



SID

Society for International Development

SID-NL Lecture Series 2010-2011

“Global Values in a Changing World”

Synergy of State and Society in a Globalized World

Ninth lecture: **We are the world? Global citizenship and its limits**

Speaker: **Kate Nash**, Goldsmiths, University of London

Moderator: **René Cuperus**, Wiardi Beckman Stichting

On Monday the 20th of June 2011, Kate Nash, Professor of Sociology and co-Director of the Centre for the Study of Global Media and Democracy at Goldsmiths, University of London, held the ninth lecture in the 2010-2011 SID-NL Lecture Series, ‘Global Values in a Changing World’.

Summary

Kate Nash argues that world citizenship is still utopian, but no longer in the realm of science fiction or of idealist political theory. The idea of world citizenship moves the development debate from thinking in terms of charity to thinking in terms of justice. According to Nash the idea of world citizenship implies obligations as well as rights in the structures of global interdependence. World citizenship is close today with two main types of practices that seem to encourage the idea that we are world citizens. First, the experience of global digital media which changes our daily experience of being part of humanity and second, the structures of human rights which legally embed us in obligations to people in other countries through our national citizenship.

Who are our fellows?

As a political ideal, human rights go back to the revolutionary 18th century. Humanity had to be created, just as fellowship. Fellowship is more a question of solidarity than just tolerance; we share a ‘community of fate’ with our fellows. This fellowship has been structured nationally and national citizenship is a direct political legacy of ‘universal’ human rights. National citizenship is how the modern ‘community of fate’ has been organized, through the national state. This community of fate is a construction, an imagined community based on a fellow-ship created through symbols and practices that represent ‘us’ as belonging together.

In this context Nash talks about ‘banal nationalism’; the way in which the nation is referred to over and over again, in such a way we don’t even notice. This banal nationalism is seen in the media that mostly represents fellow nationals in the coverage of (foreign) natural disasters.

Banal nationalism is now to some extent accompanied by ‘banal cosmopolitanism’, showed in the many references in popular culture, current affairs, etc. to the world as one single place.

Nash continues with the topic of ‘distant suffering’: the suffering of people that we only know of through images and stories of the media. Images of distant suffering require action from us and create a feeling that we should do something. What kind of response would be appropriate in relation to world citizenship, in a world where we share a community of fate with our fellow human beings? The sociologist Boltanski argues that **pity** could lead to demands for justice. Emotion needs to go from pity to **indignation**: why isn’t someone doing anything about this, followed by **denunciation**, denouncing the people who *should* be doing something. That’s how you get to justice. An example is Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans where many Americans felt indignation on part of their fellow nationals. It was really a case of justice in stead of charity.



Banal cosmopolitanism

What are our rights?

According to human rights activists we are already world citizens within the existing framework of international law. As individual human beings we have rights as well as legal and political obligations. From this point of view, preventing and dealing with distant suffering is a matter of justice and not one of charity. There is no world government, but there are common structures of rights in international law that states have agreed to already. According to Nash, it is states that are responsible for securing human rights. States are chief violators of human rights, even though they signed the human rights agreement that obliges them to ensure the socio-economic rights of individuals in whichever state they happen to live.



According to Saskia Sassen states are denationalizing. She argues that most of what we associate with globalization is created or done by states. Globalization is happening through states, and not in spite of them, as politicians often have us believe. So it is as a result of states' orientation towards global agendas and systems, and a turning away from constructions of 'national economy' that economic globalization is possible. In terms of human rights, socio-economic rights have been accepted, but are very rarely part of

government thinking. The idea of human rights are at best 'universalising', they are certainly not universal.

From national into world citizens?

Even though states are denationalizing, states remain banally national. But nationalism may also be mobilised to support human rights, as is seen in the Make Poverty History campaign in the UK, 2005. This campaign became a national obsession, partly due to the very populist media in Britain. Citizens in Britain came together to denounce the authorities who were not doing what they should be doing to alleviate the suffering of non-citizens. The campaign was organized around the theme of justice, not charity. The framework was 'cosmopolitan' because it was about world citizens, and it was 'nationalist' because the nation was portrayed through the media as the 'saviour of the poor and mistreated'. Nash thinks of this as a problematic construction, because the nationalism that goes with it is very sentimental. It becomes very much about 'us' and how great we are, thereby literally silencing the people that are suffering. It was not a relationship between (world) citizens as equals. It was about celebrating the nation. Nevertheless, it is a very interesting phenomenon in that it was about creating indignation and denouncing the government for not taking up their responsibility of ending the undeniable suffering of people in the South.

In conclusion then – how are we world citizens and what are the limits of that citizenship?

We are 'world citizens', in that we daily respond to images and stories of suffering elsewhere in the world. We are also world citizens in that we have indirect political obligations to those people, through our states of which we are nationals, insofar as they have signed up to international human rights agreements. In this sense, world citizenship is strangely exercised as national citizenship, oriented towards our own governments. It is in this respect that it is possible to frame issues of global poverty as matters of justice not charity, to elicit responses of indignation (rather than guilt, shame or indifference) and to encourage denunciation of immoral authorities. If all of this seems impossibly utopian, we should consider that it is also necessary.

Discussion with the audience

René Cuperus argued that the Netherlands are suffering from a battle between globalization and populism; a clash between the 'globals' and 'locals'. Globalization implies contradictions: The world is becoming more familiar and interdependent, but national societies are becoming more diverse and fragmented.

One of the audience members asked Nash what she actually means by 'global citizenship', since it implies that you're a citizen of a non-existing global state. Nash responded by saying that, although you can only be citizen of a state and although there is no world state, there are now networks and institutions in which states are heavily involved. States are still thought of as national states, even though they are internationalizing, making us citizens of internationalizing states. In this sense, a notion of citizenship develops.

Another person asked whether European citizenship could serve as an intermediary step towards global citizenship. Nash reacted by saying that Europe's role in the world is still unclear. The nation-states are making Europe and European citizenship is to a high extent created through national citizenship. René Cuperus reacted, by stating that for him the 'European experience' is fuelling his scepticism towards cosmopolitan citizenship, because there is a huge democratic deficit in these EU developments and as long as we have not seen a post-national democracy or -welfare state working, he sticks to the national case. Nash responded by asking what exactly he could then stick to, because the state itself is a moving target. The question of citizenship is not about what it once was and not about everything around us staying the same while globalization happens around us. What is fundamental is the way in which we are citizens of a state.

A final point that came up in the discussion was the role of the private sector. An audience member mentioned the way in which the private sector is defining the speed of globalization, while at the same time it's an undemocratic sector. The quasi umbrella organizations that we have (G8, G20, etc.) aren't democratic either. What then happens to the concept of citizenship? Nash didn't have a clear answer to this difficult issue, she could only confirm the development where our national citizenship gives us nowadays relatively little hold over 'fate'. People are looking at other forms for their political life, and politicians tend to stimulate this 'world thinking'. How we as citizens can find countervailing power to this global governance proved to be a difficult question to answer. How do you create a sense of responsibility for anything?

In the end the issue of citizens' responsibility was raised; asking a government to take responsibility and then sit back and relax cannot be all. Nash focuses on shared rights and obligations, which is quite a liberal citizenship model. Republican citizenship is much more about the direct involvement of citizens in government. Make Poverty History didn't work, mostly because only few people showed much of an interest after the huge populist media campaign. The only way in which the notion of world citizenship can develop, is if citizens themselves take a very active part in it.

