

Citizenship, violence and identity politics

Abstract

This paper is aimed at depicting the interface between citizenship, violence and identity politics. Further, it also inquires conceiving collective violence as a social fact which means that it has to be analysed within the context of a specific action environment, i.e. a social milieu that consists of a series of possible actions emerging from a particular group way of life as well as the relational dynamics of these group-making social processes. In the light of this social resistance has often been analysed for its ability to mobilise collective action and to bring about structural changes to social order.¹ However, the sociological significance of resistance should not be restricted to forms of resistance that are successful in terms of collective mobilisation and social change, because this approach tends to separate social order and power relations from the resistant practices that oppose them, obscuring the close connection between the persistence of power relations and the openings for everyday resistant practices emerging directly from these relationships: 'The openings for resistance derive from the regular exercise of power',² or, as Foucault notes, 'Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power'.³ In a similar vein, Goffman stresses the connection between power relations, its social organisation, and resistant practices he characterises as secondary adjustments: From a sociological point of view, the initial question to be asked of a secondary adjustment is not what this practice brings to the practitioner but rather the character of the social relationship that its acquisition and maintenance require. That constitutes a structural as opposed to a consummatory or social psychological point of view.⁴ From this perspective, resistant practices are neither random nor idiosyncratic but an integral part of power relations. Hence, if we are to understand what motivates people to act violently on behalf of groups and how they come to identify with these groups to begin with, if we are to comprehend whether and how the violent acts of a given group of actors might emerge from the regular exercise of social power, we should pay particular attention to the sociocultural resources which generally mobilise actors to exercise physical violence. We should focus on the relational dimension or character of the cultural, cognitive and affective resources actors mobilise in order to sustain violent interaction and on the character of the social relationships that the acquisition, diffusion and practical use of these resources require. Furthermore, if we are to understand the relational character of these resources, we have to concede that as social subjects these actors are able to grasp the nature of their position in society, albeit in a partial and somewhat blurred way. Social facts do exist as a result of social relations; they emerge as an ensemble of possible actions within the context of social group life and not as products of individual minds or macro-cultural systems. However, they are characterised by two modes of empirical existence that are mutually related:⁵ one has to be located in the mind-body complex of individuals (affects, emotions, or cognitions such as motifs) while the other has to be situated on a collective level (shared representations, social practices, forms of social control, etc.).

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Introduction

Citizenship can be defined as a matter of *status* and *quality*. Citizenship *status* comprises a varying scope of rights, but also duties (paying taxes, observing laws, obligatory voting in some countries, serving in the military or in other various roles during states of emergency, for instance). The *quality* of citizenship, on the other hand, is experienced in the (ideally equal) political participation of citizens in the (re)definition and management of their political community. This participation is crucial to the development of a sense of membership in that community and, thus, a shared political

identity. The dynamic and tensions between the status and the quality are essential for modern citizenship and should preferably coincide, but this has not always been the case. Some people, for example, have citizenship status but do not experience quality of citizenship, such as those subject to dictatorial regimes, or state-imposed discrimination based on class, ethnicity, gender or social position. Others experience quality of citizenship—such as EU citizens in other EU states or international activists involved in global mobilisations and struggles—without having formal citizenship status in the country where they happen to live or act. Moreover, dual and multiple nationals, migrants, the various situational statuses that a nomadic individual can possess,

transnational and cross-border political activities, and other similar scenarios blur and complicate the contemporary relationship between citizenship status and quality of citizenship. When it comes to citizenship status, the Arendtian formula of ‘the right to have rights’ is indeed applicable, but the quality of being a citizen, as Engin Isin argues, should be understood as ‘the right to claim rights’⁶ and, consequently, to participate in the social, political and economic matters of one’s community.

We often hear talk about *active citizenship*, whereby an individual is said to experience what I refer to here as quality of citizenship. However, *active citizenship* as an umbrella term fails to do justice to the variety of activities undertaken by citizens, and some theorists of citizenship have addressed this problem. To illustrate the importance of regime, let us briefly compare socialist and liberal-democratic regimes. In countries that adopted ‘real socialism’, being an active citizen obviously did not involve voting in multi-party elections, but comprised a different set of participatory activities: engagement in party structures, social organisations, local communes, unions and workers’ brigades; or collective actions of internal or international solidarity. In the case of Yugoslavia’s self-managing socialism, it also meant taking an active role in the management of workplaces through the system of economic democracy that involved all employees, who were also the owners of their factories, firms and cooperatives. In liberal-democratic regimes, active citizenship means, more or less: involvement in political parties; voting in periodic multi-party elections; engagement within civil society; and participation in occasional debates (usually organised top-down), referenda, citizens’ initiatives and petitions. These are the main *invited* spaces of citizenship in liberal democracies, and include room for the expression of discontent through legal channels such as strikes and planned demonstrations, and through established channels for dissent or critique that carry the narrow possibility of influencing governing elites (for instance, citizens’ petitions).

Literature review

Emancipation itself is always from something; from control, domination, ownership and possession. Its Latin etymology (*emancipare*) reveals it as a derivative of *mancipium*, indicating possession, purchase and slaves (the right to own and sell someone), and *capere*, meaning to take hold, grasp and seize. It involves the transfer of ownership, seizing the possession someone has over someone or something, thereby liberating someone or something or, finally, oneself from domination. Laclau points out that emancipation also has a ‘dichotomic’ dimension, that there is a chasm between an emancipatory moment and the social order which has preceded it. ‘Emancipation is not . . . an act of *creation* but instead of liberation of something which precedes the liberating act’.⁷ Liberation as such can remain only an emancipation of that constituted ‘something’ or agent from domination, without being a creative act. However, emancipation without creation may be limited as well as temporary. The etymological association of emancipation with slavery remains fundamental. Lacan mentions two dilemmas. The ‘freedom or life’ dilemma leads to slavery. For to choose freedom is actually to choose death; and to choose life is to choose slavery. In the ‘freedom or death’ dilemma, however, the final outcome might be the same: you die either way. The choice of freedom may come down only to the freedom to die; the death that a person chooses for himself is, in this situation, the only proof of freedom as freedom of choice.⁸ We can see it thus as a rebellious and emancipating act, unlike the false freedom of the freed

slaves. An emancipation from domination with the aim to participate in the slavery regime on equal footing only reproduces the system as such. But if rebellion brings emancipation that is not only *from* slavery but *for* a different political and social order that challenges and replaces slavery and thus emancipates all slaves—if the slave thereby creates a new emancipation *form* for this universal freedom—then death may not be the final outcome. The *quilombos* of fugitives in Brazil signalled the world to come. If death is the punishment, as in the Lacanian dilemma, it will at least be the chosen death of the self-emancipated, and not only that of the fugitive.

In his regular seminar in March 2014, Alain Badiou touched upon a similar problem he has observed in recent occupations and mobilisations. Badiou sees them as mostly reactive, and therefore a ‘negative declaration’, a rage, a protest, crystallised in—as in Egypt, Tunisia or Ukraine—a collective ‘we don’t want this anymore’. However, according to Badiou, the occupation of the city, in the restricted form of the occupation of the central city square, its urban heart, is increasingly the concentrated form of the possibility of the declaration . . . there has to be a new form of declaration, establishing an alliance between intellectuals and a large section of the masses. This new alliance was not present in the public squares. The whole problem is to invent modernity other than globalised capitalism, and to do so by way of a new politics.⁹ We can agree that we need ‘a new declaration’ and a new politics, but consisting of what? On this, Deleuze notes that what we most lack is a belief in the world, we’ve quite lost the world, it’s been taken from us. If you believe in the world, you precipitate the events, however inconspicuous, that elude control, you engender new space-times, however small their surface or volume. It’s what you call *pietas*. Our ability to resist control, or our submission to it, has to be assessed at the level of our every move. We need both creativity *and* a people.¹⁰ The need to create something new, a new politics, needs a new *people*. But *for* what do we emancipate ourselves when we emancipate ourselves *from* the current political, social and economic regime? That emancipatory creativity mentioned by Deleuze, in my view, occurs when desire for the ‘new’ is expressed through an emancipatory rupture; it means giving content and meaning to that ‘new’ through the invention and practice of a new emancipation form, which requires a public space (not every space is able to engender a new universal emancipatory declaration) and must be open to all willing to experiment with that new form. Hence, the occupation of public spaces is necessary as an expression of that rupture, where negative declaration (emancipation from) is followed by affirmative declaration (emancipation for) and put immediately into practice via a new emancipation form that can result in a changed political and social contract. That new contract is what gives birth to ‘a people’.

Occupation thus creates a specific space-time of emancipation within the hostile environment of the dominant regime. But occupations themselves can be limited to an inventive form of protest that presents an open critique of the regime without creating a new emancipation form. Here, I will depart from Deleuze’s insistence on ‘new space-times, however small their surface or volume’ by defining the new emancipation form as dependent on public space within which the creation of inclusive new space-times of emancipation becomes possible. This may not always be achievable in some types of conquered, liberated or simply created spaces (of smaller surface and volume), such as squats, occupied factories or isolated communes and camps. Their activist character will depend on the public (and therefore political) character of their concrete practices,

and whether they are closed or open squats (and how the larger public perceives them), cultural and social hubs with strong or weak political potential, worker-run factories oriented towards production, or closed communes and camps as lifestyle practices or civic training sites. Many of these forms are compatible with the existing regime and are allowed to live (and even thrive) at its margins or in pockets. Their emancipatory potential depends on how open they are, how universal the content of their experiment is, and whether they put into practice new emancipation forms that challenge the dominant order.

Finally, if a new emancipation form is brought to life, it automatically becomes a competing model that can potentially replace the existing regime. There is a grey zone in which activists who open new spaces and experiment with new democratic and economic models are tolerated by the system because they are seen as benign and impermanent. These activists live simultaneously under two regimes—the one they create in an occupied space and the one reigning in other spaces outside the occupied zone. If the experiment is temporarily and spatially limited, their new emancipation form will remain *prefigurative* of what might come, one day. But, if the new emancipation form persists, starts to spread and eventually endangers the system, then emancipatory activist citizenship acquires an insurrectional character. To understand critique as an expression of citizenship, we should further distinguish between active critique and activist critique. The fine line between the two is again largely dependent on the type of political regime in place and whether it allows and tolerates critical views or forbids and suppresses them. An active critical voice can be embedded within the structures of the system and, from that position, openly express a critique (and suggest solutions) and even go as far as to criticise the system as such. Anti-systemic critique is mostly permitted in liberal democracies, especially in academic circles. Although the ideas of Badiou and Žižek often nourish activists in their thinking and actions, the concrete work of both philosophers can in fact be seen as active citizenship, i.e. they are engaged citizens expressing their views in already designed spaces for expression of various, even anti-systemic and subversive, views. Some people do, however, cross the line between active critique and activist protest. Consider, for instance, Antonio Negri's activism in Italy in the 1960s and 1970s, Foucault's own public engagements and, in our own epoch, Cornel West's street activism (often followed by arrests) as well as David Graeber's and Simon Critchley's close involvement with the Occupy Wall Street movement. Critique itself can be considered as activist when it challenges and endangers the system, its ideological structure and concrete functioning, or is perceived as doing so by the system. It may then be sanctioned, and those expressing it can face punishment for their thoughts and stance. Examples are many: the *samizdat* publishing of forbidden books in some socialist regimes; modern-day blogging in Iran, Saudi Arabia or China; or the cases of Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning and Julian Assange, all facing persecution for exposing state secrets, crimes and misdemeanours. Snowden became an activist by exposing the government's illegal surveillance practices and, in doing so, expressed both an individual protest against what he sees as government's attack on the rights and liberties of citizens and an activist critique of that very governing system.

Citizenship studies must be circumspect in the face of these differences in taking the ideal Western model as a blueprint for understanding social developments in Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Arab world. In order to come to terms with recent struggles, resistance and violence in contentious politics, we must be aware

that we are living in post-Marshallian times. The Fordist model of Marshall's citizenship—full employment, a growing economy, demographic reproduction of the population, the nuclear family and, above all, peacetime—has been replaced by a world of conflict, uncertainty and dysfunctional societies.

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, neo-conservatives such as Francis Fukuyama¹¹ proclaimed the 'end of history' and celebrated the global realm of Western capitalism and democracy. This full-bodied and naïve worldview is no longer viable; in fact, it has never been more than wishful thinking. It is much more convincing to argue that we find ourselves in a 'new era of uprisings'¹² that has been in the making for more or less two decades. Struggles for citizenship rights have spread while people have made claims against authorities for very different reasons, in very different circumstances and in the face of very different preconditions. In Latin America in recent years, we have seen upheavals, riots and protests in many countries for many reasons. Quite a number directly oppose the social consequences of neo-liberal politics. In Chile in 2011–2012, pupils, teachers and students began to demonstrate and developed resistance against a 'left' government that did not actually reorganise the country's completely privatised neo-liberal education system. This system offers good education only to those who are able to pay for it while depriving the majority of young people of their social right to education. Demonstrations ended in violent clashes with the police that brought many students into custody. In Argentina, immediately after the 2015 election of the conservative neo-liberal candidate Mauricio Macri as president, in April 2016 hundreds of thousands demonstrated against the loss of some 70,000 jobs. As in the case of Chile, students, professors and the staff of universities came out in protest in the face of rising inflation that threatens salaries in an education system where universities were receiving more money. There are food riots against the devastating effects of neo-liberal politics of the privatisation of water in Bolivia, or against the catastrophic effects of free trade arrangements, destroying rural agriculture.

In the case of Latin America we recognise many examples of what sociology of citizenship should take into consideration. Colombia is a case in point. It permits us to examine the role of violence in an ongoing process of state-building that is broadening infrastructural state power. State sovereignty is challenged by both leftist guerrilla and right-wing paramilitaries that control parts of the country. How can and does citizenship develop under such conditions? Given a long and ramified experience with violence in social relations, and contrary to citizenship literature in general, contributions from Latin America are directly confronting the problem of violence in relation to the crisis of citizenship.^{13–18} In these comparative perspectives, citizenship studies can find many stimulating aspects of how, and how differently, violence and citizenship are linked together, from institutional analyses of the state to analyses of civil society and the wider contexts of citizenship developing in a climate of violence. Turning to the Arab world, we see not only the effects of senseless belligerent politics of 'regime change' and 'democratisation' in countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq but also the different social orders and power relations that became obvious in the uprisings of the Arab Spring. Protests thus resulted in quite different outcomes: a democratic process in Tunisia, anarchy in Libya, an even more rigid military government in Egypt than before, war and civil war in Syria, the destabilisation of Lebanon and massive migration pressure on Turkey and Jordan. To this well-known list, we can now add the situation in Yemen and other parts of the Arab world. At the same

time Western powers continue to support Arab states, most notably Egypt and Saudi Arabia, where citizenship rights have either been compromised or excluded by authoritarian states.¹⁹

Autocratic regimes in Russia and growing authoritarianism in Eastern Europe also generate conditions of citizen resistance. As right-wing populism spreads over Europe, democratic achievements have become compromised. Resistance is obvious in mass demonstrations, for example in Poland, and it will take some time to see whether resistance emerges to defend the citizenship rights that these countries gained only a quarter of a century ago. We argued above that global uprisings against authorities have been in the making for about two decades. Supposedly, the brutal beating of Rodney King by white police officers in 1991 that resulted in the 1992 riots in Los Angeles may be seen as a beacon of a new era among those who had felt for a long time excluded, being denied their basic civil rights and exposed to misrecognition in the US. With good reason these riots have been called 'new riots', be they 'multi-ethnic'²⁰ or 'multi-cultural'.²¹

Since then conflicts between a militarised police force representing a neo-liberal state that defends extreme inequality by 'punishing the poor' have become more common.²² In recent years, upheavals against racist police arbitrariness and brutality and the killing of defenceless black people have unsurprisingly become more and more violent. Peaceful protest or violent riots after the killings of Michael Brown in Ferguson and Eric Garner in Staten Island, NY, in 2014, or Freddie Gray in Baltimore in spring 2015, are just different kinds of resistance against state agencies that are acting more and more violently. In these clashes, people make claims to at least the physical integrity of the black population, as the American Constitution guarantees to all citizens. The revenge killings of police officers in Baton Rouge and Dallas in 2016 have brought even more instability and insecurity to American cities.

If we finally look at Western Europe, we see at least two dynamics that promote resistance: neo-liberalism on the one side, and politics of social, cultural and religious exclusion on the other side. These two dynamics frequently go hand in hand. The consequences of excluding considerable sections of the population from citizenship in the sense of denying citizens full recognition as members of society unleashed riots in Paris in 2005. Another aspect becomes obvious in the face of the bank crisis of 2007–2008 that neo-liberal economists, experts of different kinds, and national governments and the EU turned into a debt crisis by imposing austerity politics. The rigid system of austerity politics is undermining the economic foundations of countries at the Southern fringe of the EU, depriving generations in these countries of their future and limiting the possibilities of making a basic living. In recent years, we have seen how such neo-liberal politics directly trigger resistance, violent and non-violent. Social unrest and distrust of governments will increase as it becomes obvious that these policies will only benefit the economic elites of Europe.

The spread of social struggles, political resistance and violence with regard to citizenship rights in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Middle East generally requires social scientists to take a comparative perspective in order to understand different pathways to different systems of citizenship in different parts of the world. As sure as Europe went through a frequently violent path towards citizenship through the centuries, so will countries in other parts of the world take a similar path. However, precisely because of today's growing inequalities within and between societies, a new militarisation of

international relations and growing authoritarianism and populism, and the many threats to citizenship, it is essential to abide by citizenship. In our time, citizenship is the only viable framework for a politics of peaceful protection of individuals and their societies from a range of contemporary domestic and international threats.²³

Activist protests occur in spaces not designed for protest, and challenge legal rules and law enforcement. This kind of protest may represent a spontaneous reaction, a rally, or a public action against a government or regime; it may express discontent with certain events, decisions and processes or with government policies in general. Activist protests can take many shapes, from resistance in streets and squares—such as in demonstrations, street camping, days of action, wildcat strikes, and sit-ins—to direct action, including flash mob tactics, traffic disruption (e.g. *piqueteros* in Argentina) or daring acts such as chaining oneself to a tree or a whaling ship. These protests can and often do (but do not always) develop a critique of the political and socio-economic system in general. By critique, I mean to imply an open questioning of the political, social, economic and even cultural foundations of a given regime. Michel Foucault defines critique as involving 'not to want to be governed...not wanting to accept these laws because they are unjust because...they hide fundamental illegitimacy'²⁴ In other words, protests can target aberrations, corruption or the malfunctioning of a system without necessarily putting the whole system into question. If this occurs, however, activist citizenship as protest merges with activist citizenship as critique. In the contemporary context, that critique questions electoral democracy as false or incomplete democracy, or even hidden oligarchy, but also sometimes the capitalist system as such. Can activist citizenship as critique exist without protest? Through processes of differential association, these actors learn how to interpret their own social identity in a Goffmanian²⁵ sense as a discrediting attribution of identity by others, that is, by the larger society. This collective appropriation of a stigmatising social identity through both within-boundary and cross-boundary interaction produces discursive as well as practical and thus mostly tacit forms of knowledge about their own position in society. This knowledge is what forms the basis for their group-related social reality in terms of patterned meaning structures represented by symbolic boundaries – resulting in persistent and highly antagonistic boundaries between 'us' and 'them' in their narrative understanding of the self and their action environment. As far as official representative sites on the other side of the boundary are concerned, the collective appropriation of this type of social position culminates in a profound aversion to government authority such as the police. In this context of ongoing acquisition of shared representations of one's own place within society, the actors' narrative accounts of the self in which they are embedded, with which they might identify, and which guide (and control) their daily behaviour are highly fragmented and hence far from being homogeneous among the suburban youth living in the French *banlieues*. Indeed, the content of the accounts of one's own position in society circulating and accessible to the actors observed refers to constant oscillations between different forms of identification with a stigmatising social identity on the one hand, and individual attempts to cross—or at least to blur—elementary components of the boundary on the other hand. Strategies of boundary blurring aim to overcome the stigma as a principle of categorisation and social attribution by, for instance, emphasising universal moral qualities and membership in a broader community of human beings or citizens with equal rights and moral integrity.²⁶ This highly fragmented form of social identity can also be observed by looking at the strong ambiguities these actors

express with regard to their own social and physical neighbourhood. However, the particular social dynamics by which they become drawn into mobilisation processes during a period of collective violence enable them to overcome this split or fragmented social identity as French citizens by forming a community of temporary solidarity.

Citizenship and welfare reform

It is a central argument of this paper that traditional conceptions of citizenship have been eroded by a variety of factors, including neo-liberal state policies but also, as importantly, the emergence of identity politics, with relentless claim-making upon the state. Citizenship here refers to the 'bundle of rights and obligations that formally define the legal status of a person within a state'.²⁷ As Turner argues, it is 'from this legal basis that individual citizens claim entitlements to national resources through institutional arrangements such as retirement, unemployment provisions, social security and welfare' (ibid.). Importantly, Heater considers that citizenship has the potential to 'tame the divisive passions of other identities',^{28–31} whilst Turner argues further that, despite its formal legal status, citizenship is, 'as a consequence of nationalism and patriotic sentiment, intimately bound up with the sentiment and emotions of citizenship',³² suggesting that should the bond be broken, this sentiment, and indeed emotional attachments, may drift to alternative sources of meaning. National governments across the Western world have increasingly undermined and limited the entitlement of citizens to national resources that form the basis of the traditional model of citizenship and, in doing so, have broken these bonds. This neo-liberal turn is commonly associated with the political right in the 1980s. However, it has been most destructive in its manifestation in the policies of parties associated with the political left, traditionally the champions of social security and welfare. The mid- to late 1990s would be a pivotal era in creating the economic insecurity that has accompanied the introduction of the so-called 'new economy' across Western contexts. It was in this period in particular that neo-liberal economic approaches pioneered by the political right, most notably President Reagan in the United States and Prime Minister Thatcher in the United Kingdom, would infiltrate the parties that working-class voters had traditionally trusted to represent their best interests.^{33–36}

It is important to broadly contemplate the dimensions of the neo-liberal political project. Neo-liberalism is a catch-all term and is used in a variety of different contexts; however, it is most concisely articulated by Harvey:

Neo-liberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property right rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices.^{37–40}

Harvey notes further that, as the central characteristics of this approach, [deregulation] privatization and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision have been all too common . . . The process of neo-liberalisation has . . . entailed much 'creative destruction', not only of prior institutional frameworks and powers (even challenging traditional forms of state sovereignty) but also of divisions of labour, social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life and thought, reproductive activities, attachments to the land and habits of the heart.^{41–44} The impact of neo-liberalism on traditional conceptions of citizenship was to undermine arguments for

state welfare provision amongst the very parties that had traditionally supported it. In 1996, the Democratic Clinton administration in the United States passed the Welfare Reform Bill and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. Clinton had promised to 'end welfare as we know it', arguing that welfare dependency was a national crisis. The new Act promoted 'personal responsibility' and stipulated that citizens could receive no more than five years of government benefits in their lifetime, although states could limit this to two years. Fassin⁴⁵ This Act would force millions off welfare and into insecure, low-paid work with equally poor working conditions.

In 1998 British Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair co-authored a working paper with German Social-Democratic Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, 'Europe: The Third Way', which radically redefined the approach of the European political left, promoting 'self-help' and arguing that the 'safety net of entitlements' must be transformed into a 'springboard to social responsibility'.^{46,47} This critical document included outlining a model for a 'streamlined and modernised tax and benefits system', 'lowering the burden of tax and social security contributions on low paid jobs' expected of employers, and supporting the creation of individually owned small businesses as a 'viable route out of unemployment'.⁴⁸

Less well known is that these direct attacks on the core dimensions of traditional citizenship were preceded by the Australian Labor government, which instituted a superannuation system in 1992, shifting the burden from government to requiring compulsory contributions from employers to a fund tied directly to the free market. During the Hawke and Keating Labor Governments (1983–1996), the Australian Labor Party transitioned from a 'top-down' welfare state system to what Paul Keating labelled a 'welfare model focused on the needs of each individual and which maximised choice', making the economy 'more efficient' in the process.^{49,50} The subsequent Conservative government of John Howard (1996–2007), for whom Thatcher was a personal inspiration, merely expanded these policies more aggressively. More recently, governments have maintained a steady degradation of retirement, unemployment provision, social security and welfare to the extent that contemporary programmes, if they exist at all, would be barely recognisable to the policy makers of three decades ago. Notions of individual responsibility and choice, irrespective of social context, abound and the aim of many programmes is to make life for welfare recipients so unbearable and difficult that they do not bother to claim benefits.⁵¹

Can activist citizenship be exclusionary and violent? To answer this question, I will first analyse self-inflicted violence. How do we understand cases of self-immolation, public suicide and self-sacrifice—such as hunger strikes and similar self-induced pain? All of these acts cross the line of active involvement in public affairs and can be seen as activist protest against perceived injustices as well as a severe critique of the system, government or policies that facilitate these injustices.^{52,53} They are also often acts of indignation and powerlessness. Nearer to our time, the self-immolation Spring with unpredictable consequences. These extreme acts represent, I would argue, *negative* activist citizenship. They are severe acts, mostly with fatal consequences, that destroy the person committing the act and thus the very possibility of politics as relationship to others. They do this, however, in order to make *a* politics possible, through acts that intend to break the deadlock on political and social activities of citizens imposed by the existing order. They not only cross the line

between active and activist citizenship but that between between life and death. Many such activists die without achieving their goals (take Buddhist monks, Kurdish militants, recent public attempts at suicide in the Romanian parliament or a spate of self-immolations in Bulgaria), but some indeed initiate or portend changes to come. If self-inflicted violence abolishes citizenship by destroying humans as subjects of citizenship, what can we say about violence towards others and its relationship to activism? Indeed, we often witness violent outcomes of activist protests involving various ideological stripes. The use of violence in this context, I would argue, has exactly the same effect as self-violence. It abolishes the space for citizenship for anyone who suffers from or is involved in violence. Indeed, its goal is to establish a different balance of power, to redefine political community and, eventually, to institute a different political regime.⁵⁴ We might thus witness *agonistic* confrontations degenerate into violent *antagonistic* clashes that reduce or even dissolve the space for both active and activist citizenship. Again, this is negative activist citizenship, which may involve protest and critique but which, in the act of violence, suspends citizenship as such in order to redefine it.^{55–59}

The term activist is often used as *positive* term. It implies that activists, by enlarging spaces for citizenship, actually do something good and even progressive.⁶⁰ But can we apply the activist label to every civic action that expresses protest and critique, regardless of the concrete acts, ideologies and goals that accompany it? To put it bluntly, can fascists or racists be called activists as well? Or, in other words, can activist citizenship be restrictive and exclusionary? We would have to answer yes. Indeed, depending on the regime in place, we can observe various acts of exclusionary activist citizenship that have come as protest but often bring about a critique as well. However, an exclusionary activist citizenship can never be emancipatory.^{60–68}

Only an analysis of every single case, its content and goals, will reveal the exact nature of activism under scrutiny. For each act, we have to carefully examine the methods of inclusion and exclusion (who is in and who is out?), which determine whether an activist citizenship can also qualify as emancipatory. For emancipation can only be enacted and acquired based on universal principles valid for all. Emancipation has a 'holistic' dimension⁶⁹ insofar as it affects the whole social life. For that precise reason, fascist activism cannot be emancipatory, nor can any other activism that applies only to a determined group (based on, for example, ethnicity, race, religion, class, sexuality or gender) at the expense and exclusion of all others. The emancipation of an enslaved nation or group, for instance, must be based on the universal principle that no nation or group should be enslaved by others. It is only in this respect that this type of national liberation can be seen as emancipatory. And, it is surely no longer emancipatory if the emancipation of one's own group means the exclusion and subjugation of another group.^{70–72}

Exclusionary activism, it is worth noting, is often associated with right-wing ideologies premised on inequality and the differences among people. The political left, in contrast, must aspire to ever-growing inclusion and equality. We do see, in this moment, contemporary social movements that are demanding true democracy (meaning political equality and inclusion of all) and social justice (tending towards or requiring social equality for all). However, even for this kind of activist citizenship to become emancipatory within the context of the current regime against which activists stage their protests and express their critique, the question of *space* becomes crucial. Only an 'occupation', I would argue, of physical, concrete public space, open for all wishing to partake, will allow for the advent of a specific *space-time* of emancipation that can facilitate emancipation from that system, open up the possibility of emancipation for different political,

social and economic relations, and, possibly, engender a new form of emancipation.

Citizenship and identity politics

The cumulative effect of the undermining of traditional entitlements and, in effect, dismantling the social safety net across Western contexts was not felt immediately, but has built up steadily over time. Notions of citizenship have, in line with neo-liberal discourses, changed. Individuals are now expected, in terms of political discourse, to 'make choices' and to craft their own life course and existential projects, developing upward trajectories. Identity politics has surged to the fore of contemporary political concern, with claims to the state no longer made on the basis of class, but on the basis of sexuality, religion and gender: [Many] people are preoccupied with the attempt to fulfill their political aspirations by placing increasing emphasis on the particular social groups with which they identify . . . Instead of regarding themselves as citizens of sovereign states, much less citizens of the world, many people have come to see themselves primarily as members of racial, ethnic, linguistic, religious or gender groups . . . Their efforts are directed mainly at asserting the rights of their own group.^{73–75}

The increase of identity-based politics and claim-making has paralleled the rise of social media, which acts as a force multiplier for rights claims at a time when governments are utilising such media to spread their messages out to the public in unadulterated form. Online petitions, comments and other forms of expression all require a level of cultural capital and competence possessed primarily by urban elites, who can gain the instant attention of government staffers and politicians. A single Facebook post by a prime minister or leader may be read as a ringing endorsement, garnering thousands of 'likes', whilst comments can reflect an echo chamber of approval. Such approaches to gauging public opinion are augmented by opinion polling, often conducted by companies affiliated with one side of politics or the other. This explains why some political issues maintain currency despite their relatively small social base and others struggle for any attention at all.

If, as Isin and Wood claim, citizenship can be defined as 'competent membership in a polity' then 'those who do not possess the civil, political and social rights or the cultural capital to exercise such identity based citizenship are denied the opportunity to become competent and full-fledged members of society'.⁷⁶ Such groups are prone to what Ghassan Hage has referred to as 'misinterpellation', whereby the promises of society about hard work and upward mobility prove to be illusory, and a process of 'shattering' occurs whereby the myth of citizenship and belonging are replaced by a more meaningful narrative.^{77–79} The more that narratives lay the blame at the feet of an all-powerful other, who has deliberately undermined the individual and group, the more likely they are to be successful in gaining willing followers from those deprived competent membership in their polity. As we shall shortly discuss, those blamed may range from the so-called, yet invisible, political establishment and elites, to immigrants and, most notably, to Muslims. In the absence of collective mechanisms (due to the rapid decline in trade unions) that can both articulate concerns (and anger) and achieve tangible outcomes for workers, these narratives offer both alternative solidarities and empowerment, honour and redemption in the face of dishonour, and the opportunity to assert one's strength.³ They offer action in the face of passivity and recognition, and belonging in the face of invisibility, fragmentation and individual suffering.

Citizenship, identity, and state

The interaction between the state and citizenship has been the subject of a theoretical debate dating back to the classical political theorists. Although consensus exists that citizenship is a form of state-individual relationship, there are variations among scholars on what citizenship and its content mean. For social contract theorists the very basis of the “social contract,” through which the state emerged as a form of human organization, is the conferment and recognition of citizenship on those in the political community. Aristotle and Rousseau perceived citizenship as the right to rule and be ruled. According to Aristotle, for instance, a state is “a compound made up of citizens; and this compels us to consider who should be properly called a citizen and what is a citizen really is.” Although the concepts of state and citizenship have changed in time and space, the idea of contemporary citizenship is still connected with the notion of the state. Conceptually, the state is an entity endowed with political sovereignty over a clearly defined territory; that has a monopoly of the uses of legitimate force; and that consists of citizens whose terminal loyalty is to the state. In other words, a modern state is conceived as a collectivity of citizens. In this manner, citizenship is commonly viewed as the right of individual to the protection of life, liberty, property, and welfare. The citizens must be active figures if the state is to be able to provide for the common good of citizens. Charles Tilly, however, identifies four main components of citizenship, namely category, role, tie, and identity. As a category, citizenship indicates a set of actors-citizens-distinguished by their shared privileged position in a particular state. As a tie, citizenship identifies mutual relation between an actor and state agents. As a role, citizenship includes all of an actor’s relations to others that depend on the actor’s relations to a particular state. And as an identity, citizenship can refer to the experience and public representation of category, ties, or role. Dipankar Gupta, quoting T. H. Marshall, argues that citizenship has a “tendency towards equality,” that tends to equalize people who may otherwise be very different in terms of wealth, power, status, or achievement. Yet in Africa, citizenship is a complex concept. In his analysis of citizenship and ethnicity in Kenya, Stephen Ndegwa defines citizenship as “defining those who are, and who are not, members of a common society.” But he rejects the notion that there is only one form of citizenship. Ndegwa emphasizes the importance of recognizing the multiplicity of conceptions of citizenship, liberal, and civic-republican, transitional, to mention but a few that can and do exist in a modern state. But it is his analysis of the distinction between the liberal and republican views of citizenship that offers the most useful framework for understanding the challenges facing many African countries. The “liberal conception of citizenship holds that rights are inherent in individuals, exists prior to community, and is guaranteed with minimal obligation to the community. The civic-republican conception considers rights not as inherent but acquired through civic practice that upholds obligations to the community.”

Therefore, citizenship in both liberal and republican conceptions is a form of social pact, constituted by the dual elements of reciprocity and exchange between the citizen and the state. The individual enjoys those rights and privileges that no other social or political organization offers, while in turn, he gives his obligations, loyalty, and commitment to the state. While citizenship sounds like an egalitarian and equalizing concept, it does not presuppose class but civic equality: equality before the law, equality of access and opportunities in state institutions and structures, and fairness and justice in the interactions between the state and individuals and amongst individuals in a political community.⁸⁰ The liberal conception of citizenship thus has to compete in many African countries with traditional, often

parochial, obligations to specific ethnic groups. Historically, in pre-colonial African societies, individual rights did not occupy center stage. Rather, duty to the community and to those in authority was what matters. The individual had no independent status in the context of his/her community. For instance, “the Nguni concept of *ubuntu*, which has equivalent in other Bantu languages, has been elevated to a creed in post-apartheid South Africa. “*Ubuntu*” literally means that one’s value as an individual can only be defined in relation to other human beings—a person is only a person through other people.”

The criteria for citizenship, however, differ from country to country. Three different criteria can be identified. The first is citizenship by birth (*jus soli*). The second is citizenship by descent or ancestral claims (*jus sanguinis*). The third is citizenship acquired through naturalization. In most cases, countries adopt a combination of two or all of these criteria. The first criterion is more inclusive and liberal in nature. This is adopted in countries such as the USA and Canada. Other countries such as Germany deny citizenship on the basis of birth, permanent, or prolonged residency. In a country such as France, children born in the country cannot lay claim to citizenship except under certain conditions: that is when they reach the age of, have lived in France for five years, and have committed no crime. What is important is that every state stipulates rules through which it defines those who are its citizens and those who are not. The common type of citizenship operates according to the principle of *jus sanguinis*. “Rooted in the 19th- and 20th-century ideas about the nation state, this type of citizenship is predicated on the notion that the main political community is based on descent or ethno-national community. Each nation should have state, each national should be a citizen of his/her nation state and each nation state should allocate citizenship rights along national lines.” In other words, states and citizenship are and should be the political manifestation of ethno-national identity. Consequently, those countries with multiethnic populations that use this principle of determining citizenship face a serious challenge of excluding non-national groups such as immigrants. In much of Africa, this principle of *jus sanguinis* has given way and informed the ethnic conflicts that have emerged—leading some ethnic groups to mobilize to demand either inclusion, or to create their own polity so that nation and state coincide, or to fight to gain control of the state that now excludes or marginalizes them. In many cases, they appeal to international norms about self-determination. Citizenship in case of *jus sanguinis* assumes that each primordial community can and should govern itself.

As such those sharing common social and cultural characteristics are in; those who do not are out. This principle is historically inaccurate and alien in the African context. As many countries are populated largely by immigrants, it is hard to sustain the principle of *jus sanguinis*. After all, migration has been central to the making of African history and state formation. And in a country like Sudan where ethnic identities are understood to be malleable, it is hard to maintain a rigid and legal analysis to identity and citizenship. *Jus soli* provides an alternative way of allocation of citizenship. The principle of *jus soli* grants citizenship along territorial lines. It begins with the assumption that a community is primarily defined by geography and civic ties. States, therefore, generally extend citizenship to those who are born in a given territory. They naturalize those immigrants who meet a set of conditions, including knowledge of and commitment to the principles of a given state. In much of Africa, the constitution spells out rights and privileges of all citizens. The problem is not, however, the constitution but the translation of its provisions to reality. Before the law all Sudanese citizens, for example, are equal but the daily experiences do not always reflect this equality. One

element of this problem is the division of Sudanese citizens, in their daily experiences, into indigenes and settlers, and refers to ascribed identity of being born in a particular place into a specific ethnic group considered to have a “home” within the locality. To be an indigene of a place, therefore, means that the ethnic group can point to a territory as “native land” where such native land is in a local council or state.^{81–83}

In the daily experiences, the categorization of people in many African countries into indigenes and settlers indicates who is native to a particular place and who is not. This categorization creates problems because the categorization is a basis for citizenship rights, entitlements, and access to opportunities. Sudanese daily experiences are full of tales of denial, exclusion, and discrimination on the one hand, and access, inclusion, and a sense of belonging by other groups on the other. These experiences point to a two-tier citizenship structure, the first for indigenes and the second for settlers. Similar to many African states, it is true that identity in its ethnic, racial, and religious forms is central to the citizenship question in Sudan and South Sudan because it is the basis for inclusion and exclusion. Citizenship is here defined as a relationship between the individuals and the state in relation to mutual rights, duties, and obligations. It is also a form of participation in the running of the state and society, and in this sense an agency and subject. The issue becomes more important because, as in most of Africa, citizenship is tied to group rights and thus closely linked with identity. In reality, identity is a form in which the citizenship question is posed and practically experienced. This perhaps explains the rise in identity politics, especially in relation to material issues such as access to land and public services. The essentialist position on identity assumes that ethnic and racial identities are deeply shaped by primary loyalties and affinities. While it is not true that all ethnic and racial identities lead to conflict, it assumes that individuals possess strong sense of ethnic or racial identity that mainly shapes their political actions and worldview. For instance, the conflict in Rwanda is analyzed as a consequence of historic antagonisms between the Tutsi and the Hutu. But this position does not answer the main question of why these identities emerge as a central element of action in some areas and not others. Even if we accept that ethnic identities are a given and deeply rooted, the essentialist position cannot provide insight into why when, or how these identities translated into political organizing and action that might in some regions lead to violence and secessionist movements.

Alternatively, identity politics in this study refers to the process of categorizing and de-categorizing people (ethnic, religious, gender, etc) into groups on the bases of shared and presumed similarities. More often, such similarities may be based on assumptions and stereotypes rather than actual traits, attributes, or characteristics. Such categorization and de-categorization become the basis for a range of issues related to rights, opportunities, privileges, and entitlements. Identity politics is a basis for determining who is in and who is out and therefore, there are contestations and struggles to maintain the status quo by those who are in and for change by those left out. Nevertheless, identity and its politics are the bases of contestations for inclusion in opportunities and rights as are available to others. In such conflicts, holders of particular ethnic markers as defined by the attackers such as government army and militia groups are singled out for elimination, forced to relocate and their properties torched. This collective nature of the violence is perhaps serving to strengthen geo-political solidarity. Also important from the view of the targeted groups is the near absence of material benefits attached to Sudanese citizenship. This gap is filled by ethnic, regional, and religious protest movements and thus serving to reinforce divisions. The rise

in ethnic and regional movements also serves to weaken national sentiment if the first priority of various protest movements is their ethnic or regional groups. These ethnic and regional movements were preceded by identity construction and reconstruction which provided the bases for further divisions into new majorities and minorities in multicultural nations or state nations settings. The difference between multicultural nations and state nations is that the ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity in the former does not have a territorial base, whereas in the latter it does. State nations are not simply multiethnic, multi-religious, or broadly multicultural; some of their diverse groups are also geographically concentrated, making the possibility of separatist nationalisms quite real. Nation states tend to be assimilationist, but state nations’ policies involve creating a sense of belonging with respect to the statewide political community, while simultaneously creating institutional safeguards for respecting and protecting politically salient socio-cultural diversities, such as language, religion, and cultural norms. Many African countries such as Sudan and South Sudan contain diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural groups, but these groups also have their territorial regions. Federalism is normally a preferable political arrangement for the protection of such diversities, if they are territorially specific. Undifferentiated and singular “Sudanese” or “South Sudanese” identities also exist. However, if the state attempts to mould these various identities, as in the case of Sudan, into a singular national identity that would in turn fracture state nations, not solidify them. Unity in such cases requires recognition of multiplicity, not a flattening of diversity.

Citizenship rights

Against the background of historical and comparative analysis, Tilly showed that early citizenship rights, or rather early forms of rights, emerged in contexts of social struggles against authorities—in many cases marauding hordes, as in the Thirty Years’ War⁸⁴ that had not fully constituted themselves as modern states. His warning not to ignore contention recalls early debates in citizenship studies that criticised Marshall’s⁸⁵ theory of citizenship as being evolutionist and teleological, thereby widely neglecting social struggles for rights. However, from the rediscovery of citizenship in sociology in the late 1980s, Michael Mann⁸⁶ and Bryan Turner⁸⁷ both developed comparative perspectives that put social conflict at the centre of historical analysis, though arguing in quite different ways. They both showed that in order to understand the development and nature of citizenship it was essential to consider revolutions, war and the role of the military as critical elements in any theory of citizenship. In distinguishing different regime strategies—absolute and constitutional, liberal, contested and integrated, absolutist and authoritarian—that in different ways had bestowed certain citizenship rights upon their populations in order to pacify society, Mann referred to these practices as ‘strategies of the ruling class’ and as a decision in the face of effects of geo-politics and the victories in the two world wars. By doing so, he argued in favour of taking into consideration geo-political as well as military influences upon developments within single societies, in contrast to concentrating upon processes that resulted from seemingly evolutionist developments. This argument referred to sociological theorising that in the mid-1980s had begun to take the state, the military and war seriously and to (re-)introduce them into sociological theory.^{88–93} Turner⁹⁴ admittedly appreciated Mann’s perspective of citizenship as a strategy of ruling classes, but critically elaborated upon this approach by developing another kind of historical comparative perspective, combining the separation of ‘public’ and ‘private’ in Western cultures with the distinction between ‘active’ and ‘passive’ forms of citizenship. This not only helped to

promote theorising on citizenship in general; it no less allowed for including the relevance of revolutionary struggles in the sociology of citizenship—something that had somehow been neglected in Marshall's seminal essay. Turner showed that to understand the different paths towards democratic citizenship depends, at least in some cases, upon successful revolutions that will then shape the character of citizens' rights:

Historically the presence of a successful bourgeois revolution in the development of politically modern systems was a significant ingredient in establishing parliamentary democracy and its associated civil rights. The revolutionary conflicts against aristocratic privilege in the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the French Revolution of 1789 have been important in the establishment of the notions of sovereignty and citizenship, representation and social contract and the development of the concept of public opinion in the shaping of political life.⁹⁵

No doubt, these revolutionary processes allowed for a development of modern societies towards democracy and citizenship. However, with regard to social struggles, resistance and violence being critical aspects of the development of modern citizenship, we also have to take into account a strangely contradictory process. First, the realisation of the 'monopolisation of the legitimate means of violence'⁹⁶ that would allow for the reduction of violence within societies; second, that the participation of subjects (not yet full citizens) in wars would then open the way towards the status of citizenship.

Conclusion

Theoretical responses to this puzzle have produced a variety of different results. Some theorists have claimed that this historical period was to be understood as a 'civilizational break'.⁹⁷ Others have pointed to a suppressed and neglected history of violence in the West. A self-image of peaceful development should serve as a model for all other nations, but it also contributed to a Western self-conception of being a superior civilisation. To be sure, this self-ideal of a peaceful occident does not match with historical reality. Max Weber's dictum of defining the state by the accomplishment of the monopolisation of the legitimate means of violence is of utmost significance for the history of citizenship. In a historical perspective, Norbert Elias,⁹⁸ in his civilizational theory, has shown that, with the emergence of the modern state from sixteenth-century Europe in a long-lasting process, the means of violence could be monopolised. This monopolisation not only went hand in hand with the centralisation of power but also allowed for an encompassing civilising process of both man and society, in that Western societies experienced a historically unknown reduction of violence in all social relations within and beyond societal boundaries. Further, the story tells us about the gradual development of the modern institution of citizenship in this process and, correspondingly, the transformation of subjects into citizens. Only sporadically has sociological reflection of citizenship questioned this illusionary conception of Western democracies. Consequently the Western concept of citizenship has been promoted as a role model in the march towards modernity as peaceful, democratic and universalistic. In recent years, struggles for citizenship have rocked quite a number of societies in different parts of the world. There are general and encompassing processes such as neo-liberalism that have transformed the globe as a whole and that are currently recalibrating democratic processes by devaluating the modern principle of 'one man one vote' as democratic decision-making is decoupled from citizens' will in a new form of governance. No less have the economic aspects of neo-liberalisation, such as privatisation and marketisation of formerly public goods and services, caused a rapid growth in social

inequality and the exclusion of large numbers of people from political life.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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