

# Perception and positionality: Adult refugee and migrant students' understandings of the global citizen identity in British society

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## Abstract

In an increasingly globalized world there is continued debate within educational research about the existence and identity of the global citizen. This article contributes to this exploration by locating the debate within the further education (FE) and skills sector. It is based on the author's MA dissertation and examines the understandings of the global citizen identity as held by adult students from refugee and migrant backgrounds at a large FE college in London. It also investigates the extent to which these students perceive themselves as global citizens in British society. A qualitative study is used to explore these perspectives through student focus groups and the theme of positionality. This article argues that the global citizen identity is largely understood as an aspirational identity that is implicated with orientations of power and that there is an overall absence of a critical approach in relation to understandings of the global citizen identity. Increased criticality is therefore essential in enabling an exploration of this identity as necessarily multifaceted and complex.

**Keywords:** global citizen; refugee; migrant; positionality; identity

## Introduction

The challenges raised by migration remain at the forefront of educational debate in these rapidly changing times, characterized by the unprecedented growth of international migration and the transformed political landscape in the UK after the Brexit vote. This has been evidenced by negative representations of refugees and migrants in the media (Lamb, 2014), the complexity of challenging perceptions of the refugee and migrant identity (Pinson *et al.*, 2010; Hastings, 2012) and a shift in UK citizenship policy, which it is argued has become less open and more assimilatory (Kymlicka, 2003). The tension between responding to increased migration and addressing the implications this has for British society is complex (Tarozzi and Torres, 2016) as it brings questions of national and global identity into sharp focus, 'forcing consideration of who belongs in national societies' (Berry, in Peters *et al.*, 2008: 58) and who does not.

In this article, I explore the perceptions of adult refugee and migrant students of the global citizen identity in British society. I address this through the theme of positionality in the context of a large further education (FE) college in London. The introduction addresses the key terms of refugee, migrant, positionality and identity, presents the theoretical framework and provides an overview of the FE and skills sector and positionings of the global citizen identity. This is followed by an examination of the research questions and methodology, the findings, discussion and conclusion.

A refugee is defined in Article 1 of the 1951 Geneva Convention as an individual who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion (UNHCR, 2011).

What makes economic migrants distinct from refugees is that their migration is not forced and they cross national borders freely for reasons such as work and study (Eidoo *et al.*, 2011). However, it is also important to note that, in addition to economic migration, which is characterized by access to employment and progression opportunities, migrants can also be political, environmental and familial (Striking Women, n.d.). In this article, economic migration is the focus, as the majority of migrant student participants in this study share this background.

I utilize standpoint epistemology as a theoretical framework to examine adult refugee and migrant students' understandings of the global citizen identity in British society, as it advocates a critical approach to questions of identity and recognizes the importance of context through 'a wide range of starting points and perspectives' (Bourn, 2015: 5). It has its origins in critical theory, and is concerned with examining the dynamics of power that restrict and limit individual freedoms, with the aim of transforming inequality to enable a more democratic and equitable society. Critical theorists argue that knowledge is not neutral (Cohen *et al.*, 2011) and plays an important role in addressing and representing individual interests and freedoms. They argue that all knowledge is situated in the context in which it originates, and that there is not one sole form of knowledge or knowing the world.

As part of this critical theory framework, standpoint epistemology or positionality can be understood as taking a stance, or a position, on the nature of epistemology and ways of knowing and learning about the world (Ritchie *et al.*, 2013). Consequently, knowledge cannot be viewed as universal (Schwandt, 2001), as is argued by writers who utilize a critical perspective to share the standpoint epistemologists' view of the importance of context and the incomplete nature of knowledge (see Andreotti, 2006). Positionality recognizes the variety and complexity of knowledge through its stance that knowledge is 'partial and incomplete' (Schwandt, 2001: 238) and advocates a critical approach that is responsive and transformative.

In addition to positionality, identity is a key term. Identity, like the term global citizen, is debated and understood in a variety of ways. One understanding is that it is a means of self-definition and identification with other individuals and groups (Liebkind, 1989). This interpretation considers both self and the collective. This complexity is reinforced by the difficulty of engaging with identity as a means of definition that is singular rather than pluralistic (Yuval-Davis *et al.*, 2005) and which pre-supposes fixed ways of viewing the global citizen identity in isolation, or as separate from individual and collective contexts. From this perspective, identity is considered in its context of use, in which an understanding of the global citizen is examined through the individual's own experiences. It is this interpretation of identity that I utilize to examine the participants' positioning of themselves as global citizens.

## The further education and skills sector

The FE and skills sector incorporates a wide range of provision for learners beyond the age of 16 with an extensive offering of academic and employment-related qualifications. This provision includes qualifications such as the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), which is studied between the ages of 15 and 16 by students in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, to the more practical apprenticeships

that combine work-based training with learning in a classroom environment. The importance of the global dimension has become increasingly recognized in a policy context, even though there is no prerequisite for the FE and skills sector to include a global dimension as part of its curriculum requirements and offer (Bentall and McGough, 2013). This has been addressed through a lifelong learning skills agenda (Bourn, 2011) and the accrual of global skills, which emphasizes up-skilling and the acquisition of knowledge in recognition that the FE and skills sector is operating in a climate of increased global competition. The advancement of skills is viewed as essential in maintaining a strong national socioeconomic position (Department for the Economy, 2006). This positioning is closely linked to a political agenda in which the acquisition of knowledge and skills is promoted to enable the development of active citizens (Home Office, 2002) who have the capabilities to participate in a society that advocates competency and progress. However, despite the advancement of the skills agenda through governmental policy and the promotion of up-skilling and progress alongside the more recent advocacy of global skills (Bourn, 2008), this has not necessarily translated into the development of globalized perspectives. This emphasis on a predominantly competency-based approach to skill acquisition does not address complexity and uncertainty in the context of managing change in an increasingly globalized world (Scheunpflug, 2010) and serves to limit globalized perspectives that endorse the examination and re-examination of beliefs, assumptions and attitudes in the context of meaningful engagement in global learning.

The emphasis on knowledge and skill acquisition is also reflected in the FE Skills for Life English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) core curriculum, in which the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information technology are positioned as integral to making a contribution to society. Yet, while these basic skills are viewed as 'essential elements of global learning' (Serf, 2008: 413), it is questionable whether the development of these basic skills is used to advocate transformative learning in which opportunities to engage in diverse ways of seeing, thinking, learning, doing and being are taken beyond an equality and diversity and inclusive practice agenda that characterizes much of the current climate in the FE and skills sector. Despite this, there is acknowledgement of globalization as a force for change (research by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS), 2008, cited in Bourn, 2011), which has influenced the concept of learning for a global society (Bourn, 2011). Despite the lack of a curriculum framework that incorporates global learning (Bentall and McGough, 2013), there is a growing awareness of thinking globally in which individuals are encouraged to make links between what they are learning and their own lives (Development Education Association, 2005, in Bourn, 2008) and the lives of those around the world (Lowe, 2008; Davies and Lam, 2009).

Literature on refugee and migrant students as global citizens in an FE context is sparse. Dimitriadou (2004), Beaumont (2010) and Morrice (2013) predominantly focus on language, critical thinking skills and identity. However, this is mostly from the perspective of younger refugee students and the term global citizen is not specifically addressed. Research was conducted in 2008 by LSIS (2008, in Bourn, 2011) with colleges and training providers in the FE sector, into perceptions of the global dimension, but this also relates to language provision as opposed to adult refugee and migrant students and a discussion of the term global citizen. The global dimension is examined in Bentall and McGough's (2013) research in an FE setting. However, this focuses on the global learning of young learners in general. Bourn (2001) and Bentall and McGough (2013: 48) consequently highlight the 'paucity of research' in relation to the field of

global learning in the sector. From this gap in the literature, I formulated the following research questions as the focus for my study:

1. How do adult students from refugee and migrant backgrounds (and their tutors and teachers) on English for Business and IT courses at X college define a global citizen?
2. To what extent do these students from refugee and migrant backgrounds (and their tutors and teachers) perceive themselves as global citizens, and why?
3. In what ways do these tutors and teachers view their own roles in supporting their students as global citizens? (An examination of this research question and the responses of the tutors and teachers is outside the scope of this article.)

## Positionings of the global citizen identity

This section explores positionings of the global citizen identity and outlines the interpretation of this identity that I use in this article. The global citizen identity is a debated concept that continues to be understood in various ways. One of the ways this identity has been positioned is through 'being', characterized by both attitude and personal attributes. This global citizen contributes an outlook through a state of being in which possessing characteristics such as compassion is utilized by interacting with others. This emphasis on being is also an emphasis on self through an attributes-based typology in which personal attributes are viewed as central to the maintenance of the global citizen identity (Oxley and Morris, 2013). However, the focus on a state of being is not without complexity as this global citizen does not exist in isolation. They are part of a cosmopolitan outlook which encourages a responsive and open attitude to newcomers to the host society (Kymlicka, 2003). This openness of attitude associated with personal attributes, such as care, is in stark contrast to the separateness and exclusion of the refugee identity that Bauman (2004, in Pinson *et al.*, 2010) highlights. Yet what this attitude reinforces is the imbalance of power relations of giver and receiver by a host society who gives through an attitude of care and compassion, and a receiver who is the recipient of this (Dobson, 2005, in Andreotti, 2006). It does not suggest mutual exchange or mutual engagement but that terms of engagement are based on responsibility for the other and a mentality that seeks to help rather than to engage in an exchange that is based on equal terms (Davies and Lam, 2009). The focus on 'being' of this global citizen is linked to 'doing', yet the action of doing raises questions of morality in which there is the suggestion that this identity is not reciprocal. This has 'implications of ... responsibilities, duties and entitlements' (Davies, 2006: 6) that are afforded to refugees and migrants by the host society.

An alternative positioning of the global citizen identity is based on attainment through a skills and competency-based focus. This positioning is associated with a moral-political understanding of the global citizen identity (Tully, in Peters *et al.*, 2008), and is characterized by an emphasis on the acquisition of global skills to take action in promoting a global outlook. In this positioning, global citizens utilize their global outlook to equip themselves through knowledge, skills and learning to enable an active, participatory and engaged approach, as global citizens who take action for change (Bourn, 2008). Yet this global mindset is also associated with the accrual of 'multi-national sophistication' (Tully, in Peters *et al.*, 2008: 205) and a global citizen who is not only associated with knowledge and skills but with notions of prestige, status and wealth. This global citizen is the incomer rather than the displaced who learns 'about' rather than 'with' and who travels to acquire knowledge and experiences for

their own gain. This is indicative of a power dynamic in which the global citizen identity is positioned as part of a multinational elite who operate on terms of acquisition and accretion.

This provides a positioning of the global citizen identity that is complex, in which moral-political and aesthetic-cultural understandings (Tully, in Peters *et al.*, 2008) interlink and merge. What is also evident is that a critical understanding of the global citizen identity must also be considered, beyond an association with the acquisition of skills and knowledge of a global knowledge economy outlook (Lang-Wojtasik, 2014), or by travel that is characterized by a global elite (Dobson, 2005, in Andreotti, 2006) who engage in providing support to those deemed in need of this through a one-way exchange. Instead, a positioning is needed that examines, engages and questions perceptions and assumptions of who the 'other' actually is. This positioning does not promote care or compassion as ends in themselves, or as a means to an end to ensure that action for change takes place, or to establish terms of engagement with a version of the 'other' who is characterized through separation, segregation and difference. Instead, it enables an examination of identity that is less about framing an understanding of the global citizen through static thinking, where identity is viewed as fixed, immovable and clearly defined, and more about moving towards an exploration of the positioning of identity in which knowledge is not only contested but is 'partial and incomplete' (Schwandt, 2001: 238), and perceptions of the global citizen are necessarily complex. It is this positioning of the term global citizen identity that is used in this article. I examine the perceptions of adult refugee and migrant students' understandings of the global citizen identity at a large FE college in London and the extent to which these students view themselves as global citizens in British society.

## Methodology

This section addresses the research questions, methodology and data analysis I used in this qualitative study. I chose a large FE college as I had previously taught refugees, migrants and asylum seekers there as an ESOL lecturer for six years, before becoming a teacher trainer. The experience of teaching students from these backgrounds was pivotal in enabling this research and in reinforcing my commitment to individuals who frequently experience the challenges, obstacles and difficulties of navigating identity. The college provided a recognizable context for the qualitative study to be conducted and for me to be able to gain access to the research participants. The selection of a qualitative study allowed me to investigate participants' multiple perspectives with a focus on the descriptive (Yin, in Cohen *et al.*, 2011) by conducting the research in their own educational context. I used an understanding-based rather than outcome-based methodology (Guba and Lincoln, 1982) in order to gain a variety of responses not restricted by statistical representation, and to provide a broader scope for participants to frame their responses. I selected focus groups as the data collection method for the student participants to understand their perceptions of the global citizen identity, with the purpose of providing a forum for participants to share their stories and tell about society (Ragin and Amoroso, 2011) in as person-centred a way as possible.

I carried out five focus groups with adult refugee and migrant students on EBIT (English for Business and IT) programmes at the college across three levels: EBIT 3 (Entry Level 3), EBIT 4 (Level 1) and EBIT 5 (Level 2). In addition, I conducted four interviews with the students' teachers and tutors. This data has not been included as it is outside the scope of this article. The number of participants in each focus group varied. EBIT 3 and 4 were each divided into two focus groups due to the larger number

of participants in these groups. There were five participants in the first EBIT 3 focus group and four in the second, seven participants in the first EBIT 4 focus group and five in the second, and two participants in the EBIT 5 focus group. Six participants of varying ages originated from Sudan, four from Iraq, two from Albania, with the remainder being from Lebanon, Peru, Lithuania, Kuwait, the Yemen and Russia. They did a variety of jobs. For example, one participant from Peru worked part time as a cleaner in the mornings before college and another from Sudan worked part time as a shelf-stacker at Sainsbury's alongside his studies. In total, 18 participants from refugee and five from migrant backgrounds participated in the study.

I chose focus groups for the student participants due to their participatory and interactive nature. However, in practice, the focus groups were based more on individual interaction between myself and the participants. They moved away from being shared forums in which to exchange individual perspectives and towards individual interviews in a group setting, although not with the same depth of response compared with the tutor and teacher interviews. As a result, there was minimal discussion among the student participants, which I had not been anticipating when seeking to provide a platform for the participants to formulate their positionings of the global citizen identity in relation to their own lives. In the literature on focus groups some advocate smaller numbers of 6–8 (Fowler, in Cohen *et al.*, 2011) and others 4–12 (Morgan, in Cohen *et al.*, 2011). In practice, the focus groups were different sizes, and several consisted of an uneven balance of refugee and migrant backgrounds due to some absenteeism, with some consisting of no students from migrant backgrounds. While I sought to ensure a balance, this was not possible on the day of data collection.

I transcribed the focus groups verbatim. This was in recognition that the notes taken as student participants expressed their views in response to the question guides linked to the research questions would only provide me with a global analysis of the data as a preliminary analysis (Legewie, 1994, in Cohen *et al.*, 2011). Transcribing the data in full provided me with an increased opportunity to explore participants' perspectives and experiences of the global citizen identity in relation to their own lives.

I utilized Kvale's (2007, in Flick, 2014) data analysis framework of data reduction, data reorganization and data representation to analyse the data. Due to the volume of data generated, I reduced it by applying several processes within the context of qualitative content analysis (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). In seeking to maintain a reflexive approach, Kvale's (2007, in Flick, 2014) framework provided an iterative component of data reorganization, which offered the flexibility to develop, modify and refine the data analysis. To reduce the data, I carried out a global analysis utilizing student participant focus group notes and teacher and tutor interview notes and several initial readings of the transcripts. This gave me a sense of the data and the identification of sections directly relevant to the research questions. While the transcripts held other data that was not directly relevant, these sections were important in capturing context. Several categories were formulated for data analysis predominantly by using Oxley and Morris's (2013) typology of global citizenship and the cosmopolitan and advocacy conceptions of political, moral, economic and cultural and social, critical, environmental and spiritual.

In demonstrating critical awareness and responsiveness to the concept of data reorganization (Kvale, 2007, in Flick, 2014), I identified further categories and theoretical codes within the data by a process of initial coding, patterning, refining coding and presenting findings (Barbour, in Flick, 2014). I then applied this framework by justifying the choice of transcription and selection of a global analysis as an initial analysis, with several more in-depth analyses to reduce superficial and simplistic

interpretation. I applied the same initial coding frame and strategies in an identical way to all transcripts, from the first global analysis to the more detailed analyses. This did not mean that the codes appeared in the same way, or with similar frequency across transcripts, and additional codes were developed utilizing the codes of B=Belonging, M=Migration and C=Colonialism.

## Findings

### **Research question 1: How do adult students from refugee and migrant backgrounds (and their tutors and teachers) on English for Business and IT courses at X college define a global citizen?**

The majority of student participants predominantly use attributes-based and rights-based typologies to position themselves as global citizens in British society, in addition to a knowledge and skills-based typology to a lesser extent. Participants from both refugee and migrant backgrounds provide responses such as 'understanding each other', 'respect each other', 'love each other regardless of religion, race, colour' and 'we are the same ... human'. This is a positioning of the global citizen identity frequently communicated through a view of humanity as shared, regardless of country of origin, or due to having moved from one country, or countries, to another. Participants' perceptions of the global citizen identity are in part communicated by the possession of several characteristics such as 'open-mindedness', 'kindness', and being 'caring' and 'responsible'. This positioning is largely framed by the participants from both backgrounds within the perimeters of their own experiences and contexts, based on what they have themselves experienced since coming to Britain and by what they perceive this identity should be. One of the participants from Sudan recognizes the importance of making a contribution by helping others through voluntary work in his country of origin, which is reflective of the attributes of a global citizen that he identifies, such as being responsible. Another of the participants from Lithuania formulates some of her perceptions of this identity through a comparison of the opportunities and way of life available to her in both her native context and in the British context.

The global citizen identity is further positioned within an attributes-based typology by some of the participants from refugee backgrounds as a means to establish connections with one another and with others, in a country in which – as several participants comment – they feel alone, for reasons such as separation from family and friends and isolation from their native cultures and customs. This identity acquires an aspirational dimension in which the global citizen is positioned by several participants from refugee backgrounds as a means of bringing individuals together in the British context based on their experiences of community in their countries of origin, such as by visiting one another at home. This aspirational dimension is furthered by some of the participants from migrant backgrounds who position their understandings of this identity in relation to a skills- and knowledge-based typology and the opportunities and progression routes that living and studying in the UK enables through employment and travel. These responses are frequently oriented towards the value of hard work and the desire to progress by participants from both backgrounds.

Some participants from refugee and migrant backgrounds also position their perceptions of the global citizen identity in British society within a rights-based typology. One of the predominant ways in which this is formulated is through awareness of and respect for diversity in response to characteristics such as culture, religion and ethnicity. Support of difference is implied through this awareness, which is directly

attributed to several of the participants' personal experiences of coming to the UK. This rights-based typology is furthered by several of the participants from refugee backgrounds regarding inequality of opportunity. They relate this to the economy and education as a means of comparison with countries that are viewed as global and those that are viewed as not, such as Sudan and Iraq, and the question of identity is deemed out of some of the participants' control and related to political influences such as the government maintaining overall responsibility based on rule of law: 'finally they decide'.

While critical perspectives of the student participants' understandings of the global citizen identity are minimal in response to this research question and predominant interpretations are framed through attributes-based and rights-based typologies, implications of positioning and power are present. These implications are largely formulated through discourses of aspiration in relation to the West and through positionings that are implicated with notions of Western superiority and entitlement in relation to prevailing understandings of Western nations such as Britain and America, knowledge and skill acquisition, travel opportunities, and through comparisons made between the native context and the British context. The responses of one participant from a refugee background are indicative of a re-positioning towards a discourse of self-empowerment in challenging assumptions of power. However, this is not representative of the majority of student participants.

### **Research Question 2: To what extent do these students from refugee and migrant backgrounds (and their tutors and teachers) perceive themselves as global citizens, and why?**

The responses of the student participants vary in terms of the extent to which they perceive themselves as global citizens in British society, and some of the participants' responses from refugee backgrounds indicate that they do not fully ascribe to the global citizen identity, commenting that they are global citizens in part. One student participant from Iraq does 'not yet' ascribe to the global citizen identity based on the length of time in Britain, current language skills, experience and knowledge of the UK, and these determining factors are shared by several of the participants. This participant's response indicates a positioning of the global citizen identity as something to be achieved in meeting specified criteria, which is in contrast to an interpretation of the global citizen identity based on the sharing of a common humanity as in the attributes-based typology. However, while this participant questions his positioning in relation to whether or not he yet views himself as a global citizen, there is an overall absence of a critical approach in response to the participants' perceptions of themselves as global citizens, and in relation to understandings of the global citizen identity.

This is furthered by implications of positioning and aspiration in response to the global citizen identity as indicated by several participants from both migrant and refugee backgrounds. These positionings are indicative of Western notions of supremacy about ways of living that they aspire to, such as in countries like Britain and America. This is predominantly expressed through a travel and knowledge economy approach to aspiration and the accumulation of knowledge and skills highlighted by many of the participants in relation to bettering their lives, and in relation to well-being in the face of war and conflict. Many of the responses of the participants from refugee backgrounds are associated with the act of moving to acquire safety and the gaining of a new identity. However, this act of moving is also indicative of identity conflict by several of the participants; for example, one of the participants from a refugee background says: 'If I stay there I feel narrow'. While this demonstrates the importance



of context in relation to the participants' associations with the country of origin and with Britain, it is also indicative of notions of aspiration and betterment in relation to positionings of the global citizen identity expressed by some of the participants. The implications associated with these notions are problematic from a critical perspective in questioning assumptions of power. This is not only framed through participant responses around obtaining a better life through increased opportunities for growth and progression and increased safety, but also through several of the participants' (from both backgrounds) perceptions of themselves as 'citizens of the world' and by making comparisons between their native context and the British context framed through a discourse of gain and lack. These findings are explored in the discussion section that follows in relation to the participants' perceptions and positionality of the global citizen identity.

## Discussion

This section examines the participants' understandings of the global citizen identity in British society through the theme of positionality. Positionality enables an examination of this identity through its critical stance, which recognizes that there is not one sole means of knowing or learning about the world, as advocated by standpoint epistemology (Schwandt, 2001), and that perceptions of the global citizen are necessarily complex. It suggests that knowing is subjective and open to interpretation, which rejects positivist claims to a singular form of knowledge or reality, a perspective that is reinforced by Scheunpflug's (2010) and Andreotti's (2006) assertion that re-conceptualization is necessary to question where knowledge is coming from, and where it is going to. In the study, the participants demonstrate their positionings of the global citizen identity in a number of ways and one of the key ways in which this is presented is through an attributes-based typology as a means to take future action. Attributes such as being 'kind' and 'responsible' are associated with mutual exchange in which these participants recognize the importance of helping others in the host society, and the desire to work towards the acquiring of an identity that is 'civically minded' is indicated through this exchange (Bruter, in Pinson *et al.*, 2010). Several of these participants position themselves not as participators in volunteering as the majority have not yet volunteered in the British context, but as aspirational identity seekers in which the mutual transaction of giving and receiving through participation forms part of this civically orientated identity. This has implications for the function these refugee participants wish to fulfil in the host society (Bauman, 2004, in Pinson *et al.*, 2010) through its associations of acceptance and tolerance. This acceptance has implications of conditionality in relation to the global citizen identity, and the expectation of mutual exchange in which the host society offers belonging in exchange for giving back to this society.

However, several other participants from refugee backgrounds do not only frame their responses through an attributes-based typology as a means to integrate by giving back to the host society, but as a means of connection to both themselves, their country of origin and to the wider world. Their positioning in relation to the global citizen identity is not only externally orientated through an action-connection to the host society but also internally orientated through an action-connection to their country of origin, and to themselves. One of the refugee participants has volunteered in a school in her home country of Iraq and another as an aid worker in his native Sudan, demonstrating that giving back is not only to the society that hosts them, but also to the home country to which they belong. This doing through action is equated

with being through personal fulfilment – ‘that’s make me feel really good’ – and through contribution to, and being part of, humanity – ‘I feel as happy because I give something to human’.

What is central to this action-connection through participation is that it moves away from notions of the West ‘ready to aid an underdeveloped third world’ (Andreotti, 2016: 103) in challenging perceptions of power. Help and support is extended by the other to the other, which indicates that giving is not only a means of mutual exchange in the host society and the country of origin, it is also a means of subverting power relations by challenging commonly held perceptions of the other ‘who is displaced’ (Pinson *et al.*, 2010: 18) by re-positioning themselves within a discourse of self-empowerment. This re-positioning is consequently associated with taking a stance, or a position, on engaging in action within both the host society and the country of origin, in reinforcing a moral ethic based on action for change (Oxfam, 2006, in Bourn, 2008), which challenges perceptions of power relations. However, it is also important to draw attention to the fact that in several cases this volunteering is only aspired to, and the participants who were previously involved in volunteering in their countries of origin were not engaged in volunteering in the host society at the time of the study.

The participants’ understandings of the global citizen identity can be developed further in relation to positionality beyond an attributes-based typology through the participants’ engagement on their EBIT programmes of study. Many participants from both refugee and migrant backgrounds utilize a global-competency-based perspective (Dill, in Goren and Yemini, 2016), in which participants understand the global citizen as one who seeks to accrue global skills to participate in both the college and the host society, and learning English is equated with a discourse of self-improvement through the acquisition of knowledge. However, alongside the motivation to improve prospects is the recognition that this is not available and attainable for all, and this is formulated through a rights-based typology: ‘if you have the same education they have if you have same opportunity’. This is indicative of binary thinking – an ‘us’ and ‘them’ point of separation, in which a rights-based typology to equality appears conditional as a result of inequality of access and opportunity, and in which power relations are positioned through a North–South divide in which the Global South accesses the opportunities for advancement from, and in, the Global North. This goes beyond a knowledge economy approach (Lang-Wojtasik, 2014), in which belonging is equated with the acquisition of skills, to a positionality that reinforces rather than challenges the reproduction of imperialist logic (Zemach-Bersin, 2007).

This existence of unequal power relations (Dobson, 2005, in Andreotti, 2006) through some of the participants’ positioning of themselves in relation to the global citizen identity is central to an examination of a more critical approach. In the study, participants from both refugee and migrant backgrounds demonstrate a desire to identify with the global citizen identity in recognition of what this identity offers them. Several of the participants utilize a deficiency framework to describe what they do not have in their country of origin versus what is available to them in the host society. For example, one of the participants from a migrant background speaks about her native Lithuania in terms of what it lacks, and contrasts it with the host society through the lenses of possibility: ‘Here you can do anything’. This indication of aspiration is furthered by notions of the aspirational identity seeker in which it is possible to ‘be anything you want’. This has implications for a rights-based approach (Berry, 2012), in which an emphasis on individual liberty and freedom in the host country is compared with the country of origin, which is perceived as deficient, or limiting, in enabling this. This ‘narrowing of vision’ (Appiah, in Peters *et al.*, 2008: 2) towards the country

of origin in favour of the host society is furthered by two participants from refugee backgrounds whose responses about ways of living they aspire to, such as in countries like the UK and America, are not only associated with 'doing anything you want' but with gaining 'a better life'. However, this positioning is also suggestive of a 'form of epistemic blindness' (Maldonado-Torres and Sousa Santos, in Andreotti, 2016: 104), in which alternative ways of being and doing are reduced to an idealized vision of a power-based host society, in which the country of origin is negated and individuals distance themselves from it. This is in pursuit of a global citizen identity that is action-orientated through not only the accumulation of knowledge, skills and acquisition but also through a power orientation that favours an identity influenced by the host society, rather than one grounded in the country of origin.

This 'narrowing of vision' (Appiah, in Peters *et al.*, 2008: 2) is complex in relation to positionings of the global citizen identity. Some of the participants from refugee and migrant backgrounds recognize this identity within a framework of an attributes-based typology in which attributes such as being 'kind' and 'responsible' are formulated through a framework of giving back and one of mutual exchange (Berry, 2012). Other participants from both backgrounds position themselves in pursuit of the global citizen identity as a means of acquiring and achieving skills and knowledge, in the expectation that this will enable them to partake in the host society and grant them access to opportunities for self-improvement, through which they acquire, or demonstrate, a global identity. This is also understood through the framework of a rights-based approach by participants from both backgrounds in recognition of their shared humanity, regardless of country of origin.

However, a critical approach to the global citizen identity moves beyond these 'soft' interpretations (Andreotti, 2006), and the accrual of competencies to live and work in a global society (Scheunpflug, 2010). Instead, it argues against the development and promotion of an identity that 'is conclusively defined' (Tarozzi and Torres, 2016: 47), in which notions of Western supremacy embody notions of identification, classification and definition of those perceived as 'other'. While it is too simplistic to make any assertions as to whether the participants are 'othered' through seeking legitimate ways of joining and operating in the host society, what can be considered is the ways in which they choose to identify themselves (Tarozzi and Torres, 2016). In the study, some of the participants from both backgrounds understand identity through the idea not just of similarity, but of sameness: 'we are the same ... human'. Here, the world becomes a 'single community' (Shaw, in Dencik, 2013: 121) and power relations are removed through this positioning. This point of connection is associated with a 'soft' interpretation of the global citizen identity that is linked to well-being (Sorgen, 2015) by several participants from refugee backgrounds who acknowledge the importance of 'respecting each other' and 'love each other' in recognition of their shared humanity.

However, by taking this stance in relation to the global citizen identity, it can also be argued that this view 'homogenises difference' (Tarozzi and Torres, 2016: 63) to achieve integration within the host society. This stance cannot be separated from the complexity of the participants' positioning of themselves as global citizens in the pursuit of a shared identity that seeks to remove difference. This serves to reduce the global citizen identity to an identity that is more clearly defined, and consequently more easily attainable, rather than questioning its 'partial and incomplete' nature (Schwandt, 2001: 238) as an identity that is not finite or fixed. The complexity of the global citizen identity in relation to positionality can also be addressed through several of the participants' (from both refugee and migrant backgrounds) responses, in which they appear to identify closely with this identity through a discourse of travel, which several

use to identify themselves as 'citizens of the world' and as global citizens. Travel is not interpreted through the lens of holidays or short-term stays, but through a sense of self in the world: 'you feel yourself you belong everywhere'. However, this knowledge of access to other host countries through travel is problematic as it becomes associated with a discourse of power relations in which a participant from Iraq comments: 'you have all the world that belongs to you but you can live anywhere you like'.

While this response is indicative of the 'principle of autonomy' (Tully, in Peters *et al.*, 2008: 208), which several participants interpret through a rights-based typology of freedom of choice and individual liberty, positionings of the global citizen identity become implicated with ownership and 'a colonial framing of the world' (Andreotti, in Simpson 2016: 9). This challenges an understanding of the global citizen identity that is not critically examined and which draws attention to the assumptions made in relation to perceptions of power with implications of entitlement highlighted by 'the recognition and cultivation of a shared ennobled nationality' (Andreotti, 2016: 102). The willingness of these participants to be identified in certain ways is suggestive of a minority identity that seeks to become part of the majority (Berry, 2012), in which 'imperialist desires' (Zemach-Bersin, 2007: 17) that are communicated through a sense of ownership and entitlement are indicated. This association between the global citizen identity, power and positioning is furthered by several participants' awareness of a more critical approach to an understanding of this identity through social justice. One of the participants from a refugee background demonstrates this awareness through his comment: 'countries who are bigger [...] to help other countries who don't have too much opportunities or who are poor countries'. Yet what this also indicates is a further association with an assimilatory understanding of colonizing power, towards both the host society and of countries such as America that are viewed as 'global' in the study. Many of the participants' understandings of the global citizen identity from both refugee and migrant backgrounds is expressed through their recognition that they perceive themselves as part of the global and that they are global citizens as a consequence in which a participant from Lithuania states: 'I think it's not being able to be I think we are full stop'. This participant's interpretation of the global citizen identity is that it is not something to be aspired to but that it is something that has already been gained and achieved.

However, not all participants position themselves in relation to the global citizen identity and the acquisition of this identity in such complete terms, or with such a willingness to be associated with being a global citizen. A participant from Sudan states that he does not 'feel shame' about being an immigrant. This reluctance to perceive identity in terms that are frequently associated with 'otherness' demonstrates the complexity of contested identity and highlights an understanding of the global citizen identity from a different perspective. This positioning is not only associated with status and implications of power but with the power of self to reject negative perceptions of identity that are experienced and ascribed. The 'perception of being helpless individuals' (Lammers, 2007: 74) represents a 'binarised view of identity' (Martin and Griffiths, 2014: 952) that is challenged by this rejection, and through the participant's assertion of a refugee identity that he does not perceive in these terms. This indicates the complexity of identity, not only through a consideration of the ascriber and the ascribed, but the way in which identities cross-cut and intersperse with each other (Sales, 2005). This is demonstrated by one of the participants from a refugee background who recognizes: 'you not anymore your country but you not fully another'. This view does not present a positioning of identity that is fixed, or one that has been achieved or 'arrived' at, but one that is uncertain and incomplete, and

which has not yet 'reached fruition' (Tarozzi and Torres, 2016: 81), if reaching fruition is indeed possible. The global citizen identity is therefore understood in different ways by different participants in the study, and the conclusion that follows will summarize this exploration.

## Conclusion

In this article I explored the extent to which adult students from refugee and migrant backgrounds perceive themselves as global citizens in British society in the context of a qualitative study at a large FE college in London. I utilized the theme of positionality to examine this question and I have ascertained that the majority of participants ascribe to the global citizen identity in a moderate to large degree. The predominant understanding of this identity is through a combination of an attributes-based and a rights-based typology. In this article I have posed several ways of understanding the global citizen identity through the theme of positionality, and findings indicate that the majority of participants from both backgrounds perceive the global citizen identity as one that they already identify with by recognizing themselves as global predominantly through their experiences of moving from one place to another, or as an identity that can be 'arrived at' principally through knowledge acquisition and the accumulation of time and experience.

However, what is much less evident is participants' necessarily complex exploration of the global citizen identity, in which identity is examined from a critical standpoint and in which different ways of knowing and learning about the world (Ritchie *et al.*, 2013) are brought to the forefront of this examination. While participants' understandings of their perceptions as global citizens in British society are predominantly framed through perceptions that are based on what they have contributed to, and what they aspire to contribute to, and what they are currently working towards through the vehicle of learning and acquisition on their programme of study, these perceptions are primarily expressed through a discourse of aspiration and implications of power as a means of being 'associated with people who ascribe values to them' (West *et al.*, 1996: 57, in Tarozzi and Torres, 2016). While this implication is far from comfortable through its suggestion of integration in the host society that is through assimilation, as opposed to an understanding of integration that is conceptualized as a reciprocal process, with its 'implied aspect of mutual accommodation' (Sorgen, 2015: 252), it would not be accurate or justified to present this solely from an ascriber and an ascribed view of the global citizen identity, which would serve to narrow, and consequently limit, a richer, more complex understanding of this.

The global citizen identity is not fully ascribed to by all participants in the study. Several demonstrate an awareness of a more critical understanding of this identity, although this is for a minority of participants who utilize an awareness of power relations by challenging a narrative of powerlessness towards the refugee or migrant status principally through a consideration of volunteering. Instead, many participants position themselves as global citizens within a dominant paradigm of assimilation through knowledge, skills, similarity and status indicative of a 'frozen narrative' (Martin and Griffiths, 2012: 917). Through this narrative a global citizen functions as an aspirational identity utilizing a deficit model of what Britain offers versus what is possible in the participants' countries of origin.

Yet what is arguably essential is to be able to examine these concepts of self and self in the world from a critical perspective, in which questions of knowledge and power are central to the growth of a more equitable and reciprocal approach as a

means of taking this examination further. By seeking a re-positioning of this dominant narrative to advance the debate as to understandings and interpretations of a revised global citizen identity, emerging understandings should not be reduced to an identity that is competency-based and power-based, expressed through a narrative that 'takes a position' (Lowe, 2008: 60) and that is assimilatory rather than exploratory. Instead, it should enable an exploration and examination of a positioning that calls for 'the construction and reconstruction of knowledge' (Otting *et al.*, 2010: 741) by deconstructing normative views and dominant narratives to enable exposure to the emergence of a revised global citizen. Increased exposure to critical perspectives of the revised global citizen identity is consequently required, and necessary, for students from refugee and migrant backgrounds to be able to explore their understanding of this identity at a time of great global change and challenges, with increased criticality and through a lens that does not limit, reduce or restrict the value of diverse perspectives and diverse experiences.

## Notes on the contributor

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