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978-0-521-12810-0 - The Practice of Global Citizenship

Luis Cabrera

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The Practice of Global Citizenship

In this novel account of global citizenship, Luis Cabrera argues that all individuals have a global duty to contribute directly to human rights protections and to promote rights-enhancing political integration between states. *The Practice of Global Citizenship* blends careful moral argument with compelling narratives from field research among unauthorized immigrants, activists seeking to protect their rights, and the 'Minuteman' activists striving to keep them out. Immigrant-rights activists, especially those conducting humanitarian patrols for border-crossers stranded in the brutal Arizona desert, are shown as embodying aspects of global citizenship. Unauthorized immigrants themselves are shown to be enacting a form of global 'civil' disobedience, claiming the economic rights central to the emerging global normative charter while challenging the restrictive membership regimes that are the norm in the current global system. Cabrera also examines the European Union, seeing it as a crucial laboratory for studying the challenges inherent in expanding citizen membership.

Luis Cabrera is Senior Lecturer in Political Theory at the University of Birmingham, where he also serves as an associate member of the Centre for the Study of Global Ethics.

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Frontmatter
[More information](#)

For Alice

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xii
Introduction	1
Part I: Theoretical concerns	11
1 Global citizenship as individual cosmopolitanism	13
2 Rights, duties, and global institutions	34
3 Defining and distributing duties	66
Part II: Global citizenship in practice	97
4 Minutemen and desert samaritans: citizenship practice in conflict	99
5 Mobile global citizens	131
6 Global citizen duties within less-affluent states	154
Part III: Advocacy and institutions	179
7 Regional citizenship and global citizenship	181
8 Advocacy duties and global democracy	211
9 Education and motivation for global citizenship	238
Conclusion: the practice of global citizenship	258
<i>Appendix</i>	263
<i>Works cited</i>	265
<i>Index</i>	305

Preface

You have to burn some shoe rubber to get the story. That was the axiom drilled into me as a cub reporter for The Associated Press, some time ago now. Only so much can be learned through the telephone, my senior colleagues advised. To tell the story right, you need to be able to take in the look, the feel, and even the smell of a place. You need to observe your subjects in their own surroundings, try to develop a genuine sense of where and how they live their lives. Something similar is true, I am increasingly coming to believe, of the political theorist's work. A theory argument, especially if it has clear policy implications, can benefit enormously from engagement with salient actors in their own contexts, offering their own justifications for action, and their own insights on possibilities for change.

When I began this book, I was already several years distant from filing my last story on the AP wire. I had completed the transition from reporter to academic, fulfilling a long-held ambition to be able to delve more deeply into arguments and issues, and to develop my own positions on them. I knew precious little at first about the immigration context that figures so centrally in this work. I quickly became frustrated with trying to think through the issues arising, especially around unauthorized immigration, using what I could glean from theoretical treatments, news, and non-fiction accounts. So, I began to accompany colleagues' classes on experiential learning trips to the border between the US state of Arizona and the Mexican state of Sonora. I was exposed with their students to ground-level views of border economics, deprivation, and the reasons behind mass unauthorized entry. I began to meet some of the activists who had for decades been bringing issues of social justice from the borderlands to national and global audiences.

My intention had been to follow an earlier theoretical argument for institutional cosmopolitanism – a macro-level case for the desirability and feasibility of some forms of global political integration – with a straightforward theoretical treatment of the individual duties that

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Luis Cabrera

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x Preface

could arise in such a frame. Unauthorized immigration had seemed to be an area in which many issues of global justice came to a head, and one which could be a productive site for the exploration of duties applicable to all persons. It became apparent, after my first few trips to the border, that I would have to conduct some more systematic field study if I were to fully grasp the significance of unauthorized immigration for individual duties, or global citizenship, as I was coming to conceive of the project. With the help of numerous colleagues, I took what was effectively a crash course in qualitative methodology. I also gave close study to the relatively few political theory works at that time which had sought to incorporate original empirical research – in particular Jane Mansbridge's (1983) seminal study of democracy in practice at Vermont town meetings and among workers at a community crisis center.

I began to seek out those conducting humanitarian patrols for unauthorized crossers who were stranded and at risk of dying in the desert, as well as immigration-rights activists more generally. Both groups seemed to me to be clearly practicing aspects of global citizenship. I also wanted to observe and interview those "civilian border patrol" members of the Minuteman Project in Arizona. They appeared to be enacting a stringently nation-centric form of citizenship in taking it upon themselves to guard their own international boundary against unauthorized entry. Initial interviews and field observations quickly corrected an error in my approach. I found that I had neglected perhaps the most important set of global-citizen actors: unauthorized immigrants themselves. Such individuals were, more than any others, acting as though it were already possible to be a global citizen. They crossed borders in search of opportunities for themselves and their family members. They often made civic contributions in both their host and sending communities. Further, they appeared to be practicing something akin to global "civil" disobedience in attempting, by violating entry laws, to claim economic and other rights that are enumerated in major human rights treaties. They had a strong sense that their violation was morally permissible.

Later fieldwork involved going closer to the source of unauthorized immigration in North America, in this case the immigrant-sending state of Veracruz, Mexico. Veracruz was a particularly significant site. It provided the opportunity to speak with groups of ordinary Mexicans offering food and shelter to Central Americans riding atop freight trains to the US border. That is probably the most dangerous means of making the journey. Riders are frequently preyed on by gangs and Mexican authorities, and many lose limbs or their lives when they fall under the moving trains. Interviews and observations with those aiding the riders

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Luis Cabrera

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

reinforced a sense that individuals within less-affluent states could, and often already did, discharge significant global-citizen duties.

Field research in Western Europe, and especially in the North African Spanish enclave of Ceuta, helped to complete the picture and reveal important similarities across contexts. European activist groups lobbied to have rights protections extended to all persons, regardless of immigration status. Prospective unauthorized entrants went to often extraordinary lengths to try to reach European soil. They spoke of weeks-long treks through the Sahara Desert, where many saw their companions drop and die beside them. Or they had tried to run the gauntlet of the Gibraltar crossing, or the more dangerous ocean crossing from Africa's northwest coast to the Spanish-controlled Canary Islands, a route that has claimed thousands of lives in the past decade. It would take a book much longer than this one to do such stories justice. What hopefully will emerge, however, is the richness of both the empirical and theoretical contexts of global citizenship, and the importance of bringing excluded voices into global justice debates, including within works such as this one. Individuals who are pressing at the normative edges of the current global system are often capable of speaking eloquently, or with simple power, about why they act as they do. Their insights fundamentally inform the theoretical treatment of global citizenship here, as well as the possibilities identified for institutional transformation.

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Frontmatter

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Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-12810-0 - The Practice of Global Citizenship

Luis Cabrera

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgments

xiii

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Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-12810-0 - The Practice of Global Citizenship

Luis Cabrera

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xiv Acknowledgments

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