Chapter 4

International Citizenship under Siege

Introduction

How does the switch from economic globalization to military empire-building by the United States bear on these diverse citizenship trends? What types of resistance to such a prospect are likely to take hold around the world, with what impacts on traditional and poet-modern forms of citizenship?

FALK, 2003, p. 1

Boggs views the decline of politics as primarily based on the collapse of the values of democracy and citizenship (Boggs 2000: 111). Elections are-for the most part-empty spectacles, whereas the real power lies in “private structures and their empires made up of lobbyists, PACs, media networks, financial services conglomerates, experts” (Boggs 2000: 111). The belief in the need for technical expertise and “professionalized knowledge” carries with it strongly “disenfranchising consequences” (Boggs 2000: 111). It is because of the empty postures and promises of politicians, especially in the US where the real issues and concerns are simply ignored, that the population tends to leave behind the whole political enterprise, and retreat in multiple other directions, such as “paramilitary militias, and an urban gang culture, the spread of domestic terrorism, the increased popularity of identity-based movements, widespread new-age and therapeutic fads” (Boggs 2000: 112).

In addition, the universities, after the 1990s, adopted post-modernism with its themes of chaos, fragmentation, local knowledge, and, most of all “the futility [of] political action” (Boggs 2000: 112). Thus we can see the “end of politics” as disinterest, disenchantment, and as an escape from the futility of participation in domestic governance. The old-time belief that “you cannot fight City Hall” has now become the much more powerful and truthful conviction that you cannot fight Shell, Exxon, Monsanto, Dow Chemical, and all MNCS, with their multiple tentacles and their stranglehold on both law and governing institutions.

But, pace Boggs, it seems that there is another set of powerful motivators, beyond the desire to escape futility and powerlessness. Beyond militias, gangs, fads and nihilism, there are still in existence the individual conscience, and the communitarian concerns that motivate people to seek elsewhere the virtues
and values that are lost in the empty rituals of organized politics. Some of the major NGOs and social movements propose and offer precisely the motivation that has been lost. This motivation comprises the goals and represents an escape to more meaningful allegiances.

Environmental and health concerns are universal, and only global movements like Greenpeace may begin to address them, while also matching the communitarian concerns offered by various local movements. Human rights are equally universal as they encompass both the local and the global, and such INGOs as Amnesty International, for instance retain and emphasize the lost values of former local politics. The World Social Forum and the Occupy movements combine to offer tentative answers, or at least to raise the awareness of the flaws and the emptiness found in the World Economic Forum and the G8 meetings against which much of the anger and the distaste of citizens is focused.

It seems to be much more than an escape from disillusion, to fads and nihilism: it is instead a growing awareness of the need for human solidarity across borders and beyond narrow parochialism, and toward the recognition of the commonality present in the collective, although the latter does not have a formal form of governance, beyond the UN in its weakened state, at least partially controlled by the same corporate power and the same rogue states that have destroyed the significance of local politics.

Thus, as Sassen acknowledges, citizens transcend their national commitments and interests, for the most part, using the internet (Sassen 2006). Boggs sees the citizens’ preoccupation with the internet as part of an individualized, privatized lifestyle that eliminated democratic political concerns. But it is indeed through the internet that citizens achieve their global dimension as they find lost relevance in NGOs and social movements. Perhaps, then, the prevailing democratic deficit and the lack of political commitment to the state, is a step forward as the global citizens acquire and exercise the capacity to think critically rather than accept authority as it is, even when justice and respect for humanity are missing from its current instantiations. Thus the time has come to empower the global collectivity, as we see the growth and development of “global citizenship” as Richard Falk terms it (Falk 2003: 179).

Hence, in this chapter we will consider the alternatives facing transnational citizens in their quest for new communities worthy of support and commitment. Global citizenship under the authority of the UN Charter and its principles is one alternative. But the UN itself is not always free or able to enforce its own principles, as the Security Council (SC) is geopolitically controlled, so that Western (mainly US) interests prevail over most principled efforts on its part. Indigenous peoples’ rights—especially in Canada—are a prime example of