Circulations and the Entanglements of Citizenship Formation

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Abstract

Citizenship is given form, meaning, and power through the transactions and circulations that constitute it. Our focus in this paper is with the ways that circulations through networks and institutions that extend beyond nation-states are enacted and encouraged through pedagogies and practices that moor habits of citizenship in daily lives. While there has been significant attention to those practices at national and local levels, there has been relatively little attention to the ways that floating sites of citizenship formation are entwined with, but also seem to be suspended above, other sites. There are at least three ways in which circulations both construct those sites and are entwined in citizenship formation: they are the reason that the seeming contradiction between cosmopolitanism and efforts to moor citizens to place becomes unremarkable; they enable and shape the modes of interaction that conjoin politics and emotional geographies; and they are part of the way that a common understanding of active citizenship is accepted almost without question. We use the examples of two international conferences for young citizen-activists to illustrate our arguments regarding the circulations of ideas, norms, and practice that are central to citizenship formation.

Keywords: Citizenship, Intimacy-geopolitics, Mobility, Youth

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Citizenship is freighted with many, sometimes contradictory, meanings. It is a status conferred by a nation-state. It is a marker of belonging and inclusion, even as it creates exclusions. It conveys expectations of how subjects should behave. It is a western category that is treated as though it is universal. It guarantees rights. It obligates subjects to serve the state. It is conditioned by local, everyday relationships and practices. It represents global, cosmopolitan ideals. Collectively, the academic literature on citizenship reveals it as a complex, multivalent concept[1].

Our intervention in this wide-ranging literature focuses on the ways in which citizenship is formed through an intimacy-geopolitics of circulation. As we explain, such circulations simultaneously attach citizenship—or at least the practices and behaviours undertaken by citizens—in localities and communities, even as it is encouraged and performed through sites and relations that are seemingly detached from those very same places, communities, and nations.

The kernel of our argument is as follows. Citizenship is constructed through a complex set of relationships between qualities, norms, interactions, and positionings with respect to a collective, a collective that itself may be undergoing transformation. This conceptualization has at least two implications. First, numerous embodied, institutional and affective agencies are involved in citizenship formation. Second, the processes of entangling and ordering imply the circulation of ideas and norms through multiple means. Our particular focus is with the ways that circulations through networks and

institutions that extend beyond nation-states are enacted and encouraged through pedagogies and practices that moor habits of citizenship in daily lives. While there has been significant attention to those practices at national and local levels, there has been relatively little attention to the ways that floating sites of citizenship formation are entwined with, but also seem to float above, other sites. We use the examples of two international conferences for young citizen-activists to illustrate our arguments regarding the circulations of ideas, norms, and practice that are central to citizenship formation.

Intimacy-Geopolitics, Circulation, and Citizenship Formation

The term 'intimacy-geopolitics' highlights the inseparability of, and tensions between, intimacy and geopolitics (Pain and Staeheli 2014). A growing literature has pointed to the ways that intimacy is important to geopolitics, often arguing that it is necessary to recognize the ways that actions and relations at multiple scales condition geopolitical relationships; this literature is often concerned with the spatial relationships that entangle near and distant places, such that the presumed binary between them is dissolved (e.g., Mountz and Hyndman 2006; Pratt and Rosner 2012). In so doing, this literature often argues for the importance of recognizing the political and politicised nature of intimacy (which is, in itself, ambiguous and complex) and its roles in shaping geopolitics and relationships, such as through the invocation of gender based violence as a rationale for war (e.g., Fluri 2011) or the role of gender in development policy and practices (e.g., Nagar et al 2002).

In defining intimacy-geopolitics, however, Pain and Staeheli (2014) argue for more than the 'importance' of intimacy to geopolitics, and instead argue that they are inseparable from each other and are mutually constituted, rather than being prefigured.

We build on this argument to suggest that citizenship, as an instantiation of intimacy-geopolitics, is given form, meaning, and power through the transactions and circulations that constitute it. We use the term 'circulation' rather than the more common 'mobility' advisedly. There is, for instance, a burgeoning literature on policy mobilities that might have been called upon (e.g., McCann and Ward 2011). Likewise, mobility features prominently in the literature on children and young people's geographies (e.g., Barker et al 2009). In both such instances, however, mobility is used somewhat generically to refer to a broad array of phenomena ranging from the dissemination of policy through global governance networks, to young people's experiences of transnational migration (e.g., Hopkins and Alexander 2010) and the everyday movement of young people to and from home, school, and elsewhere (e.g., Harker 2009; Skelton 2013; Horton et al 2014). Such research has been fruitfully informed by a "new mobilities paradigm" that emphasizes the relational character of mobility and immobility (Adey 2006; Hannam et al 2006; Sheller and Urry 2006). This approach has been useful in challenging idealized notions of unencumbered movement and circulation of goods, ideas, people, and capital conjured up by terms like mobility, flow, and networks, emphasizing the blockages to and unevenness of mobility. Yet in many analyses, the term mobility tends to still be used in a binary fashion[2] (i.e., people, things, or policies are either mobile or not) (Salter, 2013); this has the potential to obscure more complex power relations that condition mobilities.

Often missing in this notion of relative im/mobilities is the shape that movement takes beyond stop and go. What kinds of movement are encouraged or discouraged by various social and institutional norms and moorings? Rather than simply being overlooked in analyses, Salter (2013) argues that the very concept of mobility does not lend itself easily to the *dispositif* implied in circulation, which, as we will see below, is important to the ways that citizenship formation proceeds. By referring specifically to

circulation, we seek to emphasize a particular, circular movement of ideas and people that organisers of international conferences typically envision, as well as the messy entanglements that come about in practice as a result of the multiply-scaled political contestations and improvisations that take place in such settings. For example, at the 2014 international youth conference described below, it was clear that many of the participants were engaged in a back and forth movement between international conferences and activism in local or regional politics in their home countries. Many delegates were veterans of an international youth conference circuit, having attended numerous international and regional conferences that are held in different cities around the globe. Such conferences are meant to serve as sites where skills and ideas can be exchanged amongst circulating delegates before returning home to be practiced in place. However, these circulations, which are part of intimacy-geopolitics and shape citizenship formation, are not easily anticipated or described in a straightforward manner, and their outcomes are not easily predicted. Rather, such circulations are shaped by complex and longstanding relationships and sudden disruptions, operating across multiple spatial and temporal scales.

As the above comments imply, citizenship is more than a status, but instead involves relationships that condition individuals' positioning, capacities, and agencies with respect to a collective. That collective is commonly assumed to be a state, but it need not be. Indeed, in many formulations and in some circumstances, citizenship is held to operate outwith the state, either as in some calls for cosmopolitan or global citizenship or in some civic formulations of citizenship in which civil society and communities stand as the collectivity (Staeheli 2011). This is not to say that the state is irrelevant, but rather that citizenship is forged, developed, experienced, and practiced in sites and institutions beyond those defined or contained by the state. Citizenship—as

distinct from the legal status of citizen—is thus formed in and through the relationships and circulations we describe in terms of intimacy-geopolitics.

There are at least three ways in which circulations are important to citizenship formation. First, they sustain the spatial relationships that entangle proximate and distant spaces. In the example we develop, they are the reason that the seeming contradiction involved in entwining cosmopolitanism—which commonly implies transcendence of the nation and the particular—with efforts to moor action by citizens to place and as national citizens becomes unremarkable. Second, they enable and shape the modes of interaction that conjoin politics and emotional geographies, as in the feelings and obligations of belonging as citizens; the circulation of a common understanding of citizenship as both feeling and status is one means by which this occurs (Osler and Starkey 2005). Finally, they are part of the way that a common understanding of active citizenship—or commitments to certain practices as citizens—is accepted almost without question, seeming to emerge as commonsensical, without an apparent source or genealogy.

Reading the Circulations of Youth Citizenship Formation

We illustrate the argument outlined above by drawing from a larger study of citizenship formation in divided societies. The study is primarily concerned with efforts to encourage behaviours, attitudes, and practices amongst young people. One component of the research attends to the efforts of an ensemble of organizations and agents – NGOs, governments, foundations, international organizations, and activists – that attempt to intervene in processes of citizenship formation in order to encourage qualities that are seen as conducive to stability, security, and reconciliation in countries marked by

deep division. In this paper, we focus on efforts of international organizations to encourage certain practices of citizenship, and in particular on the use of international conferences that bring young people together to debate common issues, to be seen and heard as active participants in decision-making, and to provide a forum in which skills and expectations of active citizenship can be imparted[3]. Imaginatively, the conferences float above the fray created by national and local conditions, politics and conflicts, removing the youth from the 'distractions' of daily life and the real world, nitty-gritty encounters that seem to corrupt or impede political action taken as citizens.

These conferences are part of a larger infrastructure or organizational apparatus that has been constructed to encourage particular kinds of young citizens[4]. Young people are often seen as paradoxical with regard to citizenship. They are lauded as having great potential, but are also seen as security threats. They are sometimes represented as only loosely bound by existing norms and institutions, but they are also the focus of state efforts to forge national identities. They are seen as malleable, but also as resistant to norms and expectations. Due to their uncertain, even unstable relationships with communities, nations and social norms, there is often considerable effort to shape the identities, behaviours, and values of young people as citizens (Pykett, 2010; Staeheli and Hammett 2010).

These efforts are linked by agents who work in international organizations, government institutions, civil society organizations, religious organizations, schools, and NGOs. In the mobilities literature, the relationships between these organizations might be described as providing an infrastructure for citizenship formation (Hannam et al 2006), whereas others might describe them as forming a network or an assemblage (Salter 2013). From our perspective, the language of infrastructure or assemblage is less

important than the ways that ideas, practices, and bodies flow between them and become entangled. We focus on international conferences because they seem to float above local and national efforts to form young citizens, collecting influences and ideas from multiple sources, even as they encourage youth to immerse themselves in actions to address problems in their communities and countries. There is a pervasive assumption that removing young people from their everyday environments may expand their world views, but also remove them from the pernicious influences that may be found 'at home'. It thus may impart a kind of cosmopolitanism to those who attend, even if it is temporary, intermittent, or blended with other citizenship values and practices on return (Baillie Smith and Jenkins 2012; Diprose 2012; Baillie Smith et al 2013). Consistent with our conceptualization as citizenship being formed through circulations that we analyse in term of intimacy-geopolitics, we read the conferences in terms of the ways that proximate and distant are entangled (i.e, in terms of spatial relations), the encouragement of commitments to action in civil society for the good of self and others (i.e, conjoining politics and emotions), and cementing the hegemony of active citizenship (i.e, the practices of citizenship).

We focus on two conferences: the 1970 UN-sponsored World Assembly of Youth and the 2014 World Conference on Youth. These conferences bookend our larger study of international efforts at citizenship promotion as they are entwined with national and local organisations and social activists. Information about the 1970 Assembly is drawn from files in the UN Archives and Records Management Section, while the information about the 2014 conference draws primarily on participant observation. We are also informed by a small set of interviews with people who have been involved in the conferences as participants or in the organizations that supported them. We do not claim that the conferences are representative of all such events.

Instead, we use the conferences to illustrate our conceptual argument about the role of circulation in the intimacy-geopolitics of citizenship formation.

On the surface, the two conferences may seem rather different. The 1970 World Youth Assembly was a late addition—an afterthought of sorts—to the celebrations of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the United Nations. The Assembly drew approximately 750 delegates from member states and from thirteen international youth organizations. The theme of the Assembly was "Peace, Progress and International Co-operation," and the stated objectives included enrolling young people in supporting UN efforts to address problems facing the world and member states and drawing attention to the roles that youth could play. What was intended to be something of a feel-good gathering, with a long roster of social and cultural events in New York City that delegates could attend, quickly became contentious. The US government refused to provide funds for the Assembly, so ad hoc committees were created to solicit funds from corporations, foundations, and the general public; judging by the 'thank you' notes, the latter were typically in the range of $5-10. After the UN-led organizing committee was joined by representatives of the thirteen international youth organizations, the *New York Post* reported that the diplomats were out-manoeuvred by the youth, who ranged "from the Boy Scouts to Communist-dominated organizations," and who won the right to select about twenty percent of the delegates. There were concerns that these delegates would be uncontrollable (Berlin, 1970). Indeed, officials commented in their post-assembly review that they were surprised at how seriously youth delegates took the conferences, eschewing cultural events for meetings with officials and with other delegates and rejecting stances taken by the UN on contentious topics (WYA 1970a). Reflecting the tumultuous politics of the time, the latter happened frequently. The organizing committee had established commissions on World Peace, Development, Education, and

the Environment and wrote draft reports for each (apparently with little to no input from youth or youth organizations). At the Assembly, delegates ripped apart the prepared report and inserted a far more radical agenda for change. The final report of the World Peace Commission called for the end of imperialism and colonialism, called for the right to self-determination (most notably for Palestine and Puerto Rico), condemned aggression on the part of the US and other western powers, and called for the end of the blockade of Cuba. It also called upon young people to demonstrate solidary with oppressed peoples around the world (WYA 1970b). American officials, without any apparent irony, noted this was the inevitable outcome of allowing governments and youth to select the delegates, as they would bring ideological commitments to the Assembly. Officials were particularly concerned by delegates from Soviet-aligned countries, claiming they were too old and too entrenched in party politics to be free from the influence of government propaganda (WYA 1970a).

By 2014, the machinery for international conferences had become well-oiled and there were few opportunities for the disruptive activities that marked the 1970 conference. The World Conference on Youth was one of over 100 international youth conferences held in 2014 that addressed citizenship in some way. It was attended by nearly 1000 delegates, including representatives of youth organizations, youth leaders who applied to the organizing committee, delegates selected by national governments, facilitators, social media fellows, and 100 youth leaders from Sri Lanka, which hosted the conference. The stated goal of the conference was to mainstream youth into the UN post-2015 development agenda, but some observers believed it was also a ploy to promote the national and international standing of the Sri Lankan president. The conference ran over several days, and involved a mix of plenary sessions, focused discussions on substantive issues related to the Millennium Development Goals, and

training and leadership workshops. Meanwhile, officials of national governments

finalized the Columbo Declaration on Youth at the conference. Youth delegates lobbied

representatives of their national governments separately to make changes to the

declaration, committed themselves to hold their governments to account, and were then

sent back to their homes to organize communities in support of the policies advocated in

the Declaration. While youth delegates debated topics and disagreed with each other,

their influence on the actual Declaration is not clear, as much of it was worked out in

regional and national conferences at which they were not typically present (see Riles

2000). While youth delegates may have had some influence, there was no such dramatic

rewriting of the declaration as happened in 1970. Central planks in the declaration

included the need for inclusive and participatory youth policies in member states and the

integration of young people into democratic processes in a "meaningful way at local,

national, regional and international levels;" volunteering programmes were specifically

mentioned (WCY 2014).

Side events and training workshops allowed more direct involvement of young

people than did the working group finalizing the Declaration. At some of these events,

peer education projects were discussed where information was shared about how to

spread good practice for youth participation in their localities and civil society, as well as

in national politics. Other events talked about the ways to enhance global awareness

amongst marginalized youth who might not be aware of the broader contexts in which

their marginality was enforced. Similar themes were addressed in sessions aimed at

young people involved in conflict resolution. Cosmopolitanism and global citizenship

were often presented as means of overcoming internal, communitarian conflict. For

instance, a young woman from Moldova claimed "I was a citizen of my city or

neighborhood, but now I am a citizen of the world. We have to get outside our internal

conflict mentality and achieve a global awareness." At other sessions, the importance of holding governments to account was discussed and strategies for encouraging good practice were disseminated. One representative of a national youth council spoke of the ideals of citizenship and the need to activate the notion of "values-based leadership." In these sessions, civil society was argued to be important as a site from which to hold governments to account, but some delegates also spoke of the need to create civic and political spaces of their own. These were not necessarily spaces of confrontation, however, and a representative of a youth organization reminded delegates of the values of empathy. While leaders often patronize young people, she argued that youth should exercise empathy with leaders, noting that they were usually good people who really want to help and who are also frustrated by the narrow confines of their own position.

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The comments of the representative just noted served as a reminder to the delegates that they did not act in a vacuum—that even if they were acting locally, there were influences and constraints on the actions of other agents. While she would never have used this language, we interpret it in terms of circulations, intimacy-geopolitics and the entanglements of citizenship formation. She reminded the delegates that when they returned home, they would be back in the morass of relationships and constraints that affect all agents, not just youth. And even though they might act locally (whilst perhaps thinking globally), they were interacting with others whose range of actions were also constrained and shaped in complicated ways. We briefly illustrate these issues in terms of the circulations that link near and distant, the ways that politics and affective feelings are intertwined, and the practices and practicalities of acting as citizens.

The conferences themselves are an attempt to lift activists out of the day-to-day of their lives and to link them with agents and knowledges that come from other places and contexts. To facilitate learning across differences—but also to create a common basis for acting as citizens—international organizations, foundations and governments develop training materials that conferences delegates can take home[5]. While there are differences in specific materials, there is convergence around commitments to active citizenship, and in many instances to some form of cosmopolitanism or globalism, such as discussions of human rights, the interconnectedness of people and places, and the necessity to work as citizens irrespective of nationality on issues of global concern. Metaphors of boats—as in "we are all in the same boat"—are common in these materials. Furthermore, active citizenship, as presented by organizations such as UNESCO and the European Commission, requires that actors be knowledgeable of others and be willing to engage in constructive and accountable ways, no matter where they are located or with whom they interact (Basok and Ilcan 2006; Skelton 2007). Training materials encourage youth to look beyond parochial concerns of their own group and their own location and to interact more broadly and with more respect for— and even a stake in—the perspectives of other people and places. These interventions in what might be thought of as topological and topographical spatial relations also have implications for affective and political relations and for the kinds of practices that are constructed as normal and legitimate for citizens.

Such circulations, however, can be made more difficult by blockages and disruptions that limit the movement of delegates. These maybe geopolitical, such as the problems some delegates faced in obtaining visas to travel to countries. While one arm of a government or an international organization operating within a country might welcome delegates, visa and passport regimes of those same countries can block such

movements (Neumayer 2006). Even if visas are not an issue, travel is never 'free' and the costs of attendance were a challenge for many delegates, particularly to the 1970 World Assembly; the archival record is full of pleas for money or for expedited approval of visas for the attendees (WYA 1970a). In such cases, international efforts to rise above geopolitics and the conditions attendees faced at home were entangled with the real politics and economics of international travel and the support governments offer to each other.

National and local contexts affected the long-term impacts of the conferences, as well. Delegates to the 2014 conference questioned the value of encouraging participation at international conferences when opportunities for participation locally were nearly absent and when the circulation of ideas was limited to the small number of people who attended. Several delegates struggled with the feeling that conferences provided a veneer of youth inclusion in ways that seemed to co-opt and tame their political agendas. One delegate at the 2014 conference complained: "I mean, why this fancy conference hall and fancy hotels? It is like we're just acting. I feel like they are just preparing me to be like them. That's what they mean by training and participation."

Delegates at both the 1970 and 2014 gatherings argued that concerns for democracy and citizenship were not evident in the actions of governments and organizations such as the UN, or at least that the actions had multiple political valences that complicated—entangled and confused—their politics. In the 1970 Peace Commission report, for example, proclamations about democracy were interlaced with denunciations of imperialism and colonialism by superpowers. Furthermore, delegates questioned the meaning and politics of cosmopolitanism and the supposed universalism of concepts such as rights. In discussions at both gatherings, delegates debated how to

make 'universal rights' interpretable and meaningful in their local and regional contexts and in ways that served—rather than obscured—their political goals. Yet critical and sceptical as delegates may have been, there was also a sense of possibility and commitment on their part that was fostered by meeting other young people who shared commitments to making a difference in their communities, nation, and world.

Conclusion

The above examples point to the complex ways that spatial relations, politics, affective agency, and practice are entangled in the circulations that are part of citizenship formation. The conferences we discussed are merely illustrations, but are nevertheless suggestive of both the efforts to construct citizenship as floating above yet still moored to place(s) and communities, and profoundly conditioned by geopolitical, social and economic relations.

The circulations and movements of ideas, practices, and people—as well as the disruptions to them—entangle local contexts, political goals, feelings of power, activism, national politics, and broad economic and political relationships. These are all evidence of the intimacy-geopolitics of citizenship formation. Approaching citizenship formation as an example of intimacy-geopolitics enabled in and through movement and circulations allows us to recast—and perhaps ultimately discard—several canards about citizenship. The idea that citizenship is created by and primarily relevant to nation states should finally and decisively be put aside, as should claims that global and cosmopolitan citizenship somehow transcend nation states or make them less relevant. Circulations of ideas, values, and bodies are critical to the ways in which near and distant are co-constituted, as well as to the ways that the intimacy-geopolitics of citizenship formation

become evident. Rather than attempting to 'locate' citizenship in specific sites or scales, our attention is directed to the relationships through which citizenship is constructed, enacted, and given meaning. In these relationships, we can see circulations, citizenship formation, and intimacy-geopolitics as providing the resources and rationales for contestation and activism in which new qualities of citizens, new collectivities, and new ways of being political might emerge.

Acknowledgements

Endnotes

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[1] See Ehrkamp and Jacobson (2015) for an excellent recent review. See also Staeheli (2011) and Kofman (2003).

[2] David Bissell and Gillian Fuller's edited collection 'Stillness in a Mobile World' (2011) provides a notable exception to this, using the concept of stillness to challenge the (over)attention to the dialectic between statis and movement within Mobility Studies.

[3] See Ilcan and Basok (2006), Skelton (2007) and Diprose (2012) as other examples of the effort by international and/or transnational organizations to train citizens, and in particular, young citizens. These are efforts with uncertain and inconsistent outcomes, and we make no claims as to their 'real' effects.

[4] 'Youth' and 'young people' are used interchangeably, and perhaps loosely, in the paper. There is an academic literature that debates the boundaries of youth and even the utility of the category. For our purposes, however, these debates seem less relevant, as the countries that send delegates to conferences set their own definitions, which are quite varied. In this paper, our focus is on the circulations and idea of floating sites of citizenship formation using young people as an example, rather than on the boundaries of the category or on definitions of youth.

[5] As an example, see the Junior Chamber International's materials on active citizenship at http://www.jci.cc/about/whatwedo (last viewed 25 June 2015). This framework was used in presentations at the World Conference on Youth.

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