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## Global Citizenship in Public Discourse

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The idea of global citizenship is no longer confined to a small cadre of political philosophers and advocates for world government. During the past decade, the term 'global citizenship' increasingly has been communicated in public discourse by individuals across a wide variety of political, social and economic institutions—elementary schools encouraging children to embrace other cultures; secondary schools striving to render graduates more competitive in the global marketplace; multinational corporations projecting images of social responsibility amid critical scrutiny from stakeholders, journalists and advocacy groups; and political and social activists appealing to visions of solidarity, accountability and mobilization across borders.

The expansion in public discourse related to global citizenship is now clear. Awaiting further clarification are the multiple concepts that compete and co-exist within the umbrella of global citizenship. Two overarching discourses of global citizenship are especially apparent: a civic republican discourse that emphasizes concepts such as awareness, responsibility, participation and cross-cultural empathy, and a libertarian discourse that emphasizes international mobility and competitiveness. Exploring how myriad ways of thinking related to global citizenship are springing forth in public discourse, then, serves to illustrate new ways in which a wide variety of political, social and economic actors are reflecting upon the meaning of citizenship amid increasing public recognition of global interdependence.

The ideas presented in this essay come from my ongoing research into how the term 'global citizenship' has been interpreted and communicated beyond academic debates in political philosophy and the social sciences. During the past five years, I have built up two databases: a database of public statements regarding global citizenship, largely from a variety of news sources around the world, and transcripts from interviews that I have completed with more than 150 individuals associated with these public statements. By using public communication of the term 'global citizenship' as the starting point for analysis, my research strategy is different from many other contributions to the rapidly expanding literature regarding prospects for an international dimension of citizenship. While other contributions to the literature often propose specific categories of individuals as candidate global citizens—such as international migrants or transnational activists—my research has focused primarily on the perceptions and observations of individuals who have chosen either to consider themselves as global citizens or to advocate global citizenship in politics or society.

### The civic republican discourse of global citizenship

In many respects, the civic republican discourse of global citizenship harkens to ancient and medieval understandings of citizenship as self-rule. As written in *The Politics* by Aristotle, who held up participation in the public forum of Athens as the most choice-worthy way of life: "The good citizen should know and have the capacity both to be ruled and to rule, and this very thing is the virtue of a citizen—knowledge of rule over free persons from both (points of view)."<sup>1</sup> Many of today's self-identifying global citizens think about how the necessary ingredients of self-rule—political and social awareness, responsibility and participation—can be channeled into the international arena. For example, consider the definition of a global citizen offered by an advocacy manager for the Australian affiliate of Oxfam:

It would be an individual who has an understanding of the way a society operates at a global level, and having that understanding, that they interpret, for whatever reason, that they have some responsibility as an individual to take action to achieve social justice or equity or environmental sustainability. Somebody who is motivated for whatever reason to take action as opportunities arise on those sorts of issues.<sup>2</sup>

In these sorts of definitions of global citizenship, heightened awareness leads to an elevated sense of responsibility that in turn produces the motivation to project one's voice as a global citizen.

Several transnational activists, in sharing their life histories during interviews, described how they discovered their voices as citizens initially in local or national political spaces and then eventually redeployed their voices internationally. For instance, Hazel Henderson, an economic analyst and syndicated international newspaper columnist who recently has participated in the World Social Forum, first became active as a citizen in New York City politics during the mid-1960s, when she founded the group Citizens for Clean Air and took to the streets to protest industrial pollution. A young mother and housewife at the time, Henderson then worked with Ralph Nader to fight for environmental reforms within General Motors and won a seat for her organization on the corporation's board of directors. She helped organize the first Earth Day in 1970 and wrote a *Harvard Business Review* article on corporate responsibility, which yielded invitations from business schools worldwide to speak on what then was a new line of inquiry: business ethics. This international exposure led to what Henderson considers her international breakthrough as a citizen: an invitation to the first United Nations environmental conference, held in 1972 in Sweden, that in Henderson's mind brought together the global environmental movement for the first time. Her experiences at the conference and the contacts she made left Henderson thinking she was a "planetary pilgrim," a description she regards as a forerunner to the idea of a "global citizen": "We were almost, as Jonas Salk had written at about the same time, he said that this was a completely new breed in the world. He said these are the people who for the first time in history, in the human species, are taking responsibility for the whole human family on the planet. This was unprecedented. And so, I immediately self-identified. I thought, OK, that's a good enough image to work off."

It will come as no surprise that many self-described global citizens are activists campaigning for greater democratic accountability among international economic institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization. One such activist, Anne Christine Hubbard, the secretary-general of the Paris-based International Federation of Human Rights, framed global citizenship as centered on "the idea of where should we have, over what institution should we have democratic control, and what are the institutions that really decide over people's lives and against whom we should organize some form of counterpower."<sup>3</sup> The goal of pressuring international institutions to become more directly accountable to an emerging global public signals how numerous critics of economic globalization are seeking more globalization, not less, in order to tame global capitalism. For many transnational activists, global citizenship amounts to an ongoing uphill battle to create a lasting global public space.

While global citizenship as international participation obviously serves as a prevalent stream of thinking within the civic republican discourse, many other interview respondents thought about global citizenship within the context of domestic politics and face-to-face interaction in local communities, especially in terms of engagement across cultures as well as efforts to translate lofty moral visions into common everyday habits. The organizer of a co-housing initiative oriented toward energy conservation in Cambridge, Massachusetts, noted that many of the participating individuals—global citizens, in her mind—could have afforded larger, more expensive houses, but that the community is "the embodiment of a philosophy that there's a higher standard of living, both socially and spiritually, that can be achieved if we are willing to pull together and invest some time and effort into what the community needs and how we live. And I think that has global ramifications, because if we demonstrate that, then it's there for other people to notice. That's a statement of faith."<sup>4</sup> Making such a statement of faith through one's living arrangement, while planted literally in one's own backyard, serves as an interesting contrast to more directly political and transnational methods of projecting citizen voice.

Such observations serve to illustrate how standing up for one's beliefs within any political community can be taken as a form of global citizenship. Perhaps some of the most potentially intimidating aspects of global citizenship are challenges close to home, such as raising one's voice to confront bigotry. As noted by a London journalist with a local view of global citizenship as cross-cultural engagement: "I don't think you necessarily have to step out of your village to be a global citizen. It just means things, like, if someone's making a horrible racist or bigoted comment in the playground, just saying something about it. To me, those fairly small steps, they all make a world."<sup>5</sup> Taken together, the insights from the interview respondents show that global citizenship, within the civic republican discourse, often signifies forms of engagement that can be domestic and cross-cultural as well as international and political. Not only does global citizenship involve the quest to build global public space, but global citizenship also thrives within local public space.

### **The libertarian discourse of global citizenship**

Citizen voice often takes a back seat in the libertarian discourse of 'global citizenship' in favor of freedom of unimpeded movement across the globe, at least for some of the world's most advantaged and achieving individuals. In the eyes of some critics, the ascendancy of the new global elite class has imperiled the very essence of democratic citizenship. As historian Christopher Lasch once lamented, "The new elites are home only in transit, en route to a high-level conference, to the grand opening of a new franchise, to an

international film festival or an undiscovered resort. Theirs is essentially a tourist's view of the world—not a perspective likely to encourage a passionate devotion to democracy.”<sup>6</sup> Likewise, sociologist Craig Calhoun worries that cosmopolitanism weakens traditional forms of solidarity in local and national communities without bringing about new robust forms of solidarity: “If cosmopolitan democracy is to be more than a good ethical orientation for those privileged to inhabit the frequent traveler lounges, it must put down roots in the solidarities that organize most people's sense of identity and location in the world.”<sup>7</sup>

However, the insights shared by several interview respondents serve to offset, at least partially, the skepticism of these thinkers. Despite reservations that in practice, global citizenship seems to fit mainly the lifestyles and priorities of global elites, international mobility, in its own right, does not necessarily lead to disengagement from politics and society. Indeed, several executives of multinational corporations interviewed for this research who had worked overseas—and originally landed into the database of published references because of documents classified primarily within international mobility—were in fact engaged at least within the local communities in which they were temporarily implanted. For instance, Cynthia Hogan, an international marketing executive with Novartis AG who lived for several years in Basel, Switzerland, while assigned to corporate headquarters, served on the board of her daughter's elementary school and volunteered on a community health program as well as an organization that helped English-speaking newcomers settle into town.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, Rick Ellis, former chief executive of TV New Zealand, described in an interview how his family went about ‘nesting’ in local communities during several years residing in the United Kingdom and in Australia:

When we live and work in the U.K., particularly in London, which I prefer, we feel like we're part of the U.K. We pay our taxes, our kids go to school, we make friends, we have family there that we can visit on a weekend. When I'm there, I feel like I'm part of the place, so I guess once again, it's an attitude of mind: that when you are in a location other than where you were originally born and brought up, if you feel like a citizen, then consider yourself a citizen.<sup>9</sup>

Note that ‘nesting’ requires neither a passport nor voting rights, two classic elements of national citizenship, though interestingly enough, Ellis referred to the mundane duty of paying taxes as one aspect of ‘nesting.’ Mainly Ellis thinks of ‘nesting’ in terms of immersing his family within the civic life of the community. Ellis, for instance, has volunteered with fund raising efforts at his children's local schools, and he has made a point of sending the children to schools serving local families rather than schools geared toward expatriates. Such elements of immersion into local community life abroad do not necessarily amount to citizen voice in an expressly political context, but they do illustrate how Ellis and his family chose to become active contributors to civic life in the communities where they stayed.

In contrast, one extreme interpretation of global citizenship that turned up in a few of the published references centered on outright withdrawal from one's country of citizenship. The most dramatic example of this surfaced in the writing of Canadian financial journalist Jonathan Chevreau, who has argued on multiple occasions that global citizenship involves uprooting national stakes primarily for the sake of monetary gain:

For those would-be wealthy international citizens of the world, the phrase ‘offshore’ has almost magical power. Usually, the term is used in the context of taxes, as in offshore tax havens or offshore trusts. But offshore also is used to describe the unshackled investments of the new global citizen. In parallel with the explosive growth of onshore mutual funds, offshore investment funds have also been exploding at the rate of three new ones a day—with more than 14,000 worldwide. (Chevreau, 1999)

This statement, written in 1999 at the peak of an economic boom in the United States and Canada, suggests that wealthy global citizens ought to take responsibility for their investment portfolios but not necessarily for their fellow Canadians; global citizenship offshore investing is symptomatic of a stark divide, at least in some strains of libertarian thinking, between the uninhibited pursuit of an affluent individual's economic self-interest and concern for the public good within one's country of origin.

The libertarian discourse of global citizenship also includes a strain of thinking that emphasizes global competitiveness and personal achievement. Among the interview respondents, the articulation of global citizenship as achievement was particularly apparent in secondary education, as secondary school principals espousing global citizenship seemed acutely concerned that their students would advance to universities and reach sufficient technological proficiency to compete in the global marketplace. For example, Father Bressani

Catholic High School, located near Toronto, reconfigured its co-op program that long had placed students in jobs with local businesses. Traditional co-op placements had been in lumberyards, restaurants and retail stores and generally had not attracted the school's brightest students. More recently, however, the program has reached out to more academically-motivated students and placed them into international law firms, international agencies (such as UNICEF) and high-tech corporations. At times, the students assigned to these organizations have learned startling lessons about the volatility of the global economy. One student, who went on to pursue a university degree in engineering, lost both of his supervisors at Bombardier when the aerospace corporation suddenly restructured its operations and immediately re-assigned the engineers working with the student to offices in Montreal and in Wichita, Kansas. As school principal Brian O'Sullivan recalled during an interview:

Here was a student seeing a major global aerospace company doing some restructuring, and from a relatively safe position on his part. He wasn't an employee, but he was seeing basically the global economy flying out right in front of him. His reaction, initially was, "Well, this is annoying, I've got a new person (for a supervisor)." Our reaction was, "Stand back and watch this. You might be annoyed, but people's careers are being shifted internationally here. Enjoy the view."<sup>10</sup>

From the opposite corner of the world, at Southland Girls High School in Invercargill, New Zealand, principal Linda Braun said that the term 'global citizenship' entered her vocabulary in 1997, as the school began successfully recruiting Asian students from overseas, leading to a much more internationally mobile and culturally diverse student body. Despite the cultural transformation of the school, Braun associated 'global citizenship' with notions of competence and competitiveness. Upon returning from an international conference for secondary school principals, held in 1998 in Helsinki, Finland, Braun told a local news reporter: "The message that is coming through very clearly is that technology, literacy and numeracy are the keys to global citizenship. We might be relatively isolated in New Zealand, but, through communication, through learning languages and through having an international outlook, we can keep pace with developments in places like Europe."<sup>11</sup>

To help translate this international outlook into daily life, the school invested \$300,000 N.Z.<sup>12</sup> in a computer network and located computer terminals in open public spaces rather than in enclosed classrooms. The school provided each student with unlimited Internet access and an e-mail account—an amenity more common at universities than secondary schools and a move that placed Southland Girls technologically ahead of every other secondary school in the surrounding region.

All in all, Southland Girls High School now typically enrolls more than 30 students from China, Japan, Thailand, Vietnam, and other Southeast Asian countries. More than 90 percent of the school's graduates go on to university education, and half of them become the first university graduates in their families. For the local New Zealand students, the experience of studying and living with a variety of students from overseas has become a central part of their secondary school education. Indeed, Braun believes that the presence of the Asian students is making it much more likely that local students from Southland will become global citizens themselves, both in terms of being professionally competitive and personally empathetic:

Apart from the obvious financial benefit for a rather average, struggling school, as far as money goes, one of the great benefits is we're in a very isolated city at the bottom of the world, and it opens up our Southland girls' eyes to the fact that there are different people in the world—different cultures, different ways of looking at the world, and that's the world they're going to be living and working in.... I define global citizen as a girl from Southland, perhaps off a farm, being able to go and live and work in just about every country in the world and know that the universalities of human experience are going to be far greater in her modern world than the differences. And where the differences exist, she will be able to understand and respond to them.<sup>13</sup>

These sorts of moral visions—instilling in students both the capability to respond to differences and the willingness reconcile differences with commonalities—extend well beyond the libertarian discourse of global citizenship and illustrate how in many cases, agendas related to global citizenship and civic empowerment cut across multiple discourses.

## Conclusion

The civic republican and libertarian discourses of global citizenship serve to illustrate how competing understandings are emerging with regard to the broader meaning of citizenship. The political theorist Judith Shklar once observed that “there is no notion more central in politics than citizenship, and none more variable in history, or contested in theory.”<sup>14</sup> Not only does the idea of global citizenship in public discourse challenge the conventional meaning of citizenship as exclusive membership and participation within a domestic political community, but also the idea of global citizenship itself contains many internal divisions. Within the civic republican discourse, notions of citizen voice focus sometimes on transnational activism, sometimes on participation in domestic politics and society, and sometimes on cross-cultural empathy both at home and abroad. Within the libertarian discourse, some ideas of global citizenship emphasize displacement and even exit from political communities, while other strains of thinking frame global citizenship in terms of participation in local communities abroad as well as fostering specific skills and values in students. How the idea of global citizenship continues to evolve in public discourse, especially in response to watershed events, promises to remain a fruitful line of inquiry for years to come.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. with an introduction by C. Lord (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984) 1277b.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with James Ensor, advocacy manager, Community Aid Abroad. Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, 9 October 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Anne-Christine Habbard, secretary-general, International Federation of Human Rights, Paris, France, 26 June 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Gwen Noyes, real estate developer, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, 18 June 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Emily Moore, Internet journalist, www.learn.co.uk (formerly education writer, *The Guardian*). London, UK, 28 September 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York, W.W. Norton, 1995), 6.

<sup>7</sup> Craig J. Calhoun, “The Class Consciousness of Frequent Travelers: Towards a Critique of Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism,” in *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context and Practice*, eds. : Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002) 8.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Cynthia Hogan, regional sales manager, Novartis AG, East Hanover, New Jersey, USA, 2 October 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Rick Ellis, chief executive officer, Television New Zealand, Auckland, New Zealand, 12 October 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Brian O’Sullivan, principal, Father Bressani Catholic High School, Woodbridge, Ontario, Canada, 28 September 2000. O’Sullivan is now on the faculty of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto.

<sup>11</sup> Linda Braun, quoted in “Principal urges international outlook,” *The Southland Times*, 28 July 1999. Braun has since retired.

<sup>12</sup> This is equivalent to approximately U. S. \$ 175,000.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Linda Braun, principal, Southland Girls High School, Invercargill, New Zealand, 25 September 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Judith N. Shklar, *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991) 1.