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HANS-GEORG ZIEBERTZ

<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7750-0669>
University of Würzburg
hans-georg.ziebertz@uni-wuerzburg.d
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The modern “homo politicus” as a transnational cosmopolitan citizen?

Abstract

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: This article takes up the concept of “homo politicus” and seeks a contemporary understanding in the context of a globalized world.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: In the classical understanding, “homo politicus” was the member of a municipal or national civil society who is aware of his or her responsibility towards the community and contributes to it productively. Today, the population is confronted with the fact that the world has become a “global village”. In this context, “homo politicus” can’t be limited to a national identity because contemporary challenges do not recognize national borders. This means that globalization demands a corresponding critical-global perspective on political responsibility, how to achieve a just and peaceful future. The article is conceived theoretically-analytically and hermeneutically.

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: The article reflects on different conceptions of the term “homo politicus”, it addresses the temptation of a nationalistic narrowing and analyses the concepts of state and nation for a design of “homo politicus”. In the literature, an alternative concept to “homo politicus” is found in the form of “citizenship”. Finally, the article discusses the ambivalent role of religions with regard to a trans-national perspective, but also points out their spiritual potential.

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RESEARCH RESULTS: The result of the reflections is to develop the idea of “homo politicus” towards a trans-national cosmopolitan citizenship. Many religions have the spiritual potential to promote this development.

CONCLUSIONS, INNOVATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS: Global or cosmopolitan citizenship is a key aspect of “homo politicus”. It means that everyone is a global citizen and can claim certain rights (e.g. the right to education, a decent standard of living, etc.), but also has duties towards the global community, e.g. by being aware of the impact of one’s actions on the present and future of humanity, striving for a sustainable way of life.

KEYWORDS: HOMO POLITICUS, HUMAN RIGHTS, COSMOPOLITICAL CITIZENSHIP, COMMUNITARIISM, RELIGION

The term “homo politicus” describes man as someone who lives in a community. The lowest level of *living in a community* is simply being part of that community without actively participating in anything. But this seems like a rather theoretical idea, an option that is hardly realisable, because can one imagine that a human being is only part of a community without a certain degree of participation? Living in a community always includes that someone moves and behaves within this community, that he or she follows ongoing social discourses, that he or she forms an opinion for him- or herself, or – much more strongly – that he or she even actively influences the general formation of opinion, for example by using social media.

One can debate whether “homo politicus” is only the person who is actively engaged in shaping the community. Presumably, however, one will also have to concede that even the passive person is a “homo politicus”, not only because he or she is part of a community, but also because it is not without consequences for the community if, for example, a high percentage shows abstinence in elections, does not pay taxes, etc. In this perspective, anyone who does not live alone on an island – and for whom is that true? – is inevitably a “homo politicus”.

But this is a trivial observation because it does not help us much. If everyone is a “homo politicus”, what follows from that? Does this have any implications or consequences? What is the benefit of a purely static assertion? If the issue of the politically involved person in the modern world comes into picture, the concept of “homo politicus” needs to be contextualised. Although this term has a long

history in philosophy and political science, conceptual alternatives are available today that may be better suited to capture the political character of man's being-in-the-world, for example, the terms citizen and citizenship. These concepts are not about an ontological form of being, but about the practical conditions of life, about the rights and duties of a citizen in relation to the society in which he lives. When we delve into the issue of citizenship, we cannot get past a substantive-normative debate about which "homo politicus" is desirable and for which model of society a vision of citizenship is developed. Furthermore, it will be asked whether and under what conditions religions are inherently capable of assuming a community-building role.

CITIZENSHIP AS A MATTER OF RIGHTS

It is an achievement of the post-feudal period in Europe that people were no longer serfs of a landlord, but were given the status of citizens, who were granted certain rights. Giving people rights was a slow but continuous process that reached its preliminary culmination in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 (UDHR), followed by corresponding declarations and documents to this day. What was special about the Declaration of Human Rights was that it gave individual citizens protection, security and a whole range of freedoms that they could sue for in a court of law. These individual rights gave protection from encroachment by other people, groups, or the state. Against the background of the atrocities committed against people during the Second World War, the declaration of the member states of the UN was of particular importance. Based on the implicit dignity of human beings, it granted the individual human beings decisive rights.

Human rights are very comprehensive, and they are addressed to every human being. When it comes to the rights of a citizen, human rights are touched upon because they are a basis for specific legal statements, but citizenship rights are at the same time more specific because they relate to a specific community. In the modern world, this is usually the state.

In the discussion about the concept of citizenship in post-war society the focus was on defining citizenship through rights, especially those freedoms established by the UN in the UDHR 1948, mentioned

above. It was said that people should feel as full and equal members of a state by enjoying certain rights. The perspective started from the state, which must give its citizens rights and guarantee the use of these rights. It is a top-down perspective, also called *passive citizenship*, where citizens receive something that they can claim because everyone is inescapably member of a state and as such, he or she may enjoy certain rights. There is the right to hold rights (cf. to the following Ziebertz, 2021).

CITIZENSHIP AS GIVING AND TAKING

In more recent research it has been questioned, whether this perspective, which seems to function like a one-way street, is sufficient. Does the community only have rights to provide, and the citizen is, above all, the recipient who can claim these rights? What about the opposite perspective? Can the community or the state also expect something from its citizens? Do citizens also have duties towards the community? Is the fulfilment of expectations possibly only a voluntary matter, or can they also be expressed as duties? In other words: Are there also obligations associated with citizenship, duties *and* demands?

Kymlicka and Norman (1994, p. 360) point out that it is not unusual for the state to expect certain attitudes and actions from its citizens. Public policy already relies on the responsible behaviour of citizens, f.i. in adequate health care, that old and young people live together in solidarity and take care of each other, that citizens pay their taxes, that they contribute to the protection of the environment and behave in a socially appropriate way towards each other. The conclusion is that society can only function if people are willing and able to cooperate with each other and practise self-restraint. That is what the state needs from its populace in order to achieve “a fuller, richer and yet more subtle understanding and practise [sic] of citizenship” (Cairns & Williams, 1985, p. 43). Neither understanding nor practice can be secured through coercion.

It is not questioned that citizens shall enjoy rights and freedoms, but it is feared that a state can only guarantee these rights in the long term if its citizens also make efforts to ensure that these rights can continue to exist in the future. Citizens have the obligation to stand

up for the strengthening of the order that, at the same time, grants these rights and freedoms to all people. This concept can be shaped in different ways, but it certainly has implications of a communitarian idea of citizenship.

CITIZENSHIP AND THE NATIONALIST TEMPTATION

In modern states, citizenship is primarily based on a contract between the citizens and the state. There are multiple aspects whereby the balance between the two is maintained. The crucial foundations are the constitution and the legal system. These preconditions are admittedly very different whether one takes the conditions of a liberal democratic society or an autocratic state as a reference – something about which will be said later. Nevertheless, a distinction must be made between the state and the concept of the nation. The state is the primary framework in which citizenship takes place and for whose mutual relationship there are numerous rules, for example that the citizen pays taxes, and the state provides education, health care, defence, etc. in return. However, whether the state is a sufficient entity to which citizens are obligated remains to be discussed. At this point, it is first interesting to inquire what it means when citizenship is referred to the nation rather than the state. What are the connotations of the nation *vis-à-vis* the state?

A few years after the end of World War II, Hannah Arendt (1952, p. 275) contributed an interesting reflection on this question. She argued that the state had been conquered by the nation. For Arendt the conquest happened as a transition from *the State as an instrument of the law* into *the State as an instrument of the nation*. In order to understand this thesis, one must be reminded of the contemporary historical background of the time in and after World War II and the experiences of states that have exaggerated the concept of the nation. These experiences were particularly abysmal for the Jewish scholar. Against the background of her experiences with Nazi Germany, the scope of this reflection becomes clear. It was the core of the nationalist ideology that only nationals can be citizens, meaning only people of the same national origin and race can enjoy the protection of legal institutions.

In the post-war period, the category *national* retained its importance, as when people of a different nationality came to a country, for example to take up work, they were met with the idea that (if they weren't going back) they would need some law of exception until or unless they are completely assimilated into the nation and (!) divorced from their country of origin (cf. Isin & Turner, 2007, p. 12). The function of this heteronomous conception of assimilation is to achieve conformity. Supporters of this idea argue that the more groups are assimilated with cultural mainstream patterns, the less they feel the necessity to emphasise differences and peculiarities (Banks, 2008, p. 131). They think that assimilation will solve the problem of deviation. This, however, presupposes that there is something in common, whereupon assimilation is to happen, be it common values, common myths, symbols, memories, traditions, language, and religion (Roche, 2001, p. 75). As is well known, an ought presupposes a can. Whether this coincidence of commonalities can be realistically assumed at all may be regarded as doubtful.

It is precisely this deep desire for unity that stands behind the assimilation concept that is currently being taken up by right-wing groups and nationalists (Banks, 2008, pp. 132–134). It is to study in Israel, Hungary, Poland and many other countries. Their key-idea is of a unitary society with a shared identity, where oneself – of course – represents the dominant culture. The propagation of a homogeneous mono-cultural society meets a deep desire which results from the feeling of insecurity in the face of socio-cultural transformations. Nationalist and right-wing movements promise that heterogeneity can be reduced if citizenship is limited to national origin and ethnic belonging. This means that these implications of nation define citizenship much more narrowly and exclusively than the concept of the (liberal) state. It works through in-group and out-group thinking, which ultimately includes many forms of discrimination.

NATION AND STATE QUESTIONED

The concept of nation elevates the concept of state and makes the relationship between citizenship and nation an exclusive case. In the current age criteria of nation as origin, ethnicity and religion are empirically questionable, because all societies are to a greater or lesser

extent involved in the process of pluralisation and globalisation. One can also critically question the limitation of citizenship to the state. The world’s individual countries are becoming more diverse and pluralistic, the attempt of enforcing homogeneity against plurality creates a great potential for violence. The more the idea of unity based on nationalist commonalities are put into practice, the more dangerous they are for liberal democracy.

Of course, there is a state’s right to maintain order, both internal and external, which requires formulating some definition of what holds a country together if reference to the rule of law is not sufficient. One also finds that citizens have a need for continuity and security. This means that no state can practice limitless openness. His guarantee of a safe and orderly life applies first and foremost to the citizens of this state, who in turn provide services for the state. But may welfare be limited to the tax-paying citizens and are the citizens only obliged to show solidarity towards their state?

The problematic nature of the concept of *nation* has been pointed out. But what could make the term *state* problematic regarding citizenship? If citizenship becomes a concept exclusively linked to the state, it can, as example, cause trouble for those who belong to the state but remain out of the country itself (Koopmans et al., 2005). National boundaries are eroding, because millions of people have citizenship in one state (passport) but work and live in another. Examples are Polish workers in Britain, Italians in Germany, Albans in Italy, Algerians in France, etc. Currently, the world is experiencing the largest migration flows, which adds to the issue. Even if citizenship is essentially linked to the state in which one lives and from which one holds a passport, this limitation cannot be fully convincing in view of the upheavals in the world. And there are examples that show how people manage citizenship flexibly. Research in countries that explicitly pursue multicultural policies (e.g. Australia, Canada) shows that there is a high percentage of the first and second generations of migrants who are proud of their origins but at the same time have a patriotic attachment to their new country (Banks, 2008, p. 134). These considerations make clear that it is not forward-looking if citizenship is reduced to the identity of the state specified on one’s passport.

EXTENDING TO A TRANS-NATIONAL COSMOPOLITAN PERSPECTIVE OF CITIZENSHIP

Today we are observing an interesting phenomenon. On the one hand, there is an increase in nationalist tendencies, which are hostile to multilateral ideas. On the other hand, there are people and groups who demand and practice a transnational orientation. An example is the young Greta Thunberg who succeeds in motivating young people all over the world to work for the global climate. The surprising phenomenon is that both, nationalism, and transnationalism, are becoming stronger at the same time, although they are opposing concepts. Not only Greta, but many activists in the field of peace, justice and sustainable environment point out that thinking within national boundaries is no longer sufficient to meet the challenges and threats facing the world (Brooks, 2014). Instead, they demand responsibility for people all over the world, going far beyond the notion that citizenship is a matter of national territory (cf. Kymlicka & Norman, 1994).

Kant and Pufendorf already reflected on a conception of a transnational cosmopolitan citizenship when they developed the idea that there can be the existence of a universal community of humankind alongside the system of states and that principles can be developed which transcend nation-state-thinking, for example regarding international relations, values, securities, etc. (Nussbaum, 2002). Under this school of thought, all people are treated as citizens of a universal state of humanity, thought of as a collective entity. If within the nation-state co-nationals are the point of reference, then the same identity can be extended to foreigners. Trans-national cosmopolitan citizenship ensures that sense of moral community is not confined to co-nationals as point of reference but enlarged to members of separate sovereign states (Taylor, 2003; Linklater, 2002, p. 328). In this approach the idea of the collective WE can be found. Jürgen Habermas (1981) has shown in his discourse theory that it is not adequate to determine the collective will through individual reflection, but that it is a communicative process in which everyone who can be affected by a decision should potentially participate in the communication.

Citizenship in the sense of the passport someone holds can be confined to a state border, but awareness of the meaning of citizenship

in the modern world extends beyond that border. Meanwhile, the consequences of many decisions made in a polity have an impact beyond national borders. Trans-national cosmopolitan responsibility is committed to the universal human society.

Trans-national cosmopolitan citizenship has to put up with being called an *idealistic idea*. It is questioned if there is a real equivalent to cosmopolitanism regarding belonging, a shared culture and political participation. Criticisms of this concept are based on the assumption of an analogy between cosmopolitan citizenship and citizenship of a nation state. This analogy is built when it is said that the concept of cosmopolitan citizenship only makes sense if humanity is led and secured by a world state, similar to what the nation state is doing today. But this is not where proponents of cosmopolitanism want to go (Linklater, 2002, pp. 318–320). Supporters of this conception instead call attention to the fact that trans-national cosmopolitan processes already exist and that there is already considerable empirical evidence of how and in what direction trans-national and cosmopolitan citizenship is developing. Examples include the many covenants the UN has adopted to establish rights of world citizens and the many noteworthy initiatives towards global ethics and a culture of human rights. International non-governmental organisations (INGOs) participate in UN conferences and contribute their positions; international efforts for the implementation of women’s rights are organized by UN departments with the participation of women’s organizations from many parts of the world. There are indeed many social and environmental movements in which these group participate on a global level (Linklater, 2002, pp. 326–329).

The many consulting and decision-making processes have a performative effect and its ‘clou’ is that facets of global ethics and participatory political processes emerge while one talks and negotiates about them. These actions trigger the reflection that the time has come for transnational responsibility. It is precisely this that national policy should take up and strengthen: to convince citizens of nation states to develop an interest in the world as a whole and to commit themselves more decisively and sustainably to societal welfare, the reduction of inequality and violence and the preservation of the environment. This is not only a moral appeal, rather there is a legal basis for it, which is often forgotten: citizens are implicated in an international

regime of multiple responsibilities and obligations *because* the nation states have ratified them. So, it is high time to implant the thought in people's minds and hearts, to think of citizenship as existing beyond the state border.

The idea of a universal discourse appeared utopian when Habermas first presented his theory. Today, Facebook, Twitter and Co. show that this possibility already does exist, and that ongoing technical development will further facilitate the possibility of global opinion-forming: the electronic revolution overcomes the problem of space. This development will certainly have an impact on the definition of citizenship. Isin and Turner (2007, p. 24) state: "The electronic commonwealth will indeed constitute a de-territorialized and denationalized entity". Parochial thinking, possibly fed with such ideas as ethnocentrism and inward-looking patriotism, represents the nostalgia of a common past, but it is now unsuitable and cannot be sustained for future generations.

Today, if one is to design a profile of "homo politicus" that promises to productively meet the challenges of the contemporary world, a trans-national cosmopolitan orientation arguably cannot be ignored. Trans-national cosmopolitan citizenship expresses the necessity of the development of an identity that is attached to the global world and to humankind around the globe. The need for trans-national thinking can only be denied if, from the comfortable perspective of a wealthy country in Europe or America, one is cynically opposed to the development of the world in the face of global poverty, violence, the victims of human rights, etc.

THE AMBIVALENCE OF RELIGIONS REGARDING TRANS-NATIONAL COSMOPOLITAN IDENTITY

The answer to this question is not simple. One may think positively of theological positions that God's word is addressed to all people, that God does not divide different people but brings them together, that God's love does not distinguish between me and the others, etc. But one must also think of the actions of religions that turn these theological positions into their opposite, that exalt themselves above others, that sow division and hatred, and that precisely do not

promote the unity of humanity. Are religions, then, by their basic configuration, capable of promoting a trans-national cosmopolitan consciousness?

A historical and empirical examination of the problem shows that religions have been strongly associated with national identity throughout the ages (cf. Ziebertz, 2023). There are numerous examples where religions function as important pillars for national identity. We can mention Catholicism and its historically significant influence on national identity in Poland, Spain, Ireland or Quebec, how Protestantism has shaped the national identity of the Nordic countries and how Christian Orthodoxy has contributed to the national identity of Greece and other Eastern European countries. The same can be said about Islam and the identity of the countries on the Arabian Peninsula. Here, too, denominations play an important role, if one looks, for example, at Sunnis and Shiites and their power as founders of a national identity in Iraq or Iran. Similar observations can be made for Hindu people in India. There is empirical evidence that many religions not only have the function of contributing to national identity, but they also participate in the ideological isolation from an environment of other faiths or allow themselves to be instrumentalised for this purpose.

The national orientation of a religion is linked to another, not unproblematic issue. The concept of trans-national cosmopolitan citizenship is undoubtedly best developed within a democratic state. However, it is important to say that, for religion’s support of national identity it does not matter whether the country is democratic or not (Taylor, 2003). Religions have made pacts with both dictators and with liberation movements. Richard Rorty is disillusioned when he says that, in spite of all the good a religion does, religious institutions endanger the health of democratic societies (Rorty, 2005). Critics emphasise that there is no compelling justification for a positive relationship between religion and democracy. With regard to Christianity, Turner sees the ambivalence of religion towards the state as grounded in Augustine’s thinking. Augustine had established a perspective on the state as a necessary evil and its main justification was its ability to create order, although the state order could never be just (Turner, 2002, p. 266). Before the II. Vatican Council the Catholic Church taught the “doctrine of indifference” as developed by Pope Leo XIII, according to which any form of state can be accepted on condition that

it respects the fundamental requirements of natural law as taught by the Church (Rhonheimer, 2012, p. 165). With *Gaudium et spes* (Vatican Council II) the church developed a more positive view on democracy, which Pope John Paul II further elaborated in *Centesimus annus* (1991, especially no. 44–47). The Church insists that democracy must commit itself to the higher truth to acquire its full value, and the Catholic Church claims to be an institution that judges the democratic system from a higher and more independent perspective, because the sacred-eternal always enjoys primacy over the earthly-temporal (Rhonheimer, 2012, pp. 172–187). This differentiation can also be found in the Reformation, especially with Calvin.

With regard to Islam, Shi'ism and Sunni Islam differ in their convictions about the source of authority and leadership within the Islamic community. According to Turner Shi'ism holds the doctrine of the Hidden Imamate in which the secular state has no ultimate authority over the community. The core of this leadership theory is the infallible authority of an imam that is pure, perfect and all-knowing. Sunnism accepts four different caliphates and dynasties as legitimate forms of government, but it is all about a leadership of the Prophet that combines religious and political power (cf. Turner, 2002, p. 264ff). Although there are such Islamic authors as Hasan Eshkevari, Mohsen Kadivar and Mohammed Shabestari (cf. Amirpur, 2009) who have developed liberal approaches wherein the secular is not invariably subordinate to religious doctrine, the political mainstream in Islam sees itself as a politico-religious program that derives legal and political institutions from Islamic theology and law. If the self-understanding is that Islam is rather a state itself or defines the state as a component of religion it is, according to Rhonheimer (2012, p. 315), difficult to see any bridge to the principles of democracy.

SPIRITUAL CONTRIBUTION

Overall, it will have to be said that not only do religions differ in terms of their possible contribution to transnational citizenship, but there are also differences within a religious tradition when it is represented in different countries. However, the picture is not only gloomy and negative.

When talking about religions (in plural), it is not intended to level out the many nuances between religions. Generally, one can say that religions provide universal claims, universal ethical principles, show support for human rights (with certain exceptions) and share the conviction in favour of equality of all human beings in the context of God's creation. Among other values, religions teach empathy and the duty of care and they demand hospitality to be extended to strangers. Most religions have an ethic that demands responsibility for "one's neighbour" (Klöcker & Tworuschka, 2005), and this does not only mean the immediate neighbour, as in Matthew 25:40 "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" and in Luke 10:27 "Love your neighbor as yourself". In the Christian religion, the doctrine of the kingdom of God is virtually a transcendence of secular nationalisms, whereby it is not earthly life and no national community, but the kingdom of God that symbolizes human salvation. Without wishing to single out Catholicism exclusively, the Pope's commitment can be highlighted, for example, when he advocates a world order in which existing goods are distributed more fairly, in which effective measures are taken to protect the environment, or in which cooperation is practised instead of confrontation. Other religious leaders have also expressed themselves similarly in the past.

This means that religions still can release the power for a universal humanity. The idea of universality, inherent in all religions, opens a perspective that is close to the idea of cosmopolitan citizenship, and it might be assumed that religious people are particularly receptive to this concept. In any case, one may demand of the religions that they make this capital fruitful for a better world society by also promoting it within their own religion and making this capital an integrated part of preaching and religious education. In many cases, religions will also have to work inwards to break down parochial narrowness.

Even if it may be assumed that there is a similarity between religious universalism and the cosmopolitan idea of citizenship (Turner, 2002, p. 272), the question remains as to whether religious and secular notions of universalism are linked or whether they exist in parallel and independent from each other. It seems that many writers, such as Max Weber, are convinced of the latter, the independency. He said that the greater the ascetic rejection of this world, the more the

sacred and the profane became separated. While a religion claims the monopolistic authority over spiritual services, the state holds the monopoly of power within a given territory. The result is a twofold understanding of citizenship, first a spiritual citizenship within the religious community (in the Christian religion this would be people as living within the body of Christ, in Islam the ummah as community of all Muslims regardless of family ties, nationality, race and social position) and second a profane citizenship within the political community (Turner, 2002, p. 260).

However, Weber's theory emerged 100 years ago and both social systems and religions have since changed. In the context of secularisation – which means deconfessionalisation, dwindling relevance of dogmatic convictions for the way of life and privatisation of faith – parallel notions of universality are not very likely. There is a probability that religious people think universalism not only in terms of transcendence to the ultimate, but also in the context of the world's immanence. Conversely, it might be that the concept of cosmopolitan responsibility makes use of trans-empirical justifications such as religious sources.

In the context of modern secular societies, no religion can claim the monopoly to comprehensively define universal humanity. In a global perspective, every religion is particular. Just as human rights are elaborated without a reference to God because one wants to avoid religious conflicts if, for example, a religion claims sovereignty of definition, and also because non-religious people have a right to negative freedom of religion, one can state that human rights contain many convictions and values inherent in religions. While no single religion can claim having the valid interpretation of human rights, every religion can support the rights that are also part of its beliefs, such as the recognition of intrinsic human dignity and the right to life. Because human rights are not subject to a particular religious doctrine can they lay claim to universal validity. Religions can and should contribute religious ideas to a transnational cosmopolitan profile of "homo politicus", but they must accept that this profile ultimately needs a secular rationale to be generally accepted. According to Habermas (2005, p. 118) a particular religion needs to develop the competence to translate religious language into secular language in order to be understood by fellow citizens who are either

non-religious or belong to a different religious tradition. Conversely, religious people can expect the secular part of society to take their contribution seriously.

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