Emerging modalities of global solidarity and active global citizenship in Ireland.

A REPORT ON A JOINT COMHLÁMH/MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY ENGAGED RESEARCH PROJECT.

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Between January and June 2022, Comhlámh and partners from the Global Citizenship Education (GCE) and international volunteering sectors undertook an engaged research project to explore emerging modalities of global solidarity and active global citizenship from Ireland. Led by a principal investigator from Maynooth University’s Sociology Department, the project provided participants with theoretical inputs around democracy, citizenship, and globalisation, supporting and challenging the group to examine, deepen and extend their work on active global citizenship. The discussions concluded that:

• Globalisation has created new complexities around the sovereignty of states, who are the traditional guarantors of citizenship. It has opened up new avenues for citizenship claims while bringing challenges in the nature and realisation of these.

• The concept of global citizenship is one response to the challenge of conceptualising democracy beyond the nation state frame. There is no specific model for this: contemporary citizenship responds to multiple sovereignties, below, within, across and beyond states.

• At this time of uncertainty and emergence, it may be preferable to talk of “acts of global citizenship” which emerge out of and further popular struggle, seeking to redefine the social context regardless of location, and that respond to these multiple sovereignties.

• These “acts of global citizenship” should be transgressive, questioning and/or disruptive of existing laws and responsibilities. They should also have a transformative dimension, a transversal orientation and an international perspective. Such a concept could be used as a framework to help forge new forms of ‘global citizenship volunteering’ which could encompass volunteering both at home and abroad, and, as a result, truly globalising solidarity.
Methodology

The research process pointed towards supporting reflexive practice by challenging and encouraging project participants to examine, deepen and extend their work on active global citizenship, rather than being positioned in the more traditional role of experts. In support of this, the PI provided the group with a series of virtual presentations on the agreed themes, which were then collectively discussed and explored.

The group had four two-hour online meetings over the duration of the research (Jan – June 2022). During these meetings five key areas were examined and interrogated to help better understand the origins, meaning and significance of ‘global citizenship’: Democracy, Citizenship, the relationship between both of these, the impact of globalisation on both, and resulting theories on global citizenship.

In early meetings the aim was to provide participants with conceptual tools to help think about democracy and citizenship, and the relation between both them, in the context of their own professional practice. Key findings here included:

• While the meaning and content of citizenship and democracy are contested, they are also mutually co-dependent and historically tied to the development of the nation-state.
• Globalisation has negatively impacted on the powers of the nation-state and on democracy.
• New concepts of global citizenship are not as complete as previous state-based notions of citizenship, raising the question as to how educators and practitioners can work with the concept in a meaningful way
• Other conceptual possibilities such as cosmopolitan, post-national, and incipient citizenship were introduced to help thinking on that question and continuing questions posed for future examination.
• The concept of “acts of global citizenship” was introduced as a model to help understand and give content to global citizenship.

Each of these themes are discussed in more detail below.

Project Background

As part of our response to the huge disruptions within the international volunteering sector caused by the Covid pandemic, Comhlámh undertook an engaged research project on global citizenship with the Sociology Department of Maynooth University between January and July 2022.

International volunteer placements from Ireland stopped abruptly in March 2020: while the sector is still grappling with the impact of these changes, public interest in global solidarity did not disappear during the pandemic. Indeed, many people contacting Comhlámh expressed a heightened interest in issues of global injustice and a desire to get involved in action for change. Large-scale, transnational social movements such as #MeToo, Black Lives Matter (BLM), and Fridays for Future (FFF) also reflected and constructed an appetite for engaging in response to the major challenges we are facing in our interdependent world.

In its public interactions, Comhlámh sees that people in Ireland are increasingly interested in exploring how to express their solidarity with the Global South in ways that are rooted in social and ecological justice. There is a growing awareness that the world is facing multiple challenges, including uncertainty, precarity, fragility and complexity. Calls for inclusion, diversity, decoloniality, and climate justice are providing opportunities to create new spaces for discussion and exploration, collectively building capacities and dispositions to respond to current and emergent global challenges. The concept of ‘global citizenship’ is gaining currency in the sector as a means to engage with such issues in a more flexible and meaningful manner, going beyond the traditional overseas placement model of volunteering.

Aims

In response, Comhlámh worked in partnership with the Principal Investigator (PI) Dr Barry Cannon from Maynooth University’s Department of Sociology, to interrogate the concept of global citizenship from both theoretical and practical perspectives. Both parties undertook a six-month engaged research project beginning January 2022 on “Emerging modalities of global solidarity and active global citizenship from Ireland,” forming an advisory and learning group that included strategic partners based in Ireland and South Africa (see Appendix A below). The research process aimed to provide theoretical inputs to participants from international volunteering groups and global citizenship educators, around emerging models of active global citizenship and their relationship to democracy. The project formed a key component of ongoing reflections on what we are not seeing and what may be missing in our GCE and public engagement work.
Democracy and Citizenship

In discussions on the concept of democracy, most participants felt rights-based participation in decision-making processes in an equitable, collective and inclusive manner was essential to their conception of democracy. This view correlates with a mid-range model of democracy (Merkel, 2014) in that they place emphasis on the participative role of a pluralist civil society in checking state power and informing policy. Less emphasis, however, was placed on the need for state intervention to prevent socio-economic inequality, nor was there much emphasis on the importance of popular intervention, in the form of “insurrection” for example (see discussion on Balibar 2008 below) in ‘democratising’ democracy. Such findings raise questions as to how both popular intervention and socio-economic equality can be achieved within models of global citizenship.

Citizenship

Participants identified two categories of citizenship, which are by no means mutually exclusive: citizenship as rights and citizenship as community. Questions that emerged were first, the scale of citizenship, which for participants varies from local to global, and secondly, the constitution of community, which refers to an inclusion/exclusion dynamic related to different social groups, usually based on, as one participant put it “identities, perspectives and experiences”. Hence in their answers, respondents are questioning and stretching traditional nation-bound concepts of citizenship. Questions emerge here about how the four core elements in citizenship – status, rights, identity and participation – can be operationalised within this more flexible view of citizenship.

If the status of the citizen is related to the nation state, how is citizenship status defined in a post-national world which privileges the local and global over the national? Similarly, how are rights to be guaranteed in such a scenario, when in the current context states are the chief responsible entity for doing so? In particular, how can social rights (Marshall, 1950) – that is, access to social goods such as health care and education, as well as social welfare – be maintained, protected and indeed expanded? Similarly, if identity is primarily associated with states (i.e. nationality) in the current context, how can citizenship be envisaged in a regime based on non-national “identities, perspectives and experiences”? And, if political participation is now organised on a territorial basis through elections, how can this be guaranteed and nurtured in a local/global context?

In sum, discussions on citizenship emphasised the importance of the state in facilitating and guaranteeing citizenship and the wide variation of extant citizenship regimes, which are closely inter-linked with the models of democracy (or lack of democracy) in a specific state. Hence, while participant views on citizenship are spatially, legally and socially expansive and inclusive, actually existing citizenship regimes are exclusive by definition as they are tied to specific states. This leads to an inclusion/exclusion dynamic with regard to non-citizens of that state, and to class, gender, sexual and ethnic inequalities among citizens. Such dichotomies and differentiations between imagined models of citizenship and existing models of citizenship become even more sharp in the context of globalisation, raising many questions on how citizenship rights (and duties) can be protected and expanded.

Democracy and Citizenship

Such questions become particularly crucial in the current context where democracy and citizenship are so closely intertwined. Discussions on this issue recognised the relationship between these two institutions as reciprocal, co-constitutive and dynamic and shaped by political and social elites as well as everyday citizens. Moreover, the trajectory of the relationship between democracy and citizenship can be progressive (i.e. achieving greater levels of social equality or equity)
or regressive (i.e. concentrating power in fewer hands) and that such dynamism can be felt on a scalar level from the local to the global. Balibar (2008), identifies popular ‘insurrection’ as a central motor of such change, whereby ordinary citizens fight exclusion in their struggle for what Balibar (ibid.) calls “equaliberty”, that is equality and liberty as a cohesive and unified social good. Democracy, for Balibar (ibid.: 528) is “a permanent struggle for its own democratization and against its own reversal into oligarchy and monopoly of power”, that is de-democratization. Yet, this struggle is primarily directed at the state, raising questions as to how popular discontent, and hence democratic change, can be channelled in a globalising context of such change, whereby ordinary citizens fight exclusion in their struggle for what Balibar (ibid.) calls “equaliberty”, that is equality and liberty as a cohesive and unified social good. Democracy, for Balibar (ibid.: 528) is “a permanent struggle for its own democratization and against its own reversal into oligarchy and monopoly of power”, that is de-democratization. Yet, this struggle is primarily directed at the state, raising questions as to how popular discontent, and hence democratic change, can be channelled in a globalising context in which the powers of the democratic state are diminished.

Democracy, Citizenship and Globalisation

If contemporary citizenship, then, is based on the central relationship between the state and the individual citizen, it can be argued that globalisation has disturbed and distorted that central relationship. Scholte (2000) defines globalisation as increased supra-territorial relations between people, giving them a “transworld” or “transborder” character. Saskia Sassen (2002) views this development as having a negative impact in three areas of citizenship: welfare, loyalty to the state, and politics. Welfare systems have suffered deregulation and privatisation, reducing the nature and quality of the welfare state and employment and therefore the content of social citizenship. In terms of loyalty, increased migration flows have created “multiple actors, groups and communities...unwilling to automatically identify with a “state”” (ibid.: 277). Meanwhile, the international human rights regime and the power of international capital have undermined the state as the key locus for political claim-making. Hence, in concurrence with isin and Nyers, (2014: p.2), whilst “the state is still dominant [it] cannot be said to have an exclusive claim over its members.” Nonetheless, on a more positive note, globalisation also extends the reach of citizenship as we realise that our actions have implications that do not stop at our own borders but have wider and more far-reaching effects (Heald and Mattetone 2017), most notably climate change. This indicates that such global collective action problems require global cooperation to address them. Moreover, we have a greater awareness of distant suffering and the need to “do something” to alleviate this, but there are disputes about the best ways to respond to such challenges.

Hence, the locus of citizenship has changed from a state-centric focus to what Stokke (2017: 1) calls “multiple and relational scales and territories of citizenship”. Under the impact of globalisation, citizenship’s four main elements - status, rights, identity and participation — are now impacted at the local and translocal, national and trans-national, and global and international territories and scales. Globalisation implies that the state is no longer dominant in the realm of citizenship as “citizens do not belong to one polity but to many” (Isin and Nyers, 2014: p.9). How then might citizenship reconfigure itself within this new context, presuming it survives?

Global Citizenship Models

In discussions on the concept of global citizenship, as used in the international development field, (United Nations Global Citizenship Foundation, 2022; Our World Irish Aid Awards, n.d.), participants found that the state, the central relationship in established citizenship regimes, is largely absent from the concept, in favour of a direct, action-based relationship with the actor’s locality. Additionally, actions of ‘global citizens’ seem based on the actor viewing themselves as such, rather than any specific status, privileging performance (i.e. active citizenship) over status (i.e legal nationality). Nonetheless, many felt that such a perspective can over-emphasise duties to the detriment of rights, contributing once again to the invisibilization of the state, as the main guarantor of rights. Finally, such action-based conceptions of citizenship de-emphasise or obscure the central role of citizens in political decision-making processes at the community and or national level. In this way, the concept of global citizenship can be depoliticised, underemphasising struggles against organised resistance, including by powerful...
new “new types of claim-making” which in turn “may well bring about further transformations in citizenship” (ibid.: 289). Citizenship, then, “is party produced by the practices of the excluded” (ibid.), whereby citizens use national institutions to challenge this exclusion, but can also appeal to supranational institutions to make claims at the national level (e.g. European human rights courts) as well as creating and participating in transnational networks to pursue similar objectives in distinct national settings. These mechanisms then “are internal to the national state... [but] invoke an authority than transcends the national state and the interstate system” (ibid.: 288). As such, this conceptualisation recognises the multiple layers of sovereignty governing present-day citizenship, giving a bottom up, citizen-based view of citizenship as performance, rather than simply as status.

Isin and Nyers (2014: 10) offer the concept of “incipient citizenship”, defining them as “struggles all around the world that no longer recognize the limits imposed on people and their political subjectivities but have not yet articulated terms appropriate beyond these limits.” They are waged “against already established norms, authorities, dominations, and power relations.” (ibid.), which not only take “passion and perspective, and time; [but also] boundless patience, perseverance, and resilience.” (ibid.). Incipient citizenship then is a space between the “no longer” and the “not yet”. New forms of citizenship emerge from the past, but look to reformulate, reinvigorate and reinvent as social, political, cultural and economic contexts, such as globalisation processes, do the same.

A more operational concept may be Isin and Neilsen’s (2009) ‘acts of citizenship’. They define as moments when a subject, “regardless of status and substance... constitute themselves as citizens – or, better still, as those to whom the right to have rights is due” (ibid.: 18). It is irrelevant, therefore, if the actor is a “citizen, stranger, outsider [or] alien” (ibid.: 39). What is important is that they become ‘activist citizens’ by disrupting these very aspects of citizenship. An act of citizenship, then, is transgressive, questioning and/or disruptive of existing laws and responsibilities, transformative of forms and/or modes of the political (i.e. of citizenship itself) and of the subject(s) involved. Hence, the concept allows us to research citizenship disregarding state-centric notions of citizenship, but without losing sight of the context in which they are creating their act of citizenship (Jakimov, 2022). This includes the state, as “ultimately nation state politics still very much determine not only the debate but also the actual realisation of concrete rights” (Muller 2022: 63). Nonetheless, acts of citizenship can have “transformative power... on the various individuals engaging in them” (ibid.).

The concept of “acts of citizenship” could help us think through the possibility of “acts of global citizenship”. Muller, (2022: 51), for example argues that an act of citizenship is at once local in that it “focuses on ways of being with others in the same geographical space”, and global in that its focus on politics and justice is “grounded in global human rights law” and ultimately aims “to transform the boundaries of citizenship” (ibid.) beyond the national. Similarly, as seen above, Sassen (2002) argues that in the current global context, citizens use institutional resources and networks at a multi-scalar level to challenge local, national and global actors. Hence, an ‘act of global citizenship’ could mean one which internationalises or globalises a citizenship claim by, for example, recurring to an international institution or network, or indeed forming their own network. The citizenship claim could be to extend justice against injustice on an issue which has ‘transversal’ significance, meaning “struggles of human beings within dominant political and economic sets” (Soguk 2014: 50).

Hence, following Isin and Neilsen (2009), an “act of global citizenship” could be transgressive, questioning and/or disruptive of existing laws and responsibilities, as well as being transformative of forms and/or modes of the political (i.e. of citizenship itself) and of the subject(s) involved, but with a transversal orientation and an international perspective. Such a concept could be used as a framework to help forge new forms of ‘global citizenship volunteering’ which could encompass volunteering both at home and abroad. It could also be used to help inform GCE initiatives, academic study and/or a global citizenship activist resources.
Conclusions and Recommendations

This research process aimed to provide theoretical inputs to participants from international volunteering groups and global citizenship educators, around emerging models of active global citizenship and their relationship to citizenship and democracy. The aim was to form a key component of participants’ ongoing reflections on what they are not seeing and what they may be missing in their Global Citizenship Education (GCE) and public engagement work. Reflecting on participant ideas on democracy, it could be said that most participants viewed democracy from at least a mid-range model perspective in that they emphasised a strong civil society participating in decision-making processes. Merkel (2014) states that this is the most common model of democracy in Western democracies. Questions that participants could consider here, however, relate back to Balibar’s (2008) discussion on the inclusion/exclusion dynamics in existing citizenship models.

- To what extent does the mid-range model deal effectively with lessening internal exclusions of minorities around ethnicity, in particular, but also gender and sexuality, among other minoritized groups?

- To what extent does it effectively deal with lessening external exclusion of, and improving conditions for, migrants, asylum seekers and refugees?
- How can this model deal effectively with socio-economic inequality?
- How can it be adapted to a globalising context without worsening and preferably improving responses to these exclusions?

Additionally, the project found that participants view citizenship as rights (and responsibilities) and as community. This view is based on a human rights approach, applicable at all spatial levels, and not just related to the nation state. Hence, participants have a cosmopolitan view of citizenship which transcends borders, somewhat similar to that of David Held’s (2009) conception of cosmopolitan citizenship discussed above. However, related questions emerge here regarding the exclusions mentioned above: i.e. will it improve or disimprove the inclusion/exclusion dynamic inherent in citizenship models? Equally importantly, questions should be asked around the universality of this model of citizenship and indeed the above-mentioned model of democracy:

- Are these models of democracy and citizenship too Western in their origins and ideological orientations?
- How can we democratise these models to ensure that they are culturally appropriate to all peoples on the earth?
- What can we learn from other non-Western cultures and peoples to enrich these models?
- To what extent might they be continuations of Western dominance and even imperialism (Biccum, 2010)?
- Ultimately, the question is: How do we decolonise these models?

A central factor which arises here, and which emerged in presentations, is that while notions of citizenship are expanding beyond the frame of the nation state, the latter remains the primary gateway to accessing the rights of citizenship as well as the agent by which many citizenship rights are removed or denied. Discourse on global citizenship as practiced by international development agencies, therefore, is aspirational rather than practical, due to the continued dominance of nation states in the provision or not of citizenship rights. As Soguk (2014: 49) summarises it, the concept “remains resilient as an aspiration but is unable to shake off doubts about its materiality.” Nonetheless, the increasing scalar complexity of global governance structures impacts in both positive and negative ways on access to and content of citizenship at the national level. As Sassen’s (2002) concept of de-nationalised citizenship demonstrates, citizens are increasingly drawing on local, national and transnational networks, agencies and institutions to help defend, assert and even create citizenship rights. Global citizenship, as we have seen, is primarily citizenship as performance rather than status – the call is to act as global citizens, which is taken to simply mean doing ‘good things’ to improve your community. Yet, as pointed out by some participants, this is a depoliticised approach to a concept which is ultimately supremely political, meaning essentially the struggle to secure rights. As the project developed, the issue of struggle as democratising – “insurrection”, as Balibar (2009) views it – became more central to participant thinking. Any future research project then could seek to gather examples of this more politicised approach to global citizenship.
Appendix A:

- Advisory and learning group: The project was supported by an advisory and learning group that includes strategic partners based in Ireland and South Africa. Group members were:
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