CITIZENSHIP

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PREFACE

On the day that I started writing this book, the British government announced that it was introducing compulsory citizenship education into schools. Listening to a television debate on the merits and pitfalls of this policy that evening, I felt somewhat encouraged in the task that lay ahead. Citizenship has become a buzzword, but like so many ideas that share that dubious honour, it is often misunderstood. Despite the fact that the panellists included prominent politicians, I was struck by how confused their understanding of citizenship was. It seems, then, a good time to write a book on the subject – as well as to start teaching it to our children!

In this work, I present a theoretical overview of some current debates and controversies surrounding the concept of citizenship. In keeping with the spirit of the *Key Ideas* series, however, I try to avoid drowning the reader in a 'sea of summaries'. The relevant literature is now vast; partly a legacy of citizenship's buzzword status, and partly reflecting citizenship's importance as an idea that has relevance to today's social and political problems. It

would therefore be an impossible task to review all of these often insightful contributions. Instead, I adopt a particular line of argument in each chapter and offer my own perspectives on citizenship. My approach is largely conceptual, rather than historical or comparative, and the examples I use to illustrate the discussion are drawn from those societies I know best. However, it will become obvious, particularly to those who make it as far as chapter 6, that I consider citizenship crucial to solving global as well as local problems. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the concept and outlines the book's structure and arguments – readers are therefore advised to begin there.

While writing this book, I have been lucky enough to receive support from a number of friends and colleagues. Particular thanks are due to Stevie Hallows, John Hoffman, Joe Ravetz, Alex Thomson and Robert Gibb who during the last few years have willingly listened to and criticised my thoughts on citizenship. I am also grateful to Susan Gray who collected mountains of material for me to read for this project and who served as a very able proofreader. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to all at Routledge and especially to Mari Shullaw who has been very supportive.

I dedicate this book to my parents, with thanks for all they have done for me over the years.

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THE IDEA OF CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship has an almost universal appeal. Radicals and conservatives alike feel able to utilise the language of citizenship in support of their policy prescriptions. This is because citizenship contains both individualistic and collectivist elements. Liberals value citizenship because the rights it bestows give space to the individual to pursue their interests free from interference. Rights, in their political form, also enable the individual to have a hand in shaping common governmental institutions. Citizenship therefore also has great appeal as an inherently relational idea that entails cooperation between individuals in the running of their lives. Indeed, the concept of the 'private citizen' is an oxymoron (Oldfield 1990: 159). This means that in addition to rights, citizenship entails duties and obligations. Even a state like the USA, which is often said to place too little significance upon responsibilities, has an oath of allegiance that includes such duties as supporting the constitution, undertaking military service, and even to 'perform work of national importance when required by law'. All political communities, of whatever political

persuasion, must make demands upon their citizens. Citizenship therefore appeals to conservatives, communitarians and ecologists, all of whom stress the responsibilities we all have to sustain our political communities and the natural environment. For only in this communal context are sustainable human relationships, and therefore rights, feasible.

Since the late 1980s, thinkers on the left have also embraced citizenship as a potentially radical ideal. There have always been socialists who have seen the democratic potential of citizenship. However, in the past, the general attitude of those on the left was one of suspicion. Citizenship was seen as part of the problem rather than a solution to the injustices of capitalism. Indeed, the rights of citizenship seemed to be imbued with a capitalist logic. They helped legitimise private property and hid the inequalities of class society behind an abstract rhetoric of equality. The failure of communism, the decline of class organisation, and the realisation that in increasingly heterogeneous societies not all inequalities can be reduced to questions of economics, have led many socialists to reconsider their rejection of citizenship. Feminists, too, have found citizenship useful in conceptualising the roots of women's oppression. Feminist analysis of the gendered nature of citizenship has helped draw our attention away from questions concerned purely with rights and duties, towards the question of the nature of the community in which citizenship is exercised. Poverty, discrimination and exclusion can all undermine the benefits of citizenship. Thus, a consideration of citizenship must also involve an examination of the conditions that make it meaningful.

While there is a consensus that citizenship is a desirable thing, there is much less agreement about what the status should entail, what kind of community best promotes citizenship, and whether the status is inherently exclusive. This book explores such questions and suggests answers to some of them. I will be concerned primarily with the nature and limits of liberal citizenship. This

is because it is through a debate with liberalism that the majority of contemporary accounts of citizenship have developed. Consequently, from this point on, I will desist from adding the term liberal or modern when discussing citizenship, unless drawing comparison with an earlier form of the idea. In this opening chapter, I provide a conceptual and historical overview. This will set the scene for the analysis of the dilemmas of liberal citizenship contained in chapters 2 to 7.

A CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW

Modern citizenship is inherently egalitarian. This has not always been the case. It is only with the development of liberal tradition, which I take to be synonymous with modernity, that citizenship has developed such universality. In its liberal form, citizenship has lent great weight to arguments by minorities who can point to unequal treatment as an infringement of their basic rights, upon which their human dignity rests. Campaigns for the extension of citizenship have ranged from the anti-slavery movement in Britain in the eighteenth century, women's movements demanding the vote in the early twentieth century, African Americans in the 1960s campaigning for basic civil rights, to gay activists in the 1990s protesting that the age of consent be equalised with heterosexuals. Such campaigns have all drawn upon citizenship's capacity to act as what John Hoffman (1997) calls a 'momentum concept'. Citizenship contains an internal logic that demands that its benefits necessarily become ever more universal and egalitarian. Since citizenship gained currency in modern politics, its force has proved difficult for elites to resist. For this reason, Turner (1986: xii, 135) has contended that the modern history of citizenship,

    can be conceived as a series of expanding circles which are
    pushed forward by the momentum of conflict and struggle

> . . . The movement of citizenship is from the particular to the universal, since particular definitions of persons for the purpose of exclusion appear increasingly irrational and incongruent with the basis of the modern polity.

Unlike slaves, vassals or subjects, whose statuses imply hierarchy and domination, citizens formally enjoy legitimate and equal membership of a society. If it is to have substance, therefore, citizenship cannot allow arbitrary treatment: citizens must be judged by objective and transparent criteria. Citizenship also acknowledges individuals' ability to make judgements about their own lives, which is not predetermined by their 'race', religion, class, gender or any other single part of their identity. As such, citizenship, more than any other identity, is able to satisfy the basic political impulse of humans, which Hegel has termed the need for recognition (see Williams 1997: 59–64). The status of citizen implies a sense of inclusion into the wider community. It recognises the contribution a particular individual makes to that community, while at the same time granting him or her individual autonomy. This autonomy is reflected in a set of rights which, though varying in content enormously over time and space, always imply recognition of political agency on the part of the bearer of those rights. Thus, a key defining characteristic of citizenship, and what differentiates it most from mere subjecthood, is an ethic of participation. Citizenship is an active rather than passive status. In short, citizenship is incompatible with domination, whether the source of that domination be the state, the family, the husband, the church, the ethnic group, or any other force that seeks to deny us recognition as an autonomous individual, capable of self-governance.

The appeal of citizenship, however, is not just the benefits it gives to the individual. Citizenship is always a reciprocal and, therefore, social idea. It can never be purely a set of rights that free the individual from obligations to others. Rights always

require a framework for their recognition and mechanisms through which they can be fulfilled. Such a social framework, which includes courts, schools, hospitals and parliaments, requires that citizens all play their part to maintain it. This means that citizenship implies duties and obligations, as well as rights. Indeed, it is conceivable that society could function justly without a formal expression of rights. It is, however, difficult to imagine a stable human community without some sense of obligation between its members. Citizenship is therefore an excellent basis for human governance.

Governance refers to the inherent human need to create and maintain social order and to distribute material and cultural resources. Politics, to which citizenship is closely related, is a set of methods and techniques, such as deliberation, compromise, diplomacy, and power sharing, through which the problem of governance can be resolved non-violently. The use of violence in human relationships, whether these relationships take place in the private or public sphere, represents the failure of politics rather than an intrinsic element of political life. Politics is concerned therefore with achieving and sustaining consensual governance. Citizenship is pivotal to the achievement of this goal precisely because it provides a strong legitimising identity. By demanding that we treat individuals equally, citizenship can negate sources of social tension that may threaten social order. Through its package of rights, duties and obligations, citizenship provides a way of distributing and managing resources justly, by sharing the benefits and burdens of social life.

Citizenship then is a powerful idea. It recognises the dignity of the individual but at the same time reaffirms the social context in which the individual acts. Citizenship is therefore an excellent example of what Anthony Giddens (1984: 25) has called the 'duality of structure'. For Giddens, the individual and the community cannot accurately be understood as opposed and antagonistic ideas. Instead, individual agency and social practices are mutually

dependent. Through exercising rights and obligations, individuals reproduce the necessary conditions for citizenship.

Citizenship is therefore a dynamic identity. As creative agents, citizens will always find new ways to express their citizenship, and new rights, duties and institutions will need to be constructed to give form to the changing needs and aspirations of the citizen and community. As citizenship is about human relationships, it defies a simple, static definition that can be applied to all societies at all times. Instead, the idea of citizenship is inherently contested and contingent, always reflecting the particular set of relationships and types of governance found within any given society. This means that one of the essential questions we must ask when trying to understand citizenship is what social and political arrangements form the context in which it is practised. Indeed, one of my major criticisms of much of the existing literature on citizenship is that it fails to pay enough attention to this question of context.

Many thinkers from the liberal tradition have advanced normative theories explaining what the citizen can expect in the way of rights and duties, without considering in enough depth the constraints that class, gender and ethnic differences (amongst many other social divisions) place upon individual citizens. Since all citizenship rights involve the distribution of resources, and because obligations are exercised within a societal context, any discussion of citizenship is also a consideration of power. If society fails to provide the necessary resources to sustain rights, as socialists have often feared, rights become a sham. Similarly, if the institutions in which obligations are exercised are designed to favour one group over another then again citizenship is diminished. In their obsession with defending abstract individual rights, liberals have often overlooked the power structures that can either facilitate or constrain citizens in the exercise of their rights and in the performance of their responsibilities.

Citizenship is portrayed by liberals as part of an evolutionary

process towards a more rational, just and well-governed society (Marshall 1992). This ignores why citizenship changes over time and the interests that are served by such shifts in its meaning. In practice, citizenship can be diluted as well as enhanced. The processes that determine how citizenship is defined are bound up with questions of self-interest, power and conflict. For example, citizens' rights are intimately linked to the priorities and irrationalities of the market and the states system. Economic crises may well lead to a reduction in rights, as social entitlements are rolled back in the name of industrial competitiveness. Warfare between states, or internal social conflict within a state, may also radically change the meaning of citizenship: participants in warfare being rewarded with more extensive rights, for example, or a particular social movement effectively mobilising in such a way as to promote an extension of its members' entitlements.

This brings us to three further questions, in addition to that of context, that we must address in exploring the idea of citizenship. First, social struggles have often been concerned with the *extent* of citizenship: who should be regarded as a citizen and what criteria, if any, are legitimate in excluding some from the benefits of citizenship? Second, what should the *content* of citizenship be in terms of rights, duties and obligations? Third, how *deep* or *thick* should our conception of citizenship be? By this, I mean how demanding or extensive should our identity as citizens be and to what extent should it take precedence over other sources of social identity and competing claims we have upon our time, such as family commitments or making a living?

Regarding the extent of citizenship, to ask who is to be included as a citizen is also to ask who is to be excluded from the status. All states, however liberal their immigration laws, impose controls upon who can become resident within their territory, and under what conditions they can remain. Thus, citizenship is closely associated with nationality, with the two terms often being used interchangeably in international law. Historically, the

extent of citizenship has consequently always been limited. For the individual then, and in particular the refugee or immigrant, the primary question of citizenship is often that of social membership. In the contemporary world, this means membership of a state. To be deprived of citizenship of a state, when the state is the key distributor of social resources, is to be deprived of the basis of other rights. This is why the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 15.1) includes the right to citizenship as a fundamental human right upon which the protection of other entitlements is premised.

Because of its importance to the idea of citizenship, chapter 2 is devoted to an exploration of the nation-state. It is no coincidence that the idea of citizenship has become more prominent in political discourse whenever the nature of political community has been transformed. The formation of the polis in ancient Greece or the expansion of the Roman Empire, for example, both required a rethinking of the meaning of citizenship amongst politicians and theorists alike. In terms of modern citizenship, the key event was the French Revolution, which fused citizenship with the nation-state. Chapter 2 first discusses the implications of this fusion. I will then address the question of whether citizenship requires nationality to give it meaning. Finally, some examples of current debates in Europe will be used to illustrate some of the controversies and contradictions of a citizenship that is defined as membership of the nation-state. I will argue that in order to unlock the inclusive potential of citizenship, the concept must be freed from its association with the nation-state.

The extent of citizenship is a question as much about groups within the state, who may be formally or informally excluded from citizenship, as it is about questions of immigration and asylum. The campaigns to extend citizenship mentioned above are good examples of how marginalised groups *within* the state have had to apply pressure to privileged elites in order to remove unjustifiable restrictions upon the practice of citizenship. Thus,

the extent and content of citizenship is intimately bound up with the context of this status. It may be that women, for instance, are formally viewed as equal citizens with men. If, however, women exercise their citizenship within the constraints of a patriarchal system, in substantive terms their citizenship is worth less than that of men.

I analyse some of the controversies surrounding the appropriate content of citizenship in chapter 3. In particular, the apparent tensions between different kinds of rights and between rights and responsibilities are analysed. The contemporary debate concerning these issues has taken the form of a dialogue between the dominant liberal approach and critical perspectives such as Marxism, communitarianism and feminism. My argument will draw upon these critiques. I will contend that liberalism, largely because of its assumptions about the state and the market, embraces an abstract and thin conception of citizenship. However, we cannot simply reverse liberalism's emphasis upon rights and assert in its place an ethic of responsibility as many conservatives and communitarians have advocated. Instead, for citizenship to have meaning we must see rights and responsibilities as mutually supportive.

Chapter 4 tackles the problem of difference. I ask whether the universal citizenship associated with liberalism is compatible with the pluralist reality of modern society. Should the content of citizenship vary from group to group and should minorities be protected from the majority through the provision of special rights? In critically assessing the answers to this question provided by such pluralists as Young (1990) and Kymlicka (1995), my conclusion is that so-called group rights create more problems than they solve. The point is not to give up on liberal citizenship; it is to fulfil the promise of liberal citizenship by transforming the context in which it is practised. The key to rendering citizenship more inclusive is to recognise the inherently racialised, patriarchal and class-based nature of the state and

the corrosive effects of the free market upon rights and responsibilities.

The final dimension of citizenship I shall discuss is that of 'depth' or 'thickness'. Clarke (1996: 4) defines 'deep' citizenship as

> the activity of the citizen self acting in a variety of places and spaces. That activity shifts the centre of politics away from the state and so recovers the possibility of politics as an individual participation in a shared and communal activity.

Tilly (1995: 8) contrasts thin and thick conceptions of citizenship as follows: citizenship can be

> thin where it entails few transactions, rights and obligations; thick where it occupies a significant share of all transactions, rights and obligations sustained by state agents and people living under their jurisdiction.

Tilly's definition is more conventional in its identification of citizenship with the state, while Clarke argues that citizenship must extend beyond state borders. Both however raise such questions as: is citizenship purely of public significance, or can it pervade private lives as well? What is the significance of citizenship relative to other demands upon our time and enthusiasm? Bubeck (1995) has provided a useful typology that contrasts thick conceptions of citizenship with thin or procedural notions, which I have adapted in Table 1.1.

I believe, along with other critics of liberalism, that the citizenship liberals advocate has been too thin and has been subordinate to market principles and the interests of political and economic elites. Chapter 5 explores how the emancipatory potential of citizenship can be fulfilled through policies aimed at transforming the balance between rights and responsibilities and between the market and democracy.