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Intervention

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Intervention

Desirée Weber

I would like to begin by thanking Dr. Benhabib for sharing her insights with us and allowing undergraduate students to engage with her work in such a direct way. I would also like to thank the Institute for Global Citizenship for allowing me this opportunity to speak about such pressing concerns as globalization, democracy, and citizenship.

In addressing the issue of global citizenship, I would first like to offer a few remarks regarding my own questions about this complex issue, followed by a response to Professor Benhabib's points. I will conclude with a brief consideration of the practical political implications of her arguments.

All of us certainly should, and perhaps must, grapple with the issues of global citizenship. I have an interest both in an academic sense and in a personal sense. Academically, I find that the issues of immigration, globalization, and human rights are often found at the confluence of politics and philosophy. Personally, as a German citizen but long-time resident of the United States, I am curious to see how building a cosmopolitan identity separate from, or in concert with, national identity can work. This is a particularly pressing issue at the 50th anniversary of the European Community and with the recent foreign policy choices of the Bush Administration.

Before I can even begin to define and circumscribe the complex notion of global citizenship, I find myself wondering in what context we are even asking these questions in the first place.

We do not ask these questions as a product of idle thought or academic privilege. Instead, we pose these questions in a world fraught with dangers, where conflicts abound and encounters with the foreign and the unknown are ever more frequent. It is in this context—one of contention and uncertainty—that these questions take on an urgency that they have not previously held. It is in this context that we are compelled to ask, what is a global citizen? What are the rights and responsibilities of global citizenship? These are important questions to which, I am not embarrassed to admit, I do not have any concrete answers. Perhaps in this too, there lies a point. Before any definitive answers can be given, we must take a step back. We must examine the context. These questions themselves are not neutral, either in their framing or in their possible answers.

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What are these framings that lie hidden? Or rather, what other questions should we raise and perhaps raise first? I will offer some preliminary suggestions. First, who *defines*, or has the ability to define, a global citizen? Secondly, who has the resources, access, or even power to *be* a global citizen? My hope is that these questions are not a retreat into the ivory tower of inaction. I hope they do not keep us from *acting* as global citizens. Let us remember, too, that abstract and seemingly benign concepts can manifest themselves in much more pernicious ways when all is said and done.

In exploring the issues surrounding global citizenship, I would like to raise one further point. What happens when we encounter the foreign, strange, or threatening? Does our resolve waver or is it strengthened? It is one thing to profess our commitment to internationalism, multiculturalism, and service to society. It is quite another to stick to those ideals when the going gets rough. Again I return to the framing concerns I discussed earlier. We—all of us—are asked to be global citizens in a dangerous world; danger in a political sense, but also in a personal sense. In such encounters, one cannot simply leave one's identity safely behind. Engaging with the world, whether a free or forced choice, always has some impact on our own selves. The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor has termed this the *identity cost*, the deeply personal and sometimes painful price for encountering what we don't already know.¹

Part of being a global citizen, then, is being prepared to be affected, just as much as we hope to affect; being prepared to put oneself on the line, as much as we ask others to do the same. Accepting the responsibilities of being a global citizen (while also being aware of the dangers) will allow us to strengthen our commitment in the face of uncertainty. Perhaps it is exactly in those moments of uncertainty that our commitments will be strengthened. Judith Butler, in her book *Precarious Life*, argues that events like 9/11 present us with a choice of what sorts of citizens we want to be.² It is in this vein that I hope to embrace the challenges and dangers inherent in global citizenship.

With those preliminary concerns articulated, I would like to move on to the issues raised by Dr. Benhabib. These issues revolve around a central theme: the relationship between a cosmopolitan ethic and democratic self-governance, or manifested in slightly different terms, between sovereignty, on one hand, and human rights on the other; between national security, on the one hand, and asylum seekers' rights on the other—even more generally, between identity and difference.

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These are not meant to be simple dichotomies. Instead, they are contradictions that these iterations have caused. Formulating an effective course of action requires that we consider the backdrop of larger historical trends.

I would like to explore the question of immigration and citizenship in three realms: the cultural, the economic, and lastly within liberal democracy itself, where the two converge.

When considering the cultural aspect of the question, one conclusion is that belonging to a community provides us with a sense of self. Yet how do we negotiate between that sense of self and the sense of the *other*, the *other* that is taking up residence, literally and symbolically, in our cultural community? I made reference earlier to the identity cost of the encounter. But in a related sense, where do we draw or re-draw the boundaries? There are dozens of recent examples in which immigrants assert a continued allegiance to their former cultural practices, sometimes to the exclusion of cultural practices found in their country of residency. Where do we draw the line, so to speak? Where do one culture's rights end? Especially in the legal framework of the European Union, these challenges are forcing careful thought and perhaps reconsideration of traditional ways of thinking about rights, citizenship, and democratic values.

A similar *problematique* presents itself in economic terms. What is the relationship between immigration and economic structures? Certainly globalization is seen as a phenomenon that has precipitated immigrant flows. In her recent work on borders and democracy, Wendy Brown makes the argument that regulating immigration is an effort to regulate cheap labor. Globalization isn't just about striking trade deals and opening new markets; at the same time that capital flows freely, the movement of people is being restricted, which leads me to my next question. Is the status quo becoming increasingly deterritorialized, as the waning of the nation-state model might have us believe? Or is it being "re-territorialized," but this time along the lines of economic advancement? Here, too, immigration presents us with a complicated set of circumstances that must be understood if global citizenship is to become the way forward.

Thirdly, at the confluence of cultural and economic logic, liberal democracy certainly holds a central place in these debates. Hannah Arendt was concerned that we only seem to become sensitive to the lack of rights when we encounter the stateless. While one solution may be the supranational human rights framework that is in place now, this

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situation has seemingly replicated her paradox. The only time when international human rights actually gain traction is precisely in the moment when a person's rights have been revoked. Here the tension between international rights and sovereignty is most acute and where the waning of the nation-state creates new challenges for international law.

As William Connolly has pointed out, there is always one group, or a progression of groups, that are granted rights, only for others to be excluded. This is not always or necessarily as a direct result of granting rights to another set, but is this perhaps a fundamental condition of liberal democracy? Is it inevitable for liberal democracy to function so that there is always a group excluded, the excess that the system cannot account for and at the same time is the reservoir from which democracy draws to perpetuate itself? What do we do in the face of that contradiction?

In turning to the practical political implications of Dr. Benhabib's work, I would like to point out one final hurdle. The advent of the War on Terror seems to be a step back, a disavowal of international human rights and a tightening of borders due to heightened security concerns. More broadly it has perverted the 1990s ideals that saw international human rights and democracy as making the world a more peaceful place. Witness the example of Guantanamo Bay. The extralegal status of the detainees and in fact the facility itself seem to signal a larger trend of disavowing international norms, at least on the part of the so-called hegemon. More importantly, it raises the question, "What compels the powerful to follow international norms at all?" Again the tension between international human rights and sovereignty rears its head and again the tenuous nature of our commitment to these ideals stares us in the face.

On a more critical note and perhaps a note of caution, I would like to encourage an investigation of whether or not the legal contradictions in Guantanamo are not in fact the mechanism of governance that has been precipitated by the tension *between* international and domestic law in general, a tension that the powerful are in a unique position to exploit.

In conclusion, I would like to leave you with this thought: Global citizenship requires an awareness of context, of the political forces that facilitate and hinder inclusion. The discourses of cosmopolitanism and rights are fragile and require attentiveness in order to shape their political development. There is a difficulty of translating ethic into

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action. There is a difficulty in understanding the structures that define the scope of possible actions. It is our responsibility to try, even in the face of opposition and especially in the face of plurality, to achieve the highest goals of global citizenship.

Notes

1. Taylor 2002, p. 283.
2. Butler, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (2004).

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