THE POLITICAL DIMENSION AND DISCURSIVE GROUNDS OF THE GLOBAL CITIZEN

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Abstract: The global citizen is a recognisable element in the discourse of many actors that advocate a form of identification beyond the national level. In this paper, the aim is to analyse the ways the figure of the global citizen is discursively grounded by a selection of international actors, two of which are small and US-based, and two (the World Economic Forum and the World Bank) are high profile elite institutions. It is argued that at the level of discourse, the notion of a ‘global citizen’ represents a point of identification above and beyond the civil sphere. This means that the legitimacy bestowed on this figure is ultimately projected into the institutions advocating it. In terms of discourse the role of the global citizen is linked to the fulfilment of a historical and normative task within a foundational vision of the world. Framed in this way, the global citizen embodies a particular form of subjectivity that develops social legitimacy while being presented as a non-political actor in all the actions accredited to it. This framing is subjected to critical analysis, considering the inherently political dimension of all social identities and the implications that a process of identification has for the subject.

Keywords: Political subjectivity, global citizen, discursive grounds, identity

INTRODUCTION

The development of a global subject as a citizen, able to cope with the challenges and opportunities of the global world, is on the rise. For instance, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) published in 2016 a global poll whose results show that for the first time in 15 years, 49% of people in 14 countries out of 21 consider themselves more as global citizens rather than citizens of their respective countries. In the field of education, for example, courses on global citizenship are part of curriculums at different schooling levels in many countries and even transnational corporations refer and follow guidelines based on this idea. This momentum seems to be on the increase; for instance the United Nations Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) published what is considered the first pedagogical guidance on global citizenship education in 2015.²

The concept, use, and promotion of the figure of the global citizen, however, need some explanatory points. The figure of the global citizen is embedded within the conception of global citizenship. The basic logic behind these notions is to develop a universal identification, and a sense of global belonging irrespective of social differences. This shared identification works as a guideline to address all kinds of societal problems at the local and world level. Both notions are far from settled and they are still debated. The social and political aspects debated within these notions include an ethical dimension and a normative engagement complemented by a political dimension with theoretical and practical issues concerning citizenship. These latter issues are the main point of contention within the perspectives that conceptualise citizenship. Certainly, the first question concerns the understanding of the concept; citizenship can be defined in terms of shared norms and values, as constitutional rights and responsibilities, or as membership of a political community under a frame of governing institutions.³

In the case of the global citizen, the question is the nature and capacity of the institution granting rights and the characteristics that trans-national citizenship must have. In addition, it is necessary to consider the understanding and practices that citizenship conveys in national or local contexts and the recent rise of nationalism in key countries. Despite the ongoing debates concerning citizenship and possible trans or post-national models, this article argues that the promotion of the global citizen as a subject and form of identification must be differentiated from these debates. The figure of the global citizen is not only already referenced by many local and international actors in their discourse, it has an operational version; the most notorious promotion has been made by institutions and organisations supporting the economic aspects of globalisation.

In this context, the aim of this paper is neither to propose a new account of the global citizen nor to evaluate which theoretical account of citizenship is more acceptable or less problematic at this level. Instead, the focus is on the figurative aspect in the discourse and the politics related to the promotion of the global citizen. The purpose is to analyse the manoeuvres grounding this figure in the discourse of what can be considered a hegemonic stance. The discursive version of the global citizen is a clear case of the promotion of an account of social objectivity. Hence, the focus is on the use and promotion of this person by some actors, within different contexts, as embedded in the ‘global citizen for a global world’ discourse. The topic of the global citizen is related to significant matters in different academic fields.

At a general level, the discussion raises issues of convergence in world politics⁴ and the consolidation of the international/world society.⁵ In addition, it is also related

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