



**SEEKING REFUGE:
FAITH-BASED APPROACHES
TO FORCED MIGRATION**

Poverty and Peacemaking II
March 3–4, 2017 at Princeton University

Global Citizenship in an Era of Nationalism

Aaron Tyler, University of St. Mary's (Moderator)
Tom Dobbins Jr., Catholic Charities, Archdiocese of New York
Athena Mison Fulay, International Institute of Education
Daniel Perell, Baha'i Representative to the United Nations
Tamara Mann Tweel, Hillel International
Talya Nevins, Princeton University (Student Rapporteur)

Throughout the *Seeking Refuge* conference, panelists and participants engaged with the themes of borders, migration, cross-cultural empathy, international responsibility, and identity formation, to name a few. In addition to being relevant to the topic of the conference, these themes feel especially timely in the current geopolitical climate. Dominant voices in today's public discourse promote closed borders and prioritize nationalist goals, eschewing language about shared responsibility for wellness and safety around the globe. For this reason, the morning roundtable discussion on "Global Citizenship in an Era of Nationalism" was an especially pertinent conversation. The discussion helped frame different religious approaches to citizenship and to refugees within the broader context of today's geopolitical environment.

Professor Aaron Tyler from the University of St. Mary's moderated the panel, which included panelists Tom Dobbins Jr. of Catholic Charities; Athena Mison Fulay of the International Institute of Education and Community of Sant'Egidio; Daniel Perell, who is the Baha'i representative to the United Nations; and Tamara Mann Tweel from Hillel International's Office of Innovation. Professor Tyler opened the discussion with remarks about the disconcerting rise of real, imagined, and rhetorical fears about the movement of people. He drew an opposition between constricted nationalism—which causes "an inability to accept people beyond its physical and ideological boundaries as equal in worth of dignity"—and global citizenship. According to Professor Tyler's definition, global citizenship implies a "positive sum relationship rooted in recognition of inherent dignity and value in each person simply because we are human." In order to further unpack this concept, Professor Tyler asked each of the panelists to draw on his or her faith's theologies of belonging and to reflect on the distinction between *de facto* and *du jure* citizenship in a religious, twenty-first century context.

Professor Tyler structured the discussion around two main questions and allowed each panelist five minutes to address each question. First, he asked the panelists: "Share with us some of your thoughts about this idea of global citizenship. What does it mean to you? What are some ways to think about this concept through the lens of your faith tradition?"

Tom Dobbins spoke first, stressing that global citizenship is already our reality, and explained that the commandment to "love thy neighbor as thyself" requires us to incorporate that reality into our



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reflections on who our neighbors are. Therefore Catholic Charities works on interfaith and cross-cultural projects to “help the people who are active participants in global citizenship—refugees, immigrants, veterans, unemployed people—those who may not be on the better side of global citizenship.”

Athena Fulay spoke next about academia as an example of a transnational community that relies on global citizenship for free exchange of scholarship. According to Fulay, global citizenry means that everyone in the world shares a common home on this planet, although she problematized the term “citizenry” because of the intrinsic exclusivity of citizenship. She explained Sant’Egidio as a global community with members all over the world who encounter and befriend people on the periphery of society. The focus is on community, meeting face-to-face and discussing lives and concerns, in line with the Christian or Catholic idea of treating the stranger as a brother. Professor Tyler pointed out that this is easier said than done. After recognizing that global citizenship means sharing a common home, how do we live it? How do we teach it? The panelists agreed that it is essential to begin the process through being in relationship with one another— not through a dynamic of power.

Daniel Perell presented the Baha’i philosophy of global community as a belief that humanity goes through a series of collective maturations. First we focus on family, then immediate community, then nation, and then ultimately, the global society. Like Dobbins, Perell believes that we live in the age of global society and that we are adjusting to that reality. According to Perell, “the sense that the earth’s inhabitants are the leaves of one tree is slowly becoming the standard by which humanity’s collective efforts are now judged,” and if a policy (for example) is bad for one branch, it will harm the whole tree. As systems change, disintegration and integration happen simultaneously; it is time to challenge the existing paradigms that benefit one branch over the expense of the whole tree, even if they are politically powerful.

Next, Tamara Mann Tweel presented some Jewish texts and thought processes on the question of how the religious imagination can provide a constructive theology of belonging. She cited three main principles of Judaism that do this without relying on defining the stranger or the other. The first principle is *b’tzelem elohim*, or the belief that all people are created in the divine image. The second principle is *hachnasat orchim*, hospitality, and the humbling of oneself before one’s guests. The third principle is that of welcoming the stranger— a commandment that is given to the Jews thirty six times, indicating how difficult it is to uphold.

Professor Tyler’s second guiding question to the panelists was: “As you think about today’s global climate in the era of nationalism, what are some ways in which we might pursue and practice global citizenship in day-to-day practical ways?”

Tom Dobbins answered with three basic steps: first, broaden our imaginations of what global citizenship can look like; second, practice what Pope Francis calls “the culture or civilization of Encounter;” and third, encourage one another to go across borders and boundaries to make



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friends with people different from ourselves in terms of background or ideology. Encountering another person comes in an atmosphere of mutual respect, inquiry, coming together, exchanging information, winding up as friends. Not only must we encounter people from the other side of the planet, but we must seek encounters with people on the opposite end of the ideological spectrum. This question of ideological encounter was a recurring challenge for the panelists and participants in the room as we struggled with the prospect of lowering our ideological defenses in the pursuit of meaningful engagement with our political opponents.

Athena Fulay also focused on this concept of “bubbles” and echo chambers, insisting that we need to be better at listening and understanding our country’s historical wounds like slavery. She suggested several practical initiatives: educating ourselves about other peoples’ struggles through travel and meaningful encounters; looking closely at the problems within America’s version of citizenry; engaging rather than fleeing or fighting when faced with confrontation; doing service and pursuing conversations; and reinstating hospitality as an important value in our country and in our daily lives.

Dan Perell further suggested adjusting our frame of reference for thinking not only about what is a nation, but what is a citizen. He insisted that we must question the paradigms we use to define “the other,” such as the paradigm of “developed” and “developing” countries. How do we practice the ethic of global citizenry? Where do we choose to live? What do we teach our kids? How can we expect to achieve better social integration if we, for example, continue to move to culturally homogenous districts because of the best schools?

Tamara Mann Tweel also focused her final answer on the concept of changing our own every day behavior to make our country and communities more welcoming. Even if we can’t change the law, there is great space right now to shift the culture of welcoming in our country. Faith-oriented people in particular can offer examples of the culture of welcoming, as shown at the airport protests around the country last month. She argued that the religious idea of individual dignity and worth can work against the social-science-constructed dominant urge to define people based on categories or identity groups.

The panel then turned into a group discussion on these two main questions as well as some others that participants brought up or that Professor Tyler used at the beginning. The conversation was thoughtful and fruitful, but ultimately these are questions that we must continue to engage with, now more than ever. How might we imagine new radical ways of expanding the idea of belonging in a new global community? Is global citizenship the right conception for this new conception of belonging? How might faith traditions lead the way or set the stage? Through religious traditions, what opportunities can faith offer our human community? How can they help us traverse this era of isolationism and division? What are the spiritual and practical responses that can come from our faith?