

“Pork Pies and Vindaloos”: Learning for cosmopolitan citizenship

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Short biography

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Abstract

This paper examines Audrey Osler and Hugh Starkey’s 2003 article on cosmopolitan citizenship fourteen years after its publication. Since its publication young people’s disconnection from political life has increasingly become a cause for concern for most, if not all, Western democracies (Rose & Miller, 1993, Piven & Cloward, 2000, Stolle & Hooghe 2004, Milner et al 2014). Specifically, this article examines the implications for young people’s political life in Leicester following a period of local, regional and national political changes. Osler and Starkey’s (2003) study has shown how some South Asian young people occupy ‘outsiders-within’ status in Leicester’s ‘common culture’ (and all the sub-cultures that exist within it) and see their ethnic communities from a range of voyeuristic positions. Young, South Asian participants in the study have not distanced themselves from the South Asian community entirely, but the way participants have approached narrating their self-identities has not necessarily been forged in, or determined upon, how ‘Indian’ or ‘Pakistani’ identities are conceived by the common culture. Consequently, two questions arise. Firstly, what is the impact of developing cosmopolitan citizenship among young people forging new types of ethnic identities in Leicester? Secondly, what types of educational approaches (formal and informal) would be important to help strengthen young people’s political engagement? The paper concludes, that the ongoing challenge for educators is to strengthen mutual understanding between students from different communities and backgrounds by drawing on their lived experience within the caveat of promoting cosmopolitan citizenship.

Keywords: Young people, Citizenship Education, Cosmopolitan, South Asian and Identity

Introduction

'Cosmopolitan citizens have learnt to be confident in their own identities and schools can usefully provide learning opportunities to explore and develop these' (Osler & Starkey, 2003 p. 252).

'Cosmopolitan citizenship' or outlook remains a contested concept, with varying interpretations of how the idea is defined and analytically applied across disciplines (Beck & Sznaider, 2006). In the article titled, *'Learning for Cosmopolitan Citizenship: theoretical debates and young people's experiences'* (2003), Osler and Starkey conceptualise cosmopolitan citizenship in terms of space, place and belonging. They argue that the delivery of citizenship education in schools should, if it is to be effective, recognise the multiple loyalties and biographies navigated and negotiated by young people. They also argue that citizenship education in schools has less impact on young people than their own personal and cultural sources. Such as their immediate family. They highlight the dynamic processes in how young people construct a sense of belonging, and this helps to explain how young people inhabit British identity in different ways. When asked, participants in the study told a multitude of stories about who they are. Some drew an imaginary line around themselves and said, this is my neighbourhood, my ethnicity, my religion, and my family's journey and this is where I belong. This space was influenced by attributes of their parents' and grandparents' space, and informed the way they narrated themselves. Yet, their parents' and grandparents' space was also imaginary, and the participants are the children of the physical and mental journeys their parents and grandparents travelled. In their narratives, each young person drew a line between homeland and the foreign land they resided in that revealed how they locate themselves in time and space (Venn, 2000). The participants did not see themselves as 'imprisoned' in one linear history; neither was their status simply that of 'native' or 'stranger'. Such complex identities can be called diasporic, bi-cultural, hybrid, Anglo-Asian, multicultural, global or cosmopolitan. In the young people's accounts of their identity, they each inhabited a

kaleidoscope of subject positions, which forms the basis to what the authors call cosmopolitan identities – e.g. the interplay of local and global cultural influences.

Background

The study in which the article and analyses is based took place in the post-industrial city of Leicester, in the East Midlands of England. Leicester is a multi-cultural and multi-faith city similar in shape and size to Nottingham and Derby. The national census reports that white British people now form less than half of the population of Leicester. At the local level, the unprecedented success of Leicester City Football Club winning the English Premier League in the 2015-16 season brought the city international attention and stimulated a renewed sense of civic pride. Leicester came to typify a modern David and Goliath story. What's more, the 2015 exhumation and reburial of Richard III at Leicester Cathedral firmly fixed the story of Leicester into the narrative of Englanders, which gave space for white British residents to rebalance the local narrative and reaffirm their common culture and sense of national pride. This was concurrent with the introduction of the UK Prevent Strategy.

For researchers, politicians and community actors the Prevent strategy (Christmann, 2012) - the national anti-radicalisation programme - is not a problem per se, but instead the discourse that has sprung up around the strategy in and of itself has become an area of concern. Prevent has fuelled mistrust between communities both inside and outside the classroom. Resulting from the high number of Islamic schools in Leicester and Muslim pupils in non-denominational schools. Prevent has been felt most sharply amongst the city's Islamic communities, arguably creating suspicion in the classroom and confusion in the staffroom. For the teaching of citizenship, critics' key assumption is that non-denominational schools are inherently better positioned than their faith-based counterparts to promote a tolerant society (Short, 2002, & Creese et al, 2006). Yet still, non-denominational schools experience criticism for placing Christianity on par with all world religions, sometimes at the annoyance of some Christian and atheist parents. While Osler

and Stakey's article acknowledges the disconnection from political life amongst many of the young people who took part in the study, the authors pay little attention to the broader socio-cultural and socio-political forces that influence the construction of youth identities and mistrust within and between communities. For instance, the study does not include the voices of young people from all neighbourhoods, such as those Communities 'perceived to be dangerous because of bullies and racists' (Osler & Stakey, 2003, p. 251). Using the author's conceptualisation of cosmopolitan citizenship, it requires symbiotic relationships to build tolerance and understanding in individuals leading to a globalised sense of citizenship. If not, the idea of a cosmopolitan citizen is redundant if dialogue only occurs between likeminded individuals who share a common worldview. Young people's identities are largely formed through peer interactions. The idea and practice of cosmopolitan citizenship in Leicester appears on the surface to reinforce notions of 'otherness' rather than emphasising a meeting point for dialogue and connectedness leading to inter-cultural openness and inclusiveness. We now turn to discuss what is meant by 'cosmopolitan citizenship', looking at its benefits and limitations.

Theorization of citizenship and identity

Osler and Starkey's (2003) article is anchored in two central concepts of 'cosmopolitan citizenship' and 'identity'. The authors see citizenship in its abstract, fluid, and changeable forms; it reflects and reveals the ongoing emotional scenarios played out in young people's daily lives that articulates the complex relations between collectivity and individualism. Criticisms against the defence of such postmodernist notions of citizenship have included the denial of an objective reality, the celebration of relativism, and the emphasis upon a narcissistic or self-obsessed (different from self-love) agent, etc. In their paper, these tensions are of interest along with the ideas and practices of 'human rights', 'resilience', and 'social and cultural capital' to shed light on how the 'personal is political' (Baker, 2011) for young people. Similarly, the authors' conception of identity breaks from the stable and centred modern subject, which is understood

to emerge from the 'enlightened' and 'sociological' subject(s). The enlightened subject, best theorized by Descartes (1985), is thought to be rational, cogitative, conscious, and self-sustaining – categorically a civilised being. This is an oversimplification of the 'modern subject', but represents the fixed and essential way of seeing identity. However, in Osler and Starkey's work they subject key concepts of identity to the deconstructive gaze, though do not present a total abandonment of the 'modern subject'. To paraphrase Hall and DuGay (1997), the essentialising conceptions of 'identity' are no longer useful in their original and unreconstructed forms, but without them certain key questions around agency cannot be thought at all (Hall et al, 1997, pp. 1-2). For instance, Osler and Starkey regard identity categories as mere constructions that can impede or source a sense of cosmopolitan citizenship. They have exhausted their use of socially constructed identities in challenging the status-quo in preference for working through, and with, the postmodern metaphor of identities. To paraphrase the identity theorist Hetherington (1998), many of the positions we inhabit as subjects may be privileged, but it also possible to inhabit marginal positions at the same time. Consequently, Osler and Starkey's central thesis recognises that there are local positions of centrality and marginality, but no clear centres and margins (Hetherington, 1998). The marginality that accompanies outsider-within status can easily be the 'source of both frustration and creativity' (Ugwu, 1998, in Jennings, 2001, p.18) as identified by participants as they reflected on their local and global sense of identity.

Turning to citizenship, Osler and Starkey rightly point out that a sense of citizenship is sourced from multiple sites in young people's lives, including home, school and places of leisure.

Leicester today stands as an exemplar of multicultural and multi-faith Britain. However, whilst white British are the minority in the city, the article highlights the little-known qualitative realities experienced by young people living in the city. If harmonisation and understanding is the goal of cosmopolitan citizenship, Leicester validates Putman's (2000) Bowling Alone hypothesis that cosmopolitan communities can give rise to entrenchment, leading to 'ethnic enclaves' (Wilson & Alejandro, 1980). Putnam stresses the significance of social connectedness providing young

people with a source of social capital. Putnam (2000) defines social capital as the resources to which a person has access by means of his/her social bonds and relations. Social bonds can be more or less institutionalised (in places such as clubs, groups) but also family, friends or colleagues. Putnam's analysis stresses the opportunities afforded by globalisation in nurturing the cosmopolitan ideal of tolerance and understanding, but also the dialectical effects which can often give rise to greater insecurities and destabilise identities at a local level. With increased diversity we often see a decline of social trust, as illustrated in Osler and Starkey work. Putnam sees this as a failure of global and structural forces in not promoting new and novel ways of sourcing social capital, which all are demonstrably affected by how (and whether) we connect with our family and friends and, most importantly, neighbours and work colleagues. Critics such as Arneil (2010) argue that the idyllic communities of the 1950s in which Putnam's thesis rests were less positive than he envisaged, and that the current 'collapse' in connectedness is better understood as change, rather than decline, in community cohesion.

Learning for Cosmopolitan Citizenship

Implicit in the idea of cosmopolitan citizenship is engagement in political life. However, young people in the UK are often singled-out for critical attention, condemned either for their declining presence at the ballot booths, or for their active participation in recent high-profile student protests and youth-led occupations of public spaces. The theme of young people's decline in politics is highlighted by several writers who also capture the general fall in the older electorate (Rose & Miller, 1992, Piven & Cloward, 2000, Stolle & Hooghe 2004, House of Commons, 2014, Henn & Sharpe, 2016). This is particularly apparent in voter turnout rates in recent national and European elections (Kalitowski, 2009 and Power Inquiry, 2006). Recent trends across Europe indicate that people of all ages and in all countries seem less committed to national political systems and mainstream political parties, and increasingly susceptible to radical parties and to their rhetoric. They also appear to be deeply sceptical of governments and of the

political classes in general (Norris, 2011). The 2014 European Assembly elections are a case in point. Nearly 400 million EU citizens in 28 countries were invited to vote for candidates to represent them, yet only 42% opted to do so – the lowest turnout since direct elections were first held 30 years ago (Rallings & Thrasher, 2014). In the 2015 UK General Election, only 43 per cent of people aged 18 to 24 voted, compared with 78 per cent of those aged 65 and over (IPSOS Mori, 2015). In 2017, we saw a rise of 54 per cent of 18-24 year olds who voted in contrast to a decline in 65 and overs of 71 per cent (IPSOS Mori, 2017).

The rise and fall in traditional political engagement is far more complex than a simple comparison of age bands and an outright rejection of the established politics. For instance, in the 2016 UK referendum on membership to the EU, the turn out rate in Leicester was one of the lowest nationally at 65.15% (139,307), but where remain voters totalled 51% (70,980) to leave 49% (67,992) (IPSOS Mori, 2016). Despite being held as a good example of multi-culturalism, Leicester was visibly a divided city, with the voters to remain reflecting the national picture (52%) to leave. However, eliciting which of these camps young Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Groups voters (if they did indeed vote) fell into is more problematic than it appears. Research suggests that younger BME voters have no party loyalty, unlike BME adults who tend to vote labour, and that young BME voters seem less concerned with previous core issues like immigration and are more concerned about job prospects.

This reading of young BME voters also introduces the increasing importance of alternative forms of political participation that are 'less institutionalised and more flexible' for young people such as street protests and boycotting activities (Forbrig, 2005, p. 141). There are many different spaces in which youth participation occurs. These range from formal participatory spaces such as youth parliaments and youth councils, through to demanded participatory spaces in which people act in their own right (i.e. peer interaction on social media and in their neighbourhoods). Formal participatory spaces may be limited in that they are often based on adult democratic

institutions, and may therefore have the effect of inhibiting the involvement of young people who do not, or will not, conform to adults' expectations of behaviour or interactions.

Furthermore, the most active young participants are not necessarily representative of the general youth population, and tend to be those from higher socio-economic groups and with higher levels of education attainment and social capital at their disposal (See Willetts, 2010).

Although published in 2003, Osler and Starkey's article does not address how European integration (e.g. older Britain's leaving and young continental Europeans arriving) impacted on opportunities open to young people living in Leicester. Fast forward to 2017, and the ideals of cosmopolitan citizenship appears to have been abandoned in the post-Brexit and counter terrorism era. Despite decades of multicultural education in the UK, the apparent failure of public institutions to support and protect young people's move from education into the job market has arguably weakened the trust they have for political institutions and agents - and consequently their sense of global citizenship (see Skelton, 2010. Henn & Foard, 2012. Henn & Sharpe, 2016). To paraphrase Skelton (2010), young people are in an in-between space politically and legally and they must continually have to navigate and negotiate social institutions and mechanisms to have their voices heard.

Take, for instance, the British Parliament's recent decision to not give sixteen and seventeen year olds the right to vote in the 2016 UK referendum on EU membership. This impasse suggests a continued mistrust in young people's ability to empathise and have the cognitive skills to form and communicate a clear set of political priorities. In contrast, the Scottish Assembly set the precedent in 2014 by granting sixteen and seventeen year olds the right to take part in the Scottish Referendum on membership to the UK. 85 per cent of the eligible voters turned out which included over 640,000 aged 18-24 (see Electoral Commission, 2014). There were 109,533 (over 80%) 16 and 17 year-olds registered to vote in the Scottish Referendum (*ibid*). This was the first time young people under 18 have been able to take part in a public election in the UK. The

Liberal Democrat, Labour and Green parties all support the call for constitutional change, promising to extend the right to vote to all 16 and 17 year-olds in the UK when the opportunity arises (see Grover et al, 2013 & White, 2016).

As already discussed, some young people are engaged in non-traditional forms of political participation in demanded spaces (such as activism, boycotting and protests), and many are moving towards new forms of civic engagement rather than the complete rejection of traditional democratic practices. In recent years, young people from the UK and beyond were actively engaged in creating or re-thinking democracy. In many regions, young people share a widespread feeling of alienation from politics and exclusion from society which leads to either well-argued protests such as the 99% Movement (see Furlong & Cartmel, 2006) or to public disorder driven by anger and despair (see Bridges, 2012, & Newburn, 2012).

This participation of young people in what might be perceived as anti-establishment actions (such as anti-war rallies and anti- or alter-globalisation movements) demonstrate that young people are not apathetic towards political participation and civic responsibility. Instead, these participatory actions can form the basis of new cultures of political participation and the reinforcement of civil society. Recent demonstrations and street protests can also be understood as a form of dissident citizenship where young people register their common anger with the state outside of formal democratic practices - as in recent anti-austerity protest in the UK and across Europe (see Williamson, 2014). For these reasons, informal political participation is narrowly defined in education as a structured project that address global issues of a social, political, economic, or environmental nature, rather than being experienced as a certainty of their future in a globalized world. As a consequence, young people's lived experiences is seldom documented in the classroom in preference for more unadulterated sources of information to introduce civic learning that might involve pupils' active participation in the local community.

Discussion

In the context of the UK, Leicester is among a small number of towns/cities where the white British population are below 50 per cent. However, as alluded to in Osler and Starkey's paper, the benefits of globalisation have arguably not been felt by local residents which undermines connectedness and trust between communities marked by ethnic differences (Singh, 2003).

Upon closer inspection we see a fault line in the teaching of citizenship. One noticeable silent voice absent in the study has been young people belonging to the communities defined as 'bullies' and 'racists'. In other words, 'white working class youth'. The Osler and Starkey article has privileged the perceptions and ontologies of South Asian and African young people at the expense of their white counterparts, and in doing so illustrates the implications of why and where cosmopolitan citizenship fails to connect people and stories. In order for the idea of cosmopolitan citizenship to become practice it needs state intervention that stimulates and support structures that enable young people of all ethnicities and backgrounds to build social capital and together build futuristic worldviews. Only then can cosmopolitan citizenship flourish in East Midlands cities, which should be recognised as not experiencing the same levels of opportunities as in London.

When asked about place, space and belonging, the predominately South Asian participants shared stories that reinforced notions of the global citizenship, diasporic families and the imagined communities proposed by Anderson (2006). Their accounts demonstrate the richness, diversity and elasticity in constructing cosmopolitan identities in an era marked by an instability in cultural and social referents and the so-called 'crisis in identity' (Hall et al, 1997, & Bauman, 1992).

However, what the study did not reveal is how local, regional and national politics is played out in the shaping of Leicester's identity. For instance, in relationship to Leicester's intra and inter-ethnic community relations where caste and racism plays an equal role, exasperated by poor town planning where dual carriageways disconnect communities and reinforce ethnic enclaves.

In addition, when participants were asked to identify sites of citizenship responses did not include football (Porter & Smith, 2013), nightlife (Chatterton & Hollands, 2002) or the World

Wide Web despite Leicester being a university city, with a football club in the Premier League. This paper reconciles that the article was written before Leicester's success in the Premier League and the discovery of Richard's III remains, but no indication is given on how residents (both indigenous and visible majority) come together in sharing an aspiration for the city in the analysis. The idea of a cosmopolitan citizenship and the sites in which it is sourced has been overinflated in spite of the need to build greater understanding and tolerance in society.

Indeed, the re-conceptualisation of cosmopolitan identity should be rethought and evolved to recognise the inherent tensions in localism and globalism impacting young people's lives and material realities. Osler and Starkey's article firmly argues that citizenship is not just the exclusive domain or responsibility of education, but has family and community at its source. What happens in the wider-world will form opinions, and it is the role of education to allow space for discussion and debate on such matters. But, in the light of the Prevent strategy, the question that arises is just how open and frank a discussion, which truly acknowledges the complexities and opportunities open to young people and to connect young people to political life, can be held in the classroom?

Osler and Starkey's (2003) article focuses on Leicester, but exposes the challenges faced in providing universal citizenship education and the making of democratic actors of all young people in the UK. It would be irresponsible to draw too strong a conclusion from the study about how connected young people feel towards British democratic values, but it does dispel the myth that young people are apathetic towards politics and civic engagement in general.

Convincingly, Henn et al (2005) suggest that young people are only disillusioned with political agencies and agents, and not with the idea of strong democracies. Osler and Starkey reaffirms this idea. Participants wanted to see greater democratisation of the democratic process in which they are counted as democratic actors. For instance, we see from the Osler and Starkey's study how the simple act of challenging authority is not always easy to do. Without a doubt, there is

still a mountain to climb to raise self-esteem and confidence among some young people, so that they can rightfully engage in politics, especially when they speak from a marginal position. This is perhaps the greatest value of the article in that effective citizenship education can nurture within young people the confidence to speak out on matters that concern them. If it were not for their self-determination, crystallised in the structured dialogue as part of the study, the group would not have been able to positively question the fragility of their parents' and grandparents' imagined communities. However, whilst they were given the opportunity to tell their stories, nothing changed, calling into question their ongoing commitment to engage in formal democratic processes.

Conclusion

This discussion has presented how programmes and initiatives embedded in the UK education system have served an important role in nurturing and activating the spirit of citizenship in young people. I have used the idea of hybrid identities as a category to describe the dynamics of the participants' assimilation and enculturation into British society. However, hybridisation does not exist outside of power relations. I have argued that the South Asian community is undergoing its own changes (for example aging population, repatriation, third and fourth generations and so forth), which are captured in how participants are reconfiguring their ties to the diaspora and synthesising dimensions of British culture into their lives. At one time it was fair to say that newcomers functioned within two cognitive worlds, but now those worlds have collapsed to produce something quite different. Rather than South Asian identities being in crisis, the analysis suggests that the experiences of displacement and changes in locality have spawned a new sense of ethnicities (Hall, 1996 & Anthias, 1998). The boundaries of South Asian communities in Leicester, and elsewhere in the UK, are constantly being pushed back to accommodate new forms of identity. None of the participants are searching for futuristic identities that exist outside of their cultural frame of reference, but at the same time they are not

totally reliant upon the prescribed ontological viewpoint of their natal communities of the social world. What appears paramount in the participant's narrative is the need to define their own identities, which means either erasing or playing with the cultural holds that restrict, rather than extend, their individuated sense of citizenship. In their article, Osler and Starkey evidenced Leicester's cosmopolitan credentials, but the acceptance of universal moralism has diminished perhaps in light of public cuts and a shift in focus on counter-terrorism measures. Speaking figuratively, we see that young people in Leicester have an appetite for a shared common culture, in which Pork Pies and Vindaloo co-exist but seldom do we see them served together on the same platter. The ongoing challenge for educators is to strengthen mutual understanding between students by drawing on their lived experience within the caveat of promoting cosmopolitan citizenship.

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