

## Who is the “good citizen”?

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**Abstract:** The figure of the so-called “good citizen” constitutes a type of ideological discursive strategy and expresses a social pathology of Brazilian citizenship. The aim of this essay is to subject this figure to a critical analysis of its discursive, historical, moral and political assumptions. For this, we resort to the model of immanent critique of ideology proposed by Rahel Jaeggi. We identified contradictions and problems arising from the rhetorical use of the figure of “good citizen” related to: the punitive and firearms appeal to civilians; the ideological representations of gender, race and class; the social function of the media; and political neoconservatism. The fundamental contradiction of the “good citizen” is not in relation to the figure of “bandit” or “bum,” but to the very ideal of universalization of citizenship. As an expression of ideology, the “good citizen” proved to be a real anti-citizen and, therefore, a risk for democracy.

**Keywords:** citizenship, ideology, human rights, social psychology, critical theory.

### Introduction

Who is the “good citizen”? How to explain this figure increasingly present in the Brazilian public debate? When and why does the need to morally adjectivize the status of citizenship arise? What are the social and political implications of this discourse? Is this an honest type of person, who cares for the defense of their family and traditional values and customs? Or would it be a moralistic, reactionary, demagogic type? After all, what is at stake when the figure of the “good citizen” is evoked in the Brazilian public sphere?

To answer these questions, we must consider the figure of the “good citizen” as a type of ideological discursive strategy (Montero, 2006) that expresses a social pathology of Brazilian citizenship. The aim of this essay is to submit this figure to a critical analysis of its discursive, historical, moral and political assumptions. We aim, with this, to criticize the condition of fractured citizenship existing among us, as well as to overcome the superficial and immediate criticisms that reduce the “good citizen” to a false moralism.

As an expression of ideology, we consider the figure of the “good citizen” as part of a system of conviction that has practical consequences, that is, as an effective result of a historically determined psychosocial praxis. In this sense, in order to criticize the discourse of ideology, it is not enough to show a counter-speech formally produced from the outside, but it is necessary to make a negative speech from its interior so to “overcome an attitude purely dichotomous towards

a really dialectic theoretical attitude, finding a way by which the internal contradiction to the ideological discourse makes it explode” (Chauí, 1989, p. 22).

As we will see, there is a fundamental contradiction between the assertion of citizenship and the rhetorical use of the figure of the “good citizen.” While the modern notion of citizenship requires the generalization of a given political status (“citizen”), the rhetorical complementation (“good”) presupposes a moral hierarchy that necessarily negates the primary normativity of the universalization of citizenship rights. Thus, by assuming here the critical perspective of ideology, we aim not only to criticize a certain set of ideas, such as the “good citizen” and their moral and political characteristics, but also to decipher the circumstances that allow political domination to impose itself and remain in everyday social relations based on ideological discourses.

We aim to contribute to the consolidation of an agenda of studies on the current Brazilian social and political crisis. In this scenario, our criticism will focus on an expression of social pathology of citizenship that threatens the effectiveness of democracy as an ethical way of life in Brazil.

To this end, we resort here to the model of *immanent critique* proposed by Rahel Jaeggi (2008, 2017, 2018) as a theoretical basis for critical analysis of the figure of “good citizen.” In this perspective, the task of criticism is not to describe or rehabilitate potentials contained, but not realized in a particular social formation. Above all, it is a question of analyzing and criticizing, in the same movement, the “dysfunctional functioning” of ideological discourse. In other words, it means considering that the peculiarity of ideological discourse lies in

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a special type of relationship between norms and reality, in which both are shown as misconceptions *in themselves*, that is, they indicate a process in which norms are effective, but, as effective, they become really contradictory or deficient (Jaeggi, 2008).

Immanent critique has an advantage over reconstructive models of social criticism by not limiting itself to redeeming or rehabilitating existing normative potentials, but by seeking the *transformation* of existing conditions from the dynamics of contradictions of the criticized object (Repa, 2016). Thus, by choosing the figure of the “good citizen” as the object of our critique, we seek to contribute both to question self-understanding about the normative ideal of citizenship among us and to stimulate a public debate on the possibilities of practical realization of the logic of rights in Brazilian society.

### Immanent critique

For Rahel Jaeggi (2008), four aspects methodologically characterize the critique of ideology: (1) it is a deep and critical approach of *domination*; (2) it takes as its starting point the *internal contradictions* or *self-contradictions* of a given situation; (3) it always rests on a kind of hermeneutic *of suspicion*; (4) its characteristic procedure is the *relation between analysis and criticism*, that is, analysis is an instrument of criticism, and not something separate from it. To these characteristics the author adds a fifth aspect that we consider essential: more than a model of reconstructive criticism, the critique of ideology, as *immanent critique*, must also be *transformative*. This means that, for this author, the immanent critique of ideology differs from other models of social criticism as does not aim at the “dilution” of reality based on external normative criteria but develops from the “rehabilitative overcoming” of the deficit aspects present both in reality and in norms. Thus, the critique of ideology is not anchored somewhere “outside” the relation of obliteration of reality criticized as ideological, but, on the contrary, it “is the instance that confronts us with the problems and contradictions of this reality in a way that it is at the same time a ferment of their transformation” (Jaeggi, 2008, p.163).

The normative criterion of immanent critique lies in the very crisis process of the criticized object, that is, in its problems and contradictions. Problems and contradictions, in the Hegelian sense, constitute the driving force of history and therefore refer to crises immanent to social reality. For Jaeggi (2017), such crises are not purely functional, but include both normative expectations and the self-clarification of a social formation, so that crises and contradictions are not only the possibility of erosion of this social formation, but also the constructive force that dialectically overcomes and preserves it (*aufhebung*).

It is not, therefore, a question of criticizing a false representation of reality based on external normative criteria, or of denouncing the non-realization of norms in certain social practices (for example: citizenship not realized in the discourse of the “good citizen”). It is about going beyond the discrepancy between norms and practices from the analysis of the interdependence between both, that is, from the fact that if the norm is not carried out in a given practice, this reveals a deficient relation not only of the practice, but also of the norms. It is in this sense that the immanent critique functions, thus, as a “ferment” of the transformation of both the practices and the normative desires themselves<sup>1</sup>.

We are especially interested here in the aspect that Jaeggi calls “functional-ethical” in her model of immanent critique, that is, the fact of considering both the crisis tendencies of social reality and the meanings of emancipation contained therein. In this way, we can subject the figure of the “good citizen” to a simultaneously analytical and critical procedure. This is the decisive aspect: it is not only to show that the figure of the “good citizen” is constituted by misconception, but also to point out the immanent crisis of Brazilian citizenship that conforms it. Thus, it is not a simple syntactic and semantic “correction” of the image of “good citizen,” but the chance to show that its statement already contains the chance of *regression* and real destruction of the promises of citizenship; also, negatively, through critique, we may find the potential of *normative progress* contained in the emancipatory concerns of the implementation of logic of rights as a form of democratic life.

### “Good citizen” as a figure of speech

To avoid some confusion, it is necessary to define the meaning of the use of the expression “good citizen” in this paper. We understand that we are dealing with a problem that concerns the Brazilian social reality, therefore, it should not be confused with studies on the good, law-abiding citizen (*el buen ciudadano* or *le bon citoyen*). Some notions of “good citizen” have been widely used in several countries, especially in the field of citizenship education (Abs, 2013; Burt, 2015; Pykett, Saward, & Schaefer, 2010). The difference, therefore, is not merely semantic, but stems from the very nature of the object. For example, the formulation *the good citizen*, which titled a Ku Klux Klan pamphlet between 1913 and 1933, concerns a phenomenon quite different from that employed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in the late 20th century. The “good citizens” of the Klan

<sup>1</sup> The model of immanent critique is shown in detail in the sixth chapter of Jaeggi (2018). For a critical evaluation of this proposal, check Repa (2016) and, for its connection with the tradition of Critical Theory, see Jaeggi (2017).

were religious fanatics adept to racist and xenophobic practices of extreme violence (Neal, 2009). For UNESCO’s civic education paradigm, “good citizens” are those trained to be enlightened and aware of the human and political issues at stake in their society, developing respect for others and recognizing equity among all human beings (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1998). Neither of the two cases corresponds to the figure of the Brazilian “good citizen,” although, as we will see, the meaning employed by the Klan is closer than that employed by UNESCO.

Quotation marks (“good citizen”) are used to emphasize the syntactic contiguity of the terms of this expression, which could also be represented by good-citizen. However, this last formulation may induce a substantiation of the expression. We also avoid using quotes only in the qualifier “good,” because we consider it essential to highlight the specific way in which the notion of citizenship is ideologically employed, which does not happen with other moralistic expressions, such as: “good” men, “good” women, “good” people etc.

To critique the “good citizen,” it is necessary to take it as a *figure of speech* rather than a concept. This means that it is not a question of seeking the precise definition of a concrete subject, but of highlighting the rhetorical use of this expression as an ideological discursive strategy that has practical consequences in communicative interaction. Thus, the figure of “good citizen” can be considered a type of syllepsis, since it indicates irregular agreement to the extent that it introduces a fundamental logical contradiction (between the generalizing idea of “citizen” and the restrictive aspect indicated by the moral complement “good”) and, at the same time, is communicatively supported by the implicit mobilization of concrete social relations of citizenship and subcitizenship.

The figure of “good citizen” essentially stands on the dichotomy “good citizen” *versus* “bandit” or “good citizen” *versus* “bum.” These dichotomies reflect the power of ideology in concrete relations of Brazilian society, making it difficult for this separation to be cognitively articulated as a countersense, since it would restrict citizenship only to certain types of subjects considered, in an extremely vague way, “the good ones.” The strength of ideology is also revealed when we see that if, on the one hand, we cannot find a single concrete subject that can be properly defined as a “good citizen,” on the other, as a mass phenomenon, thousands of individuals may identify with this figure. This is because it directly mobilizes the effective tension between the formal condition of legal citizenship and the moral hierarchy of ordinary social relations, already verified in several studies on the configuration of citizenship in Brazil (Silva, 2010; Souza, 2012).

## The genesis of the “good citizen”

The figure of the “good citizen” has been increasingly common both in everyday language and in studies on the social and political situation of Brazil at the beginning of the 21st century. However, it is worth questioning when this figure acquires the status of a logically accepted assertion, that is, how it becomes valid in a given truth regime.

When we seek to know the genesis of the figure of the “good citizen” taking as indicators bibliographic references such as newspaper articles and articles published in human sciences scientific journals, we realize that the use of this expression has been increasing in the last decade. In general, the term appears related to lowering the age of criminal responsibility (Azevedo, Alberto, & Amorim, 2017; Resende, 2009; Silva & Hüning, 2015), and to the possession of a firearm (Carvalho & Espindula, 2016; Santos, 2012), the actions of the Military Police (Barbosa & Sá, 2015; Bueno, Lima, & Teixeira, 2016), and the role of social media (Pinto, 2017).

We can see that the use of the figure of the “good citizen” in Brazilian society began to be widespread in the last decade of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century, mainly via digital media. In this period, the yearning for the realization of citizenship rights that were promised by the “Citizen Constitution” of 1988 favored the emergence of the figure of the subject of rights, that is, a growing identification with the idea that each person is a citizen and can claim in the public space the legitimate recognition of their status as such. This learning process based on the lexicon of subjective rights was accompanied by social integration via consumption and the growing interest in so-called “diffuse rights,” especially the so-called “consumer rights.” However, in a context marked by deep inequality and in which there is no elaboration of the past, the normative ideal of citizenship in these conditions occurs only in a deficient way, because the generalizing logic of rights never constitutes, in fact, a democratic and inclusive form of life. Sneakily, then, the figure of the “good citizen” appears as an ideological expression of a promised citizenship, but which is never fully effective. In this sense,

the good citizen is one who deserves citizenship, public policies, polite treatment by policemen, who has the right to participate. Those who do not belong to this category represent a dangerous element, which comes from marginal spaces, pollutes and contaminates... The good citizen would be the translation, post-economic crises of the 1980s, of the category “worker”... If, in the 1980s, the binomial “worker” x “bum” existed, now we have the “good citizen” x “bum,” in an update of

these categories in the face of the socioeconomic and demographic transformations experienced by the Brazilian population in recent decades. (Bueno et al., 2016, p. 348)

This means that, from the redemocratization and especially from the mid-2000s, a process of replacing the category “honest worker” for “good citizen” takes place. In this process, the new category dilutes the existing distance between exploited workers, privileged middle class and employers. Everyone can now identify with this homogenizing and enigmatic category that is the “good citizen.” All except those who are classified as “bums” or “bandits.” Here, the figure of the “good citizen” operates on the discursive level as a moral delimiter of objective relations of social segregation and police violence (Azevedo et al., 2017). This is also reflected in the public acceptance of the violence and humiliation practiced against those bodies that are considered “suspicious,” that is, usually the bodies of black and poor youth from the peripheries (Azevedo et al., 2017; Barbosa & Sá, 2015; Silva & Hüning, 2015).

Such violence operates from a discriminatory knowledge that presupposes the arbitrary classification between who is considered “citizen” and who is considered “enemy.” Thus, amid the great enthusiasm for citizenship and hope of effective redemocratization of the Brazilian State, since the late 1980s, institutional violence has found in the figure of the “good citizen” a powerful anchor and survival point. Contradictorily, the normative ideal of citizenship is discursively affirmed at the same time that it remains denied in everyday life in practices of violence and ordinary social segregation (Souza, 2012; Silva, 2010).

The pernicious and permanent effects of this social fracture or this “dysfunctional functioning” of citizenship become even more explicit with regard to the peculiar form of public articulation of the universality of human rights. Phrases such as “*human rights for right humans*,” “*rights of the bros*,” “*a good bandit is a dead bandit*,” “*the good citizen is stuck in his house while the bandits are in the street*,” “*canceled CPFs*,”<sup>2</sup> among others, are examples of how violence permeates everyday life and gains symbolic effectiveness from the dichotomy “good citizens” and “bums”/“bandits.” Expressions of this violence are punitivism, public lynchings, connivance with murderous police operations and a strong call for firearms for civilians.

### “Good citizens” with firearms

The figure of the “good citizen” has become strong enough to legitimize institutional decisions, such as the yearning for possession and carrying of

firearms for civilians. Thus, although Brazil shows high rates of endemic violence, the firearms discourse based on the figure of the “good citizen” has gained echo in public authorities (Carvalho & Espindula, 2016; Santos, 2012). As a result, facilitating access to weapons was the winning presidential campaign platform in 2018. As an administrative priority of the elected ultra-right government, the ideological discourse of the “good citizen” served not only to legitimize facilitation in access to weapons, but also to advocate against the alleged inefficiency of previous governments. As stated by the then chief minister of the Civil House, Onyx Lorenzoni:

The population, by a large majority, demanded the right to self-defense. But they never accepted the result<sup>3</sup>... That is what all successive governments have done. Not only did they disrespect the will of the majority of the population expressed at the polls, but they tried successively to restrict a legitimate right. *At the same time that they left the good citizen unprotected, they gave security to banditry*, as if every door of every house, commerce or rural property, had a sign “you can enter, we are unarmed”... Gradually, we will correct this purposeful error. (Lorenzoni, 2019, emphasis added)

In this passage, the political force of the figure of the “good citizen” is evident based on the dichotomy between “good citizen” and “banditry.” The minister seeks to justify the facilitation of the possession of firearms on the grounds that it is a security measure for the population. At the same time that this discourse seeks legitimacy in the “will of the majority” put out of context, it conceals the widespread scientific evidence that the increase in firearms implies more deaths and insecurity (Cabette-Fábio, 2019; Yablon, 2017). Nevertheless, the figure of the “good citizen” is, in this case, used as a rhetorical veneer of a measure that tends to favor, as we will see below, only the already privileged segments of society – white men from upper-middle class – and to provoke an increase in violence against the most vulnerable segments – women, LGBT people, black people and the poor.

### Representations of gender, race and class

The recent institutional desire for the release of firearms for civilians reveals, as Rita Santos (2012) shows, that the construction of the figure of the “good citizen” in the public debate is anchored in traditional gender representations. Those representations resonate in the social imaginary in certain expectations of conduct

2 The expression means “National Identification Number extinguished,” a sentence used when policemen kill Brazilian citizens.

3 The minister refers to the plebiscite on the marketing of firearms and ammunition in Brazil held in 2005. On this process, regarding the “good citizen,” see the works of Carvalho & Espindula (2016) and Santos (2012).



of men and women regarding violence, carrying of weapons and self-defense. In this sense, the masculinity of the “good citizen” seems to depend on weapons as a symbolic component that would redeem any feeling of impotence before the social world seen as threatening. Conversely, the construction of femininity would be associated with the idealization of women as docile and defenseless beings in the face of violence unleashed by “bandits” and, therefore, the safety of these fragile idealized women would depend on the possession of firearms by “good citizens.”

According to these speeches, “good citizen” are “good fathers, bosses and husbands,” for whom it is important to protect their families and property and face the “bad guys.” In this sense, the will to be armed and to have the possibility to defend themselves is shown as a sign of courage, heroism, morality and respect for law and order, which distinguishes them from “bandits,” who are associated with the refusal of rules and pleasure from senseless violence. Masculinity is thus central to both constructions, since the “good citizen” and the “bandit” are literally masculine. (Santos, 2012, p. 155)

Also, the markers of race and class reinforce the warmongering discourse around the figure of the “good citizen.” This is because the representation of violence (considered as unilateral) of “bandits” is always associated with the most marginalized social strata, especially the poor, black and peripheral youth. As Santos (2012) argues, despite the fact that most of the victims of armed violence in Brazil are these young black people from the peripheries, the narrative of self-defense is produced by upper-middle-class white men who imagine themselves as likely victims of “violent crimes against property and, to a lesser extent, crimes against people” (p. 157).

As can be seen, the critical analysis of the figure of the “good citizen” shows important elements for the debate on the effectiveness of democracy in Brazil. The practical strength of this figure seems to come precisely from the concealment of concrete and conflicting social relations, while the idea of citizenship itself is ideologically preserved, giving the impression of social regularity and proper functioning of social institutions and practices. The constitutive social fracture of the intense inequalities of gender, race and class in Brazil cannot be cognitively articulated in a broad and rational public debate through the citizenship deficit. Thus, the figure of the “good citizen,” as an ideological discursive strategy, contributes decisively to the maintenance of the *status quo* insofar as its ordinary affirmation hides quite concrete, historical and structural relations of domination.

## “Good citizens” against citizenship

How and why did the figure of the “good citizen” become the motto of an increasingly frequent ideological discourse? To explain this question, we have to confront the figure of the “good citizen” with the idea that gives it an air of plausibility and that is at its root: the idea of *citizenship*.

In general terms, the modern notion of citizenship concerns the condition or status of subjects (citizens) as effective members of a political community. This presupposes a social secondment that gives them certain rights and duties, freedoms and restrictions, powers and responsibilities. There can be no particularistic restriction in the discourse of citizenship as such since its realization depends on the generalization of this primary status. It does not include the content of rights, but their function as a regulatory principle of integration of modern societies. That is why, for classical theorists of citizenship such as Thomas H. Marshall (1967), for example, social class inequalities and other differences would be tolerable as long as there was no inequality as to citizenship status. Thus, under the empire of institutional preservation of civil, political and social rights guaranteed, a certain social formation would have ensured for itself an effective degree of inclusive democratization, in which differences would be processed under the protective domain of rights.

However, citizenship can be realized only as a social experiment in that the logic of generalization and protection of subjective rights becomes a normative measure in everyday relations. The ordinary recognition of the legitimacy of the logic of rights – and its corresponding generalization among members of the political community – is necessary so that we can talk about the realization of the status of citizenship as a regulatory norm of social practices.

Costa and Galeão-Silva (2018) describe three fundamental dimensions of the modern conception of citizenship: legal, political and identity. In the legal (or institutional) dimension are the institutions and the proper legal status of civil, political and social rights; in the political (or active) dimension of citizenship are the practices of mobilization and struggle of social movements and collectives for the realization, creation and extension of rights; and in the identity (or psychological) dimension of citizenship are the sense of belonging and the degree of social recognition received by citizens in terms of equity and respect for difference. Thus, the desires for the practical realization of citizenship in a society indicate a normative horizon based on the modern ideal of generalization of human dignity and respect for authenticity, to the extent that the logic of rights operates as a medium between the claims of recognition of the world, of life and the systemic processes of juridification. In fact, this was

observed in the text of the 1988 Federal Constitution, which establishes in its first article the citizenship and the dignity of the human person as foundations of the democratic State of rights in Brazil. Of course, history shows that this did not necessarily mean the realization of social practices of generalization of citizenship and respect for human dignity since then.

Amid the difficulties of explaining the characteristics of “citizenship to the Brazilian,” the figure of the “good citizen” gained ground precisely in the rhetoric of the *promise of citizenship*. This adjective “citizen” gets its symbolic effectiveness from ingrained processes of domination, but in its own enunciation it maintains an aspect of possible realization of citizenship (for some), thus concealing the effective non-realization of citizenship (for all).

At the discursive level, the attempts of argumentation formulated from the figure of the “good citizen” always incur in fallacies. They reveal, therefore, the error of reasoning (not always evident) contained in the enunciation of the figure of the “good citizen” in effective attempts at argumentation, since an argument is fallacious when it resorts to unsustainable premises. This occurs whenever the figure of the “good citizen” is used as a positive argument in an enunciation that aims to rationally justify inequality or everyday social violence and segregation. Examples of this procedure are phrases such as: “*the good citizen is stuck at home, while the bandits are in the street,*” “*human rights people do not care about the good citizen’s family,*” “*the government disarmed the good citizen, but protected the bandit,*” “*if he were a good citizen, he would not have been approached by the police.*” In all these statements, the fallacious aspect consists in inventing and assuming a superior, morally higher citizen with more rights, and therefore denying the very core of citizenship, which consists in the generalization of a common status. Instead of asserting citizenship, it reveals the existence of an anti-citizen.

The distinctive mark of the enunciation of the “good citizen” is misconception. But we may ask: why does such a misconception remain and have even strengthened recently? To answer this question, we must proceed with the immanent critique of the ideological character of “good citizen.” As Rahel Jaeggi (2008) states, “a person under the influence of an ideology is not just subject to a wrong state of affairs but also ‘in the grip’ of a false interpretation of this state of affairs” (p. 139). This means that the ideological character of the “good citizen” draws its strength precisely from the concrete social relations of domination that are established in Brazilian society, but which are not fully articulated or debated in the public sphere. It is not a mere “false awareness” of reality, but a socially induced false awareness, a misconception resulting from the mirroring of a *false reality*. It is therefore an “intertwining” of the truth – or of

a moment of the truth (e.g. citizenship) – with the non-truth (e.g. “good citizen”). As Jaeggi explains:

The critique of ideology does not simply discuss both [consciousness and reality]; it is based on the not undisputed claim that there is a systematic link between the false understanding and the wrongness of the situation (the normative wrongness of the facts and the epistemic wrongness of their interpretation). Reality itself seems to be wrong in a way that makes the wrong understanding all too likely and, consequently, the fact that we misunderstand it is in a way an indication of the wrongness of the situation. (Jaeggi, 2008, p. 146)

Taken as a critique of ideology, the immanent critique of the “good citizen” goes beyond the “accusatory critiques” that only point to them as a reactionary and demagogic political subject, without carrying forward a deep consideration about its causes and consequences for the political debate. In fact, the enunciation of the figure of the “good citizen” necessarily refers to the evaluation on the question of how we understand the effectiveness of citizenship as a normative ideal of everyday democratic practices. Resuming the considerations of Jaeggi (2008) on the immanent critique of ideology, we understand that it is possible to criticize the ideological character of the figure of the “good citizen” as an expression of a deficient realization of citizenship in Brazil. Therefore, in order to move forward with the task of immanent criticism towards the possibility of a transforming resolution of the contradictions posed by a supposed “citizen” who claims to be while denying citizenship, it is necessary now to analyze its proper political component.

### **The politics of the “good citizen”**

As we have seen so far, power relations appear inextricably linked to any consideration of the figure of the “good citizen.” Céli Regina Pinto (2017) discusses the political component associated with this figure from the analysis of the discursive trajectory in the Brazilian media of three major street demonstrations, which occurred between 2013 and 2015: the June 2013 journeys; the mobilizations against the 2014 World Cup; and the March 2015 journeys, regarding the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff (PT). In her analysis of the coverage given by the media in the period, the author shows how a discursive shift occurred in this set of manifestations, from left to right in the political spectrum, revealing a strong conservative rise in the period. The turning point seems to have been the protests of 2014, when there is a shift from the profile

of organized movements with well-defined agendas and tactics (such as the *Passe Livre* movement and the *black blocs*) to a new shapeless and fragmented profile of protesters (pro-impeachment groups). In this process, the traditional media played a decisive role in that it vouched for the right of the supposed “good citizen” to protest, in flagrant opposition to the so-called “troublemakers.”

One cannot fail to point out the performance of the Globo television network, both in its open TV version and in its paid news channel, in a declared campaign in favor of the protests, especially in 2013 and 2015. In the first year, *the broadcaster built a discourse that divided the protesters between vandals, those who were violent and carried slogans against the broadcaster’s journalists, and the “good citizens,” who had the right to protest.* The more the protests acquired a federal anti-government stance, the more the Globo network covered the events, going so far as to change its programming grid and the schedule of its most important attraction, the so-called “9 o’clock soap opera.” (Pinto, 2017, p. 130, emphasis added)

We can observe the identification of the figure of the “good citizen” to the diffuse wave of new street protesters that included not only the democratic sectors dissatisfied with the management of the then PT president, but also undemocratic groups declared in favor of the return of authoritarian forces to power. From that moment, the ideological discourse of the “good citizen” as a political subject defender of a certain public morality, the fight against corruption and a supposed rescue of patriotism gained strength. This occurs with the association of symbols such as the National Anthem and the Brazilian flag with the alleged “good citizens.” In this moment of effervescence of public protests, the organized social movements that traditionally occupied the streets with their own flags and with well-defined demand schedules, began to be considered as the negative of this “good citizen” and, therefore, as enemies of the motherland.

Therefore, we hardly find the figure of the “good citizen” in the so-called progressive or left wing. This seems to occur due to the permanence of classic concepts such as “militants” and “workers” at this end of the political spectrum. On the other hand, in the right and far-right wings or in conservative and liberal positions, the figure of the “good citizen” is evoked more often. It condenses distinct yearnings, from the liberal defense of private property to the extreme conservatism of customs, to the extent that it produces and settles on the purge of its antagonists: The “bums”/“bandits” and, now, also the “communists,” “leftists,” “feminists,” “gayzistas” etc. Thus, in conflict situations, it becomes

proper to the rhetorical use of the figure of the “good citizen” to publicly defend the extermination of their enemies (Brum, 2014).

In the current political context of the rise of right-wing populisms, this belligerent characteristic is expressed in Brazilian society by the phenomenon of Bolsonarism. A survey coordinated by Ortellado and Ribeiro (2019) about the opinion of São Paulo voters showed that Bolsonarists tend to assume as their enemies, in a diffuse way, the political system (especially left parties), the human rights and identity movements (feminists, LGBT, black people etc.) and traditional media (preferring new digital media). The survey also revealed a strong anti-intellectualist component and xenophobic traits among the Bolsonarist group of voters. Thus, the figure of the “good citizen” is associated with a type of ufanist and conservative patriotism evidenced by the slogan of the Bolsonarist campaign: “Brazil above everything, God above everyone.” Such discourse, however, does not necessarily mean a genuine “love of the country,” but an expression of the figure of the “good citizen” at the level of international relations, since it involves both a blind and insistent attack on countries considered enemies (Venezuela and Cuba, for example) and the idealization of countries considered friends (such as the USA and Israel). This characteristic is nothing new. It was identified as “pseudopatriotism” in the classic study of authoritarian personality in the United States (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950, p. 107). Undoubtedly, in addition to this, there are other similarities between the figure of the Brazilian “good citizen” and the authoritarian type described by Adorno et al. (1950) that deserve to be empirically investigated, in order to explain the psychosocial processes that result in adherence to ideological discourse and the obliteration of citizenship.

In everyday relationships, hope seems to have given way to hatred as a predominant political sentiment (Pinheiro-Machado & Scalco, 2018). This is reflected in several studies that have sought to explain how, at the beginning of the 21st century, the marriage between economic neoliberalism and protofascist tendencies was possible, generating the phenomenon of rise of the so-called “new rights” (Solano, 2018). Here we may find the most important political problem related to the existence of a rhetorical figure like the “good citizen”: the impossibility of a real link between a fractured citizenship and an effectively democratic form of life. The figure of the “good citizen” is an expression of a deep and historical anti-democratic feeling existing in various sectors of Brazilian society, which sustains daily necropolitics and stubbornly fights against human rights. In this process, the democratic pact is weakened and the rule of law is threatened. Thus, the rhetorical use of the “good citizen” carries with it not only the contradiction of the non-realization of citizenship as such, but, in fact,

affirms a political position – a privileged, restricted and destructive status – which, to the limit, means a real threat to democracy.

### Final remarks

After all, *who is* the “good citizen”?

As we have seen, it is not a concrete subject, but a figure of speech, a discursive representation that aims to give legitimacy to certain social practices and, therefore, with which different subjects can identify. The strength of this representation derives from the ability to hide contradictions and problems that constitute them while reinforcing prejudices and historically constituted social hierarchies. Dialectically, the fundamental contradiction of the “good citizen” is not in relation to the figure of the “bandit” or “bum,” but to the very ideal of universalization of citizenship.

The rhetorical use of the figure of the “good citizen” – whether by public authorities, by intellectuals

or in common sense in general – reveals the distance between the language of rights and its effectiveness as a form of life. As long as the discourse of citizenship is not critical of its own contradictions, it can serve to hide the real division between privileges and the struggle for dignity. Thus, the immanent critique of the figure of the “good citizen” necessarily leads us to a critique of a fractured and hierarchical society between first and second category citizens (Souza, 2012).

We can consider that we are facing a kind of social pathology of citizenship, in the sense conferred by Axel Honneth (2015). It is not, therefore, just a matter of denouncing a form of social injustice. It is, above all, to critique a set of discursive practices essential to social reproduction in which the reflexive and democratic access to systems of action and norms is blocked to almost all participating subjects. Therapeutics is likely to undergo a radical transformation of our fragile conception of citizenship towards new democratic forms of life.

### Quem é o “cidadão de bem”?

**Resumo:** A figura do chamado “cidadão de bem” constitui um tipo de estratégia discursiva ideológica e expressa uma patologia social da cidadania brasileira. O objetivo deste ensaio é submeter essa figura a uma análise crítica de seus pressupostos discursivos, históricos, morais e políticos. Para tanto, recorremos ao modelo de crítica imanente da ideologia proposto por Rahel Jaeggi. Identificamos contradições e problemas decorrentes do uso retórico da figura do “cidadão de bem” relacionadas: ao apelo punitivista e por armas de fogo para civis; às representações ideológicas de gênero, raça e classe; à função social da mídia; e ao neoconservadorismo político. A contradição fundamental do “cidadão de bem” não é em relação à figura do “bandido” ou “vagabundo,” mas ao próprio ideal de universalização da cidadania. Enquanto expressão da ideologia, o “cidadão de bem” se revela um verdadeiro anticidadão e, portanto, um risco para a democracia.

**Palavras-chave:** cidadania, ideologia, direitos humanos, psicologia social, teoria crítica.

### ¿Quién es el “ciudadano de bien”?

**Resumen:** La figura del llamado “ciudadano de bien” constituye un tipo de estrategia discursiva ideológica y expresa una patología social de la ciudadanía en Brasil. El objetivo de este ensayo es analizar críticamente los presupuestos discursivos, históricos, morales y políticos de esta figura. Para ello, se utiliza el modelo de crítica imanente de la ideología propuesto por Rahel Jaeggi. Se identificaron contradicciones y problemas derivados del uso retórico de la figura del “ciudadano de bien” relacionadas a: la demanda punitivista y por armas de fuego para civiles; las representaciones ideológicas de género, raza y clase; la función social de los medios de comunicación; y el neoconservadurismo político. La contradicción fundamental del “ciudadano de bien” no es en relación a la figura del “bandido” o del “vagabundo,” sino al propio ideal de universalización de la ciudadanía. Mientras una expresión de la ideología, el “ciudadano de bien” se revela un verdadero anticidadano y, por lo tanto, un riesgo para la democracia.

**Palabras clave:** ciudadanía, ideología, derechos humanos, psicología social, teoría crítica.

### Qui est le “bon citoyen” ?

**Résumé :** L’expression « bon citoyen » constitue une stratégie discursive idéologique et traduit une pathologie sociale de la citoyenneté brésilienne. Cet essai vise à soumettre cette figure à une analyse critique de ses aspects discursifs, historiques, moraux et politiques. Pour ce faire, nous recourons au modèle de critique immanente de l’idéologie proposée par Rahel Jaeggi. Nous avons identifié les contradictions et les problèmes découlant de l’utilisation rhétorique de la figure du « bon citoyen »



em rapport avec : l'appel à la punition et aux armes à feu pour les civils ; les représentations idéologiques du genre, de la race et de la classe ; a função social dos mídias ; e o neoliberalismo político. A contradição fundamental do « bom cidadão » não está ligada à figura do « bandido » ou do « clochard », mas à idealização própria da cidadania universal. Em tanto qu'expressão d'uma ideologia, o « bom cidadão » se revela ser um verdadeiro anti-cidadão e, por conseguinte, um risco para a democracia.

**Mots-clés :** cidadania, ideologia, direitos do homem, psicologia social, teoria crítica.

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