

Citizenship, Diversity and Critical Geography

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Abstract

This paper considers the relationship between the concept of citizenship and radical politics. I argue that citizenship has an ambiguous relationship to radical politics and is best seen as a contested concept that can be turned to radical or conservative ends. Traditional models of citizenship grounded it in the nation-state. Recent global changes, including globalisation, the resurgence of local and regional difference and the rise of identity politics have challenged such models. I then consider two recent attempts to formulate alternatives to the traditional model: cosmopolitan citizenship and differentiated citizenship. Although apparently opposed to each other in fact both rely on a passive, rights-based understanding of citizenship. Radical citizenship requires a more active participatory approach, such as that to be found in the work of Chantal Mouffe, who argues that citizenship should be seen as a form of political identity. I conclude by suggesting that an adequate strategy for implementing Mouffe's ideas in concrete political situations requires a critical appreciation of the role of geography in constituting identity and citizenship.

Citizenship and Radical Politics

In recent years there has been a growth of interest among political theorists in questions of citizenship. In part this is because of the end of the cold war. The apparent 'victory' of liberal democratic capitalism over authoritarian state socialism had two important results. First, the post-socialist states were faced with the task of developing liberal democratic institutions. Second, the capitalist world had lost its ideological enemy. This meant that it was no longer enough to declare liberal democracy to be always superior to 'communism'. Without a clear external target to criticise, critical attention turned to the nature of liberal democracy itself, and this led to a great increase in thinking and writing on citizenship and related issues. A further important factor has been the challenge of feminist, environmental, post-colonial and other social movements.

The conventional western model of citizenship involves both formal membership of a state and a series of substantive rights. Such rights may include civil rights, political rights and/or social rights (Marshall, 1950). Examples of civil rights are the right to freedom from arbitrary arrest and the right to own private property. Political rights include the right to vote and to stand for election. Social rights involve access to health care, education and

minimum means of subsistence. This model of citizenship (often called the Marshallian model) is a 'passive' model (Kymlicka & Norman, 1995) as it places little emphasis on active participation in civic life.

The political left has often had an ambivalent attitude to the concept of citizenship, reflecting the diverse and sometimes contradictory strands that make up radical political thought. The political revolutions in eighteenth century France and America were driven by a desire for civil and political rights and were informed by the writings of radicals and republicans such as Thomas Paine who published *The Rights of Man* in 1791. These revolutions have since been labelled 'bourgeois' revolutions because they marked the transition from absolutist and aristocratic rule to the political hegemony of the newly emerging capitalist class. For many Marxists, therefore, the gains of these revolutions and the benefits of citizenship that they introduced were illusory. Support for this view can certainly be found in Marx's own writings:

The right of man to freedom is not based on the union of man with man but on the separation of man from man. It is the right to this separation, the right of the limited individual who is limited to himself. ... The right of man to property is the right to enjoy his possessions and dispose of the same arbitrarily, without regard for other men, independently from society, the right of selfishness. It is the former individual freedom together with its latter application that forms the basis of civil society. It leads man to see in other men not the realisation but the limitation of his own freedom. (Marx, 1844)

For Marx, citizenship was an abstraction that did not relate to the real material conditions of social life. To resolve the problem,

The actual individual man must take the abstract citizen back into himself and, as an individual man in his empirical life, in him in his individual work and individual relationships, become a species-being; man must recognise his own forces as social forces, organise them and thus no longer separate social forces from himself in the form of political forces. Only when this has been achieved will human emancipation be completed. (Marx, 1844)

In other words, the equalities of citizenship were formal not substantive equalities. For Marx, real equality required the abolition of private property, not its protection.

Nevertheless, formal citizenship status is certainly real, and it has been used by governments to exclude would-be immigrants and other people deemed 'undesirable'. In fact citizenship is an inherently exclusionary concept as it draws a clear legal line between those who belong and those who do not. Other writers on the left have pointed out that even those who formally belong are often denied equal access to citizenship rights because of their gender, ethnicity, (dis)ability, sexuality or religion. These inequalities may be enshrined in law (for example by giving men and women different voting rights) or they may be the outcome of institutionalised discrimination. In some cases equal rights applied in an formally equal way can produce discriminatory outcomes raising the possibility that special treatment for some groups may be the only way to ensure full equality among citizens – so-called 'differentiated citizenship' (Young, 1989). The philosophical basis of the conventional model of citizenship has also been criticised. While many on the left defend the ideal of universal rights on which the conventional model is based, others see the underlying universalism as a problem in itself. They argue that the underlying values are

not, in fact, genuinely universal, but represent a particular (Western, masculine) world view that has been portrayed as universal, and that denies the value of other ways being in the world. Finally, some more active models of citizenship propagated by the political right have the aim of integrating the population more closely around the nation-state promoting patriotism, military service and seeking to minimise political dissent.

Despite all these criticisms, there are many aspects of citizenship that are supported by those on the radical left. The discourse of rights, for example, has been an important resource for numerous social movements, including the labour, women's and gay and lesbian movements. Many such movements have campaigned not for the abolition of universal rights, but for their extension to all, regardless of their social position. The social citizenship that developed with the welfare state in the twentieth century was an important corrective to Marx's argument that citizenship rights lacked substance. While the dominant forms of state welfare provision have been criticised for placing people in a passive relationship to the state and for generating institutionalised discrimination (Pierson, 1991) the extension of social provision showed that citizenship could in principle embrace social and economic life too. The struggle against apartheid, a cause dear to the left throughout the 1970s and 1980s, reveals that civil and political rights *do* matter. The impact on people's daily lives of authoritarian regimes of all political hues suggests that civil and political freedoms are necessary, if not sufficient, conditions for human emancipation.

So there is a complex relationship between citizenship and radical politics. Like so many political concepts, citizenship is not straightforwardly the terrain of either the left or the right.¹ Instead, citizenship is best viewed as a contested concept whose meaning is continually being struggled over. It may be tempting for the left to abandon the concept altogether, but that would present two further problems. First, it would allow a rhetorically powerful term and a rich tradition of ideas to be captured by the right. Second, it would leave the dilemma of how to talk about the relationship between individuals, society and the state, and about the process of civic and political participation; both of these are crucial to the renewal of radical politics in the twenty-first century.

Citizenship and Contemporary Global Change

An important step in the development of radical citizenship is breaking the strong link between citizenship and the nation-state. The European Union (EU) has recently made a small step in that direction by inaugurating the concept of EU citizenship. While the rights involved are limited, a precedent has been set raising the prospect that a fuller citizenship of the EU may develop in future. The current period of political-geographical transformation challenges the dominance of the nation-state in two important ways.² First, globalisation undermines the capacity of nation-states to exercise conventional sovereignty even within their territorial boundaries. Second, there are countervailing pressures towards localisation and regionalisation, involving demands for recognition, autonomy or secession from culturally-distinct groups. Many commentators have suggested that these two processes are

¹ In fact if it sits anywhere on the left-right spectrum it is perhaps most typically associated with the political centre.

² This does *not* mean that the nation-state will disappear, as some of the more lurid speculation has suggested (e.g. Ohmae, 1995), but that it is likely that states will increasingly share sovereignty and influence with a range of other transnational and subnational institutions, thereby becoming relatively (though not necessarily absolutely) less powerful.

two sides of a coin, and that, far from promoting cultural homogenisation, globalisation is leading to greater differentiation, but within and across, rather than along, traditional nation-state boundaries.

These contradictory pressures are reflected in two contrasting efforts to develop the concept of citizenship. The idea of cosmopolitan or world citizenship forms part of recent proposals for cosmopolitan democracy developed by David Held and others. By contrast the idea of differentiated citizenship is motivated by a desire to respect cultural difference and to respond to claims for cultural recognition from a variety of disenfranchised social groups. I shall briefly consider each of these in turn.

Cosmopolitan Citizenship

One of the paradoxes of citizenship is that the equality of citizens within states is not matched by any equality of citizens between states. Thus citizens of different states can have markedly different rights. While citizenship is often grounded in discourses of universal rights it is in practice highly differentiated. In some cases these differences may fairly reflect different local circumstances. In others, however, they may be arbitrary or unjust. If the world consisted entirely of autonomous sovereign states and if each of these were fully democratic, then these differences might not matter. They could be explained as the contingent outcome of the operation of different, but equally democratic political processes, and as accurately reflecting the democratic decisions of numerous independent political communities.³ However, the world is not so composed. States are not truly independent of each other. Actions in or by one state impinge on others and increasingly social, cultural, environmental and economic processes cross international frontiers without regard for the doctrine of state sovereignty. Furthermore, many (perhaps most) states are far from adequately democratic.

The model of cosmopolitan democracy developed by Held attempts to address this situation by proposing a tier of democratic governance at the global scale. This would involve the reform of international institutions such as the United Nations, or the establishment of new ones, including in the field of economic governance (Archibugi & Held, 1995; Held, 1995, 1996). Held spells out the implication of this for citizenship as follows:

The possibility is held out that the conflict between a person's obligation *qua* citizen to obey the regulations of a particular community, and his or her obligation to obey internationally recognised rules, might eventually be overcome, as more and more states and agencies affiliated to the new democratic order. The principles of individual democratic states and societies could come to coincide with those of cosmopolitan democratic law. As a consequence, the rights and responsibilities of people *qua* national citizens and *qua* subjects of cosmopolitan law could coincide, and democratic citizenship could take on, in principle, a truly universal status. In these circumstances, it could be said, adapting Kant, that individuals who composed the states and societies whose constitutions were formed in accordance with cosmopolitan law might be regarded as citizens, not just of their national communities or regions, but of a universal system of 'cosmo-political' governance. [...] People would come, thus, to enjoy multiple citizenships - political membership in the diverse political communities which significantly affected them. They would be citizens of the immediate political communities, and of the wider regional and global networks

³ This also raises issues about the nature of democracy within states that will not be considered here.

which impacted upon their lives. This cosmopolitan polity would be one that in form and substance reflected and embraced the diverse forms of power and authority that operate within and across borders and which, if unchecked, threaten a highly fragmented, neo-medieval world order. (Held, 1995, pp232-233)

Held's model represents an important attempt to adapt fundamental democratic principles and the concept of democratic citizenship, to take into account the changed global context. In particular the proposals for multiple citizenship and for the establishment of new mechanisms of democratic global governance mark important breaks with the doctrine of state sovereignty. At the same time the model is avowedly universalist in its intentions, proposing among other things a new Charter of Rights and Obligations 'locked into different domains of political, social and economic power' (Held, 1995, p279). As suggested earlier, this emphasis on universal rights raises acute dilemmas for radical politics. On the one hand it entrenches the ideal of equal rights for all in international law. On the other it universalises a particular model of democratic practice that gives relatively little attention to non-Western political thought.

Differentiated Citizenship

Whatever the merits of Held's universalist model at the global scale, it has relatively little to say concerning cosmopolitanism *within* nation-states.⁴ The problem of how to develop a model of citizenship that is responsive to cultural diversity has recently become the focus of considerable attention (Beiner, 1995; Benhabib, 1996; Kymlicka, 1995; Kymlicka & Norman, 2000b). There is certainly no easy solution. Even confining themselves to ethnocultural groups and without including minorities defined in other ways (e.g. in terms of sexuality) Kymlicka and Norman identify ten kinds of minority groups whose 'otherness' may pose challenges to the idea of citizenship (Kymlicka & Norman, 2000a, pp18-19). They write:

No one can rest content with the sort of rhetorical generalizations that characterized the 'culture wars' of the 1980s and early 1990s. Critics of minority rights can no longer claim that minority rights inherently conflict with citizenship ideals; defenders of minority rights can no longer claim that concerns about civility and civic identity are simply illegitimate attempts to silence or dismiss troublesome minorities. (Kymlicka & Norman, 2000a, p41)

One influential way forward has been the concept of differentiated citizenship in which citizenship rights can vary between cultural groups in an effort to protect minority rights, enhance integration or recognise cultural distinctiveness (Kymlicka, 1995, 1996; Kymlicka & Norman, 1995; Young, 1989). Kymlicka and Norman (1995) identify three kinds of groups whose 'difference' may require recognition and argue that each kind involves a specific kind of group rights (see also Kymlicka, 1995). First, disadvantaged groups such as the poor, the elderly and sexual minorities may claim 'special representation rights'. Such rights have the aim of enhancing the voice of oppressed minorities within the political system, promoting the elimination of disadvantage and leading eventually to a position where the special rights themselves may no longer be required. Second, 'self-government rights' are grounded in the

⁴ In this context it may be worth reflecting on two contrasting discourses of cosmopolitanism. The first emphasises and celebrates the diversity within cosmopolitanism and uses terms such as hybridisation and creolisation to convey this. The second constructs cosmopolitanism as a (potential) universal human condition in which differences are largely irrelevant, or even effaced entirely.

principle of self-determination, and apply to cultural groups (self-)defined as 'nations' or 'peoples'. Unlike special representation rights they are intended to be permanent, in that they reflect valued cultural differences rather than oppression (though nations can, of course, be oppressed). Finally, 'multicultural rights' provide support for recognition of cultural and religious differences as part of the wider society, rather than autonomy from the rest of society as is the case with self-government rights. These rights, too, are not necessarily temporary and are 'intended to help immigrants express their cultural particularity and pride without its hampering their success in the economic and political institutions of the dominant society' (Kymlicka & Norman, 1995, p305).

There are a number of important criticisms that have been made of the idea of differentiated citizenship (Kymlicka & Norman, 1995, p304). For example, the emphasis on difference, rather than common citizenship, raises fears of social fragmentation and division. Another concern is that other social groups will represent themselves as disadvantaged in order to obtain additional rights, leading to a 'politics of grievance' (see also Fraser, 1997). These concerns are important and have been the subject of much debate. However, I want to focus on another, albeit related, issue. The allocation of group rights may have the effect of consolidating groups rigidly around a somewhat static identity and may permanently lock in one specific set of groups to a formal position in the polity. It may be that in some extreme cases justice demands nothing less, but as a general principle this situation seems at odds with many contemporary formulations of identity politics, which typically shy away from essentialist conceptions of identity and emphasise complex and multiple identities and shifting alliances between and within diverse cultural groupings.

Part of the problem is that the idea of differentiated citizenship is still in many ways a passive rights-based approach. Of course rights are important, and differentiated rights may be vital to promote substantive, rather than merely formal, equality and inclusion. However a radical conception of citizenship must go further.

Radical Democratic Citizenship and Critical Geography

In my view a radical democratic conception of citizenship must place much more emphasis on active political participation than is allowed for in either the cosmopolitan or the differentiated model. This does not mean that active political participation is in itself sufficient to constitute radical democratic citizenship. On the contrary, active citizenship is also an important component in the conservative political tradition from fascism in the 1930s to Thatcherism in the 1980s. However, participatory democracy is an important element in radical politics and there is certainly no need for radicals to cede the concept of active citizenship to the political right.

In a thought-provoking essay on *Democratic citizenship and the political community*, Chantal Mouffe (1992) argues that the route to radical democratic citizenship lies in transcending the opposition between the liberal and the civic republican models of citizenship. Liberalism holds a limited and passive conception of citizenship which provides a minimum set of basic rights to allow each individual self-interestedly to pursue his or her private definition of the good life. Active participation in the public sphere is discouraged as this would imply an effort to promote a common conception of the good life thereby reducing the liberty of individuals to pursue their own, perhaps different, conceptions. Civic republicanism, by contrast, operates with a strong conception of the common good in which individual

freedoms may be subordinated. Active participation is the key mechanism by which the common good is formulated and realised. Mouffe argues that both liberalism and civic republicanism are flawed; liberalism because it has no conception of the political community or participatory citizenship and civic republicanism because it asserts the primacy of the common good at the expense of individual liberty. Drawing on Quentin Skinner, Mouffe suggests that there is no necessary incompatibility between the goals of protecting individual liberty and promoting the idea of a political community since it is only through active participation in a political community that individual freedoms can be guaranteed. In fact it is only through participation in community life that we acquire our conceptions of individual freedom in the first place.

In the light of these insights, Mouffe defines citizenship not primarily in terms of rights, but rather as a 'form of identification, a type of political identity; something to be constructed, not empirically given' (Mouffe, 1992, p231). It seems to me that this definition challenges both the cosmopolitan and the differentiated models discussed above. For Mouffe, citizenship is a form of conduct that is governed by shared rules about how the good life may be pursued, but does not presuppose any particular conception of the nature of the good life. Moreover,

Citizenship is not just one identity among others – as in liberalism – or the dominant identity that overrides all others – as in civic republicanism. It is an articulating principle that affects the different subject positions of the social agent [...] while allowing for a plurality of specific allegiances and for the respect of individual liberty. (Mouffe, 1992, p235)

This means that, in contrast to the differentiated model of citizenship, citizenship *is* a shared political identity, but one that does not deny, but instead *makes possible*, the expression of a plurality of specific identities by different social groups. For this to work a non-essentialist conception of the subject is required (Mouffe, 1992, p237). In addition, radical democratic citizenship allows – and indeed requires – active participation in the pursuit of political strategies that challenge relations of domination. This leads directly to the development of a plurality of social movements of women, lesbians and gays, workers, ethnic minorities whose substantive objectives may vary widely, but who have a shared interest in forging a common political identity as radical democratic citizens (Mouffe, 1992, p236).

Mouffe's proposals usefully move the argument beyond the impasse between liberal and civic republican conceptions of citizenship. However they remain rather abstract. Here critical geography can have a useful role in fleshing out the implications of Mouffe's argument for concrete political strategies. Recognising the spatiality of citizenship has a variety of implications for radical democratic politics, and I will conclude with two examples of what I mean by this.

First, the forging of identities takes place in specific geographical contexts. This applies both to substantive identities (gender, sexuality, class and so on) and to our 'articulating' identity as radical democratic citizens. The resources available for the development of radical democratic citizenship vary markedly across space. In particular the social networks which are a condition of positive identification are highly uneven, and access to them constrained in all kinds of material and discursive ways. A young gay man in rural Scotland is likely to find the pursuit of radical democratic citizenship notably more difficult than a similar person in urban California. Not only are our identities in part geographically constituted

(what it means to be gay in these two places may be very different), but our geographical context also affects our capacity to mobilise on the basis of them.

Second, Mouffe's essay deals in some detail with the concept of the political community and how it is constituted. But here too the conception is abstract and aspatial. Concrete political communities are usually territorial and access to membership is controlled in inherently exclusionary and often discriminatory ways. Mouffe's proposals concern the development of radical democratic citizenship within a political community and do not consider what lies beyond its boundaries. One important challenge, therefore, is how to address the legitimate concerns about the global political order expressed by David Held in his discussion of cosmopolitan democracy, but to do so from a perspective informed by Mouffe's ideas about participatory radical citizenship. Part of the answer will lie in the development of strong alliances between radical democrats in different territorial polities, with particular emphasis on mechanisms for supporting and learning from those struggling against oppressive regimes, for whom the realisation of anything like a radical democratic political community must seem an awful long way off.

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