied in global citizenship education becomes self-defeating, as it fails to find a solid foundation in the basis for international law and the practical arrangements for securing universal human rights.

It should be noted that the converse is also true. Membership of the polity, and the right to have a say in the rules that govern citizenship, belongs to each citizen without distinction. But those who are not members of the polity, while they may have opinions on what happens, have no place in the political process. By blurring the distinction with a sense of universal involvement each with every other, global citizenship can become an invitation to external interference with the political processes of other countries, and a foundation for neocolonial attitudes.

In much the same way as the fact that anything can be deduced from a contradiction, an edifice constructed on a foundation that is flawed can include almost anything. Without a foundation in national citizenship, global citizenship education becomes a grab bag of idea that we feel positive about.

In a tried and tested explanation for the failure of a fundamentally flawed policy, UNESCO (2014, 21-22) blames the teachers and their lack of preparation, advocating

> "participatory and transformative pedagogical practices that: are learner centred; are holistic, and foster awareness of local challenges, collective concerns and responsibilities; encourage dialogue and respectful learning; recognize cultural norms, national policies and international frameworks that impact on the formation of values; promote critical thinking and creativity, are empowering and are solution-oriented; and develop resilience and 'action competence'".

Leaving aside the question of whether being learner centred and recognising cultural norms are compatible, all of these aspects of education may be desirable, without necessarily adding up to anything that amounts to global citizenship education.

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic we are perhaps more sensitive than ever to the opportunity costs of poor information. If misinformation does not do any direct harm, it may nevertheless do indirect harm by distracting attention from measures that cold helpfully alleviate an undesirable situation. In a world where too many people still have difficulty in asserting their rights, or cannot assert their rights at all, focusing on a vague and wrong-headed idea of global citizenship can detract from efforts to ensure that nation states face up to their responsibilities in line with the international agreements that they have committed to. This is not an issue of interfering in the national interests of others, but of holding nation states to account for their actions in relation to agreements that they have entered into freely.

Concluding Remarks

Above all, politicians should not be allowed to believe that they have done all that is necessary when they have put find words into constitutions. Unless the courts, tribunals and legal processes are in place, unless the media for the expression of public opinion are accessible, and unless the functioning of the legislature is transparent, the foundation for national citizenship will be lacking. We should defer the luxury of contemplating global citizenship until that job is complete. If we allow the idea to go unchallenged that universal rights can be achieved without paying attention to the involvement of nation states, we do the marginalised and those whose rights are most at

risk a double disservice; not only are they marginalised, but they are denied the mechanisms, courts and tribunals through which they could secure those rights. Many fine words appear in national constitutions about the absence of discrimination and the provision of legal protection for all, but unless the mechanisms for securing those rights are properly constructed they will remain a distant dream for the majority of humanity.

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