

Does being a European  
mean being a citizen of the world?

## The interaction between European and global identities within a cosmopolitan public discourse

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### Abstract

*This paper aims to investigate the specificity of contemporary cosmopolitan discourse in British and French online public spaces and particularly the interaction between European and global identities displayed in this discourse. Being a part of a larger research, the paper contributes to understanding of the “conceptual conflicts”, namely public debates focusing on a complex political concept such as, in this case, “citizenship (of the world)”. The research is based on a discourse analysis methodology combining the theoretical basis of French discourse analysis and Critical Discourse Studies as well as analytical categories from the Contrastive Discourse Analysis by von Münchow (2016, 2017). It is argued that while promoting cosmopolitan ideas, contemporary European public discourse remains an example of the realisation of the Eurocentric, exclusive character of cosmopolitan identification. This more or less conscious assimilation of global and European identities may, however, be challenged in rare cases, as shown through the analysis of a reflexive contribution within the debate.*

### Keywords

media discourse, conceptual conflict, cosmopolitanism, eurocentrism

## Introduction

It has become commonplace to say that the European Union is one of the more concrete projects inspired by the cosmopolitan vision of society, with all its benefits and difficulties. European identity is, therefore, perceived as being “on the way to” the global one as it transcends national borders and helps to recognise another form of allegiance and responsibilities, beyond those to the nation-state and to one’s compatriots.

Nevertheless, reality might be more complex, as shown by Duchesne (1998), when it comes to the variety of ordinary representations of European identity. Indeed, as her study involving French citizens shows, European identity is often constructed much more as a national rather than a global one. Instead of representing themselves as Europeans in a perspective of international solidarity or global challenges, Duchesne’s responders use this identification to protect themselves from the potential loss of identity linked to increasing globalisation. Hence, Europe is not seen as a transnational scale of citizenship but as “a saver, a defense against the complete dissolution of particularisms that the idea of humanity without borders represents” (Duchesne 1998: 73, here and further the translation is mine – A.K.).

Is this also true for cosmopolitan discourse? How do European and global cosmopolitan identities interact? Is feeling European sufficient to pretend to be a global citizen? These are several questions I will try to answer in this article from a discursive point of view.

This paper aims to investigate, by means of discourse analysis, the specificity of the contemporary cosmopolitan discourse in British and French online public sphere and particularly the interaction between European and global identities in construction. The main hypothesis is that this cosmopolitan discourse remains an example of the sometimes unconscious Eurocentric character of contemporary global citizens’ identification.

The cosmopolitan discourse I am dealing with emerged in media in response to Theresa May’s remark: “If you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere”. Following numerous researchers, among which Le Bart (2004: 204), I consider the media as one of the strongest constructors of national and transnational spaces and Europe being one of them: it “make[s] Europe exist as a social reality or even as the foundation of a possible identity”. The specificities of the construction of European identity within a cosmopolitan discourse are precisely my focus in this paper.

After a brief presentation of my theoretical framework and the justification of my study aim, I will present my data in a more detailed and contextualised way. I will then focus on my methodology, followed by the analysis and the discussion of the results.

### **Discourse as a “conceptual struggle”: towards the study aim**

I will start with a theoretical consideration prior to the definition of my study aim. This consideration is based on the conflictual nature of public discourse that has been point-

ed out in discourse-based studies. Considered as a social practice engaged with power, domination and resistance dynamics as well as with the construction of identities and communities (Fairclough and Wodak 1997, *inter alia*), discourse is a stage for various social struggles. Debates, verbal attacks and counterattacks taking place at any time in the public sphere (political stage, (social) media etc.) clearly show that.

However, the conflictual nature of discourse is more or less universal and not specific to the contemporary public sphere. What is new about it, is the “increasingly conceptual nature of discourse” highlighted by Krzyżanowski: “rather than focusing on images of individuals and social groups, contemporary public discourse increasingly revolves around debating and redefining various social, political and indeed abstract concepts, often in lieu of re/presenting the actual society or its members” (2016: 309). This interest in conceptual nature of discourse could be considered as inherited from conceptual history (Koselleck 1979) which focuses on “semantic battles” in order to have access to the “itinerary” of a political concept through times.

What are these concepts? They are not predefined as such but result from struggles about their use and meanings: “concepts come into existence in the process of signification that is essentially a process of discursive struggle of several meanings for a primate of signification of social events and actions” (Krzyżanowski 2016: 312).

Following these considerations, I am conducting a study in order to offer a methodological proposition of analysis of “conceptual conflicts”. The concept at the heart of the semantic “struggle” I am dealing with is “citizen of the world”. Working on this concept allows me, at the same time, to investigate the specificities of the construction of contemporary cosmopolitan discourse. This paper, in fact, questions one of its aspects, i.e. its “obvious” eurocentrism.

## **Context and corpus**

On October 5, 2016, the British Prime minister Theresa May delivered a speech at the Conservative party conference in Birmingham presenting her development plan for the country, which had recently voted to leave the European Union. This one particular sentence of the speech made a deep impression on British people and Europeans: “If you believe you’re a citizen of the world, you’re a citizen of nowhere. You don’t understand what the very word citizenship means”. The assertion provoked an immediate reaction from the civil society and created space for debate: some people actively supported the idea while it seemed repulsive to others.

Based on the previously exposed theoretical considerations, this study deals with a conceptual conflict about the notion of “citizen of the world” at the intersection of the political and media sphere, always engaged in a close interaction with each other (Guilbert 2012: 387). A political discourse and a media counter-discourse engaged in the conflict constitute a discursive space, resulting from their interaction. Indeed, as Maingueneau

puts it, “interdiscourse prevails over discourse. That is to say that the most relevant item of analysis is not the discourse but a space of exchange between several correctly chosen discourses” (1984: 11).

Working on a “conceptual conflict” implies dealing with a heterogeneous corpus which in my case is made up of the transcription of Theresa May’s discourse of about one hour and a set of media productions such as articles (opinion pieces) from national, regional and specialized newspapers and magazines, as well as articles from blogs (personal, collective and institutional ones) and from online media with no paper version. As I was interested in the transnational dimension of the conceptual conflict, I collected a corpus from both the British and French public spheres in order to work on data coming from not only the United Kingdom but also a country, like France, that is still a part of the European Union. The corpus starts on the day following May’s speech, October 6th, 2016, and ends in early June 2019 when Theresa May resigns. The data collection was realised through media databases such as Europresse and Factiva by means of searches with key words such as “citizen of the world”, “citizen of nowhere”, “citoyen du monde”, “citoyen de nulle part”, as well as “Brexit” and “Theresa May” in various combinations.

### **Methodological framework**

My framework lies at the intersection of several approaches in discourse analysis, i.e., “French” discourse analysis and Contrastive Discourse Analysis (von Münchow 2017) as well as the Discourse-Conceptual Approach which is one of the perspectives of CDS (Critical Discourse Studies) as theorised by Krzyżanowski (2016).

Both French discourse analysis and CDS are interested, from their very establishment, in what is not explicitly expressed in a sentence. The first name to be given to this phenomenon by Henry and Pêcheux is the *préconstruit*, the preconstructed. It refers to a widely shared knowledge and connects to the interdiscourse, to something that has already been articulated and, hence, is taken for granted (Malidier 1990: 26). In fact, some information seems more “obvious” to us than other information and depending on this, the speakers choose to explicit it or not.

Von Münchow in her recent work (2016, 2018a,b) within the framework of Contrastive Discourse Analysis offers a reflection on the importance for a discourse analyst to work both on what is said and on what is practically unsaid or not said at all. The analysis of “social actors and actions associated with the ones who are mentioned in an utterance”, “making the argumentative premises explicit”, as well as “looking for ‘instabilities’ within a data set” and by “comparing different data sets” (2017 : 224) all give access to the degree of acceptance of the representations within a group, classified as “dominant”, “emerging” or “declining” (“sensible”, “challenged”), “unutterable”, “obvious” and “inexistent” (*op.cit.*: 226).

In this paper, I intend to focus especially on discursive “instabilities” (the co-occur-

rence of different, often opposed representations in discourse) and argumentative premises in order to understand how different identities interact in cosmopolitan discourse and what kind of representations underlie this interaction. Guilbert's work (2009) will also be taken into account, providing me with a specific focus on the construction of "obviousness" in discourse, even though I will be working not only on the more or less conscious constructions, but also, in von Münchow's perspective, on the representations which can totally escape the speakers' control.

## Analysis

While legitimizing the notion of "citizen of the world" within a cosmopolitan counter-discourse, participants (journalists, bloggers, scholars) use numerous references to European history and to their European identities. Namely, they legitimate their image of citizens of the world (and delegitimize its negative representation given by May) through the topos of *Historia Magistra Vitae*. This "cultural construction" attributed first to Cicero is a "claim" to know 'the lessons' from the past", able to "offer guidance" for the present (Forchtner 2014: 19). While reactivating this topos, speakers provide almost exclusively examples from the European past. Similarly, the endorsement of the "citizen of the world" status is sometimes correlated to those of the European citizen (/I am European, so I am citizen of the world/). Why do those examples and references to a contemporary European identity seem sufficient to legitimize and positively re-signify the concept of "citizen of the world"?

I will try to address the subject by paying attention to the historical events or personalities which are mentioned in these examples and to the way in which the participants make their European and global identities interact. I will proceed from the more explicit, linguistically marked association between the two to the more implicit, unmarked one which produces an "effect of obviousness" (Guilbert 2009).

A strong link between European and global identities is firstly tangible at the level of the selection of historical examples. Indeed, the participants are more than likely to choose epochs, events and personalities which are a part of the common European myth, the common European historical memory.

Typically, Ancient Greece comes up as the first historical reference of the notion and the practice of citizenship; its origins are clearly defined here:

Citizenship, despite the Home Office's farcical attempts to rebrand it as a "British value", is a notion that originates in Greece. You see it being molded and honed in the comedies of Aristophanes, the tragedies of Euripides and Sophocles (McCarthy 2017)

The names of classics are opposed to May's attempt to monopolize the notion in favor of her nation-state idea of citizenship (the marketing vocabulary – "to rebrand" – seeks to

devalue May's discourse). Her way of using the notion is opposed to that of the classical Greek authors. The Age of Enlightenment constitutes another strong reference:

In attacking world citizenship in her dictum, "If you believe you are a citizen of the world, you're a citizen of nowhere", Theresa May is in effect repudiating Enlightenment values as a whole, for cosmopolitanism is the apex and indeed the glory of Enlightenment philosophy, encompassing liberty, equality, fraternity, and all our human rights. The greatest of all Enlightenment thinkers, Immanuel Kant, proposed the ideal of world citizenship as a means to achieve perpetual peace (Letters 2016).

Here, citizenship of the world represents the values which also construct the contemporary European myth. By saying so, the speaker classifies world citizenship as a European invention, here synecdochally represented by Kant's work. The notion of "citizen of the world" hence acquires a European "inventor"

The third historical example is one which recalls events of WWII, fundamental for European construction. Here, May's discourse is compared to an antisemitic one and thus marked as dangerous:

The very different, pejorative sense of cosmopolitanism adopted by Ms May, however, originates in German antisemitic discourse. It emerged in the 19th century: the "rootless Jew" was seen as a "cosmopolitan" citizen from "nowhere". (Letters, 2016)

My second point consists of observing that cosmopolitan identity is seen as a logical outcome of a European one:

In short, our theological unitarianism (God/Nature — however so defined — is one and so all creation is also one) and our theological universalism (salvation — however so defined — is for all people without exception and for each one in particular) led us during the Enlightenment powerfully to contribute and commit to the development in our culture of the idea of a European and, more recently, a global cosmopolitanism [...] Here she articulates her visionary hope that this widespread European experience of becoming a refugee and migrant would help the whole of the continent begin to develop a sense that what it is to continue to be the person they truly are, to be treated with respect and compassion and to have certain inalienable rights and responsibilities was not something which relied upon being born in this or that territorial space (nation) but simply because they were humans sharing a transnational, cosmopolitan experience of being European rather than German, Austrian, French, Italian, Spanish, British etc., etc. (Brown 2017)

Here, the adjective “European” characterizes “cosmopolitanism” and is situated on a sort of temporary scale, which is marked using an adverb in the comparative form (“more recently”). Thus, European identity is explicitly represented as a previous stage to the global one. The whole second paragraph is dedicated to the description of the guidelines of cosmopolitan philosophy (sense of “respect and compassion”, the recognition of the “inalienable” human rights, the relativity of birthplace and of territorial attachment). The paragraph concludes with an unmarked assimilation of cosmopolitanism to “Europeanness”, within a construction of obviousness (Guilbert 2009) by means of the objectivised presentation of facts and aims to build up a “shared” knowledge, prior to the speaker’s point of view and thus difficult to question. The ideological construction /being European is being cosmopolitan/ is manifested in his text through the sequence “a transnational, cosmopolitan experience of being European [...] » in which the qualification “cosmopolitan” and the predication “being European” co-occur.

This hybrid example with both a marked and an unmarked assimilation of the two identities leads me to the final point of this contribution in which I examine the most unmarked assimilation of the European identity to the global one, which is represented as natural, *déjà là*.

The following example comes from a blog which presents the results of a scientific research. It illustrates the direct link established between being European and cosmopolitan, in other words, the idea that feeling European (and practicing “EU solidarity”) is sufficient to represent oneself as cosmopolitan and vice versa:

When it comes to EU solidarity, do cosmopolitans practice what they preach? What does it mean to be cosmopolitan – to be the kind of ‘global citizen’ whom Theresa May famously described as ‘citizens of nowhere’? Does it really make people care as much for people in other countries as they do for those of the same nationality, or do cosmopolitans pay only lip service to EU solidarity? (Taylor, 2017)

As they are interested in « practices » of cosmopolitanism as opposed to “discourses” (“do cosmopolitans practice what they preach?”, “do cosmopolitans pay only lip service?”), the authors automatically associate citizens of “other countries”, for which a cosmopolitan should care, with those of European countries. Indeed, the syntagma “EU solidarity” functions here as the reformulation and, thus, the contextual synonym of “care as much for people in other countries as they do for those of the same nationality”, presuming that such cosmopolitan activity could only be displayed within the European Union. If the latter is indeed a transnational community, it does not, however, represent the whole of humanity.

Hence, the cosmopolitan idea loses its humanist dimension, which consists of promoting equal rights and possibilities for all without any national distinction (Policar 2018). In our examples, indeed, cosmopolitanism is represented as a strictly European

desire, unknown (or inaccessible?) to other countries and communities, and Europe is presumed to be the cradle of this idea which is very positively connotated in all samples analyzed here.

While in the previous examples this “unquestionable” assimilation seems “natural”, it can also seem somehow incoherent whilst keeping the “effect of obviousness”. In the following example, the assimilation of global and European identity results from the juxtaposition of two representations of the same person, who is the article’s protagonist. Two “voices” can be heard in this text: the journalist’s and the protagonist’s (which is however potentially rearranged by the journalist). The journalist’s voice describes the protagonist as “English” and “British” but above all “European”, while several lines later, the protagonist’s voice intervenes arguing that he is a “citizen of the world” scandalized by Theresa May’s statement:

Il faut dire que Sam Owens a une histoire personnelle bien européenne. Anglais diplômé en Français et en Allemand, il a vécu et travaillé à Chamonix en France ainsi qu’en Allemagne. Il a fondé Le Verre Gourmand dans les Alpes françaises en 2005, une activité de grossiste en vins français et du monde entier pour des clients britanniques des stations de ski de France, de Suisse, d’Autriche et d’Italie ! De fait, le seul moment où il se sent plus britannique qu’eupéen, c’est lorsque l’Angleterre affronte la France au rugby... [...] « En tant que citoyen du monde, j’ai trouvé cela [l’énoncé de Theresa May - AK] insultant et scandaleux. C’est pour moi un grand plaisir que d’adapter ses propos épouvantables en un nom pour notre beau projet de collaboration sur la bière... », rapporte le brasseur des rives de l’Avon. (Hamieau 2019)

It must be said that Sam Owens has a very European personal history. As an Englishman who graduated in French and German, he has lived and worked in Chamonix, France and Germany. He founded Le Verre Gourmand in the French Alps in 2005, a wholesale of French and international wines for British customers in ski resorts in France, Switzerland, Austria and Italy! In fact, the only time he feels more British than European is when England faces France in rugby... [...] “As a citizen of the world, I found it [Theresa May’s statement - AK] insulting and outrageous. It gives me great pleasure to adapt her dreadful words into a name for our beautiful collaborative beer project...”, said the Avon river-sides brewer (my translation from French).

The co-occurrence of the two overlapping identifications may surely be explained by the fact that global identity is conceived as inclusive following the idea of having necessarily both local (national as part of European) and global attachments within a cosmopolitan identity (Calhoun 2003, Policar 2018, *inter alia*). However, the unmarked, “obvious”



character of this representation suggests that this kind of assimilation has an ideological foundation, namely a eurocentric conception of citizenship and the idea of “civilizational” superiority of Europe, which persists years after decolonization.

I would like to conclude my analysis with an example which confirms this interpretation “from inside”, through the reflexive discourse by a participant writing his contribution on a platform of citizens’ expression:

Je le dis au risque de déplaire : si être citoyen du monde c’est se croire supérieur et considérer le reste du monde comme moins évolué, alors cette philosophie pourtant si belle au préalable s’autodétruit pour n’être plus qu’une revendication prétentieuse de ceux qui pensent que leur mode de vie est le meilleur et qu’il doit s’imposer partout et pour tous. Cela transforme cette idéologie humaniste en vision suprématiste et c’est dangereux [...] Qui sommes-nous pour affirmer que notre philosophie est supérieure et que seul le mode de vie Occidental mérite de perdurer ? [...] Partant de ce principe je me sens donc français ET citoyens [sic – A.K.] du monde. Cela n’a rien d’incompatible bien au contraire. (Chroniques humaines 2017).

I say this at the risk of displeasing you: if being a citizen of the world means believing oneself to be superior and considering the rest of the world as less evolved, then this philosophy, which was so beautiful beforehand, is self-destructive and becomes nothing more than a pretentious claim by those who think that their way of life is the best and that it must be imposed everywhere and for everyone. This transforms this humanist ideology into a supremacist vision and that is dangerous [...] Who are we to say that our philosophy is superior and that only the Western way of life deserves to endure? [...] Based on this principle, I feel French AND a citizen of the world. There is nothing incompatible in this, quite the contrary (my translation from French).

This contributor endorses several identities such as national (“French”), European (more indirectly expressed by including himself in a Western “we” in “who are we to say that our philosophy is superior and that only the Western way of life deserves to endure?”) and global (“citizen of the world”). They are represented as complementary and not exclusive, and this representation is strongly marked by the conjunction “and” written in uppercase letters. However, an important reflexive discourse, absent from other examples I have analyzed, is rolled out in his text in order to question the cosmopolitan idea and its assimilation to European universalism which he describes as “dangerous”. His criticism is aimed at the fact that cosmopolitanism is automatically related to the “Western way of life” and is deaf to any other point of view and tradition. The assimilation that is taken for granted in other examples is questioned and clearly rejected here. By highlighting

the compatibility of several identities, as shown above, the contributor is trying to offer a cosmopolitan idea that would be equally open to all humans and not only to Europeans. The further discussion will help me to reflect on possible interpretations of the assimilation of the two identities and of its rejection.

## Discussion

By recalling the first analytical point, it can easily be argued that the reason for an abundant presence of European references in this cosmopolitan discourse could be explained by the origins of the participants and the political context of the debate, which takes place soon after the Brexit referendum and then during the negotiations. Even if one assumes to be a citizen of the world, she/he is more familiar with some cultural references than with others. It can also, doubtlessly, be explained by the participants' desire to re-establish connections between the UK and Europe, separated in May's speech, and to re-affirm one's multiple identifications (*I am a national, a European and a global citizen*). Finally, the representation of Europe as the most successful transnational project could have a strong influence on how Europeans think about cosmopolitanism. However, this explanation seems insufficient. At least two more reasons for this can be identified drawing on my analysis.

First, what seems to determine the prevalence of European references is the eurocentric point of view on citizenship that has been demonstrated through the analysis of the selection of historical examples. When the participants argue that citizenship originates in Greece and that cosmopolitan ideas come from the Stoic school or from the Enlightenment philosophers, they are not wrong, but exclusive. Moreover, Kymlicka and Norman (2000: 8) remind us that contemporary citizenship is very different from the Ancient Greek one, and Heater (1990: 8) suggests that cosmopolitan ideas are not the exclusive property of European philosophy. Hence, my first argument is that by being convinced of the European origins of citizenship and democracy, the speakers monopolise the notion of "citizenship (of the world)" by situating it exclusively in Europe. There is no surprise: the Western-centered nature of cosmopolitan discourse has already been identified (Calhoun 2003). Nevertheless, I tried to show how that specificity works in discourse.

Moreover, the "obvious" assimilation of European and global identities highlights the ideological character of such a representation, probably linked to the presumably "civilizational" role of Europe, which however "cannot pretend to have the monopoly over cultural cosmopolitanism anymore" (de Wrangel and Bousquet 2011: 30). The relevance of such interpretations can be confirmed by the reflexivity and criticism expressed in several contributions while discussing the allegiances of the participants themselves as well as the general idea of cosmopolitanism. If "citizens of the world" question the contemporary cosmopolitan vision, it is precisely for its universalistic ambitions and the perpetuation of a domination which contradicts the contemporary cosmopolitan idea as promoted

by philosophers. Calhoun (2003) writes: “a soft cosmopolitanism that doesn’t challenge capitalism or Western hegemony may be an ideological diversion”. The presence of critical reflection in some contributions shows, however, that this hegemony can be challenged within the cosmopolitan discourse.

## Conclusions

The analysis of contemporary (European) cosmopolitan discourse has shown that the Eurocentric idea of cosmopolitanism is extremely perennial and goes hand-in-hand with the conception of citizenship as a strictly European “invention”. However, this idea comes to be challenged by the reflexive discourse questioning the “automatisms” and the “obviousness” of cosmopolitanism as European reality. Despite its relative minority in my corpus, reflexivity about the ideological problematics of cosmopolitan discourse deserves to be studied in a deeper way.

However, this brief approach of the representations underpinning contemporary cosmopolitan discourse already gives us some elements to reflect about the current status of this discourse in the public sphere and especially within conceptual conflicts that oppose nativist and cosmopolitan discourses. While facing the depreciation of its core concept, the cosmopolitan discourse, even though strongly linked to the now dominating discourse of diversity, is constrained to struggle to maintain its position. This explains the massive presence of strongly marked identifications to the notion of “citizen of the world” and its compatibility with any other national identification (“I am French AND citizen of the world”). In the meantime, some unmarked, probably unconscious representations are revealed, showing that the cosmopolitan discourse is struggling to break free from some exclusive representations which contradict its participants’ declared position.

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