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Section One: Introduction

Citizenship, the Public Sphere, and Media

Bart Cammaerts

Historically, citizenship can be traced back to ancient Greek city-states. It is traditionally understood as a system whereby rights are granted to and duties put upon citizens. Citizenship can also be viewed as a way of structuring society, of enforcing boundaries that allowed the (city-) state to include, but above all to exclude. From this perspective, citizens are the 'official' and registered inhabitants of a geographically delimited territory. They are allocated specific rights by the state, which 'others' – non-citizens, foreigners, denizens, deviants, prisoners, slaves, etc. – do not have. In return, certain duties are expected from the citizen.

However, citizenship, as it is understood today, has evolved considerably since the Greek city-states or since the formation and consolidation of the nation states after the treaty of Westphalia (Münster) in 1648. Western Enlightenment, the struggle for universal suffrage and modernism, in close connection to the class struggles, as is shown in T. H. Marshall's seminal work *Citizenship and Social Class*, has considerably extended citizenship rights. Marshall (1950: 10–11) defined citizenship as being composed out of civic, political, as well as social rights:

The civil element is composed of the rights necessary for personal freedom [...] By the political element I mean the right to participate in the exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political power or as an elector of such a body. [...] By the social element I mean the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society.

Later the Marshallian conceptualization of citizenship was refined, amongst others, by introducing the social welfare state as the realm in which citizenship materialized in modern societies (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 21; Pierson and Castles, 2000). Feminist authors also criticized the dominant 'pater familias' focus (Lister, 1997). Furthermore, an ethnic minority perspective was introduced (Soysal, 1994; Ginsburg, 1994). In the 1980s and 1990s, the emphasis within citizenship studies partly shifted from 'rights' to 'obligations', such as paying taxes, voting, being part of a jury or other civic duties, but also informing oneself (Etzioni, 1993; Janoski, 1998).

The assumption of an intrinsic link between the notion of citizenship and the nation/welfare state remains pre-dominant in most of these approaches. Citizenship is developed and conceptualized within the ‘boundaries’ of the modernist state, which remains the most important political space in which rights are voted, upheld and enforced through the rule of law (at least within democratic societies).

However, the increasing globalization of the world economy – characterized by post-Fordism and fuelled by the introduction of innovations in communication, distribution and mobility, ecological and demographic pressures, as well as ethnic and nationalistic forces – has considerably undermined the sovereignty and legitimacy of the nation state (Held *et al.*, 1999; Haque, 1996). Due to these social, economic and political transformations, it is fair to assert that the conceptualization of the Westphalian nation state, as a sovereign state linked to a geographical territory with relative material, economical, social, physical and psychological autonomy, has become very difficult to sustain (Rosenau, 1990).

Besides the effects on citizenship of the power shift from states to the market, from states to regions or to international organization/regimes, the linkage of citizenship and the nation state is also being challenged by culturalist and post-structuralist theories, which put cultural citizenship on the agenda. Cultural citizenship is ‘understood as membership of an actual or virtual community based not on nation but on, for example, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, region, age, etc’ (Hartley, 1999: 208). This form of citizenship implies the redefinition of citizenship as ‘sets (plural) of different and sometimes overlapping communities that constitute individuals as competent members of sets of different and sometimes overlapping communities [...] which should ideally constitute the national (political) culture’ (Hermes, 1998: 159). From these perspectives, special attention is attributed to the relationship between global media (including the Internet) and cultural globalization, and to what this means for the notion of citizenship (Lash and Urry, 1994; Rantanen, 2004).

Both the post-Fordist global economic and the culturalist challenges to citizenship have given rise to a number of ‘unbounded’ citizenship notions such as ecological citizenship, net.citizen(ship), transnational citizenship, cosmopolitan citizenship or denationalized citizenship (van Steenberg, 1994; Bauböck, 1994; Hauben, 1995; Linklater, 1999; Sassen, 2002). These citizenships transcend the personal and the individual and collective rights focus inherent to formalized legal citizenship. As Mouffe (1992: 231) argued, citizenship thus becomes a ‘form of identification, a type of political identity; something to be constructed, not empirically given’. This also reflects an ethical stance that sees the moral being inscribed into the political and a strong belief in change, agency and the capacity of democracy to constantly transform and adapt itself. It points to an idealized citizenship and – to a certain extent – to the impossibility of full – complete and stable – citizenship (Enwezor *et al.*, 2002).

Citizenship is thus constantly re-negotiated and increasingly linked to sexual, cultural and/or ethnic identities and sub-cultures. It points to the distinctiveness, but also (possibly conflictuous) coexistence of, on the one hand the citizen as a legal subject, linked to communities of birth, the polis and welfare state rights, and on the other hand the citizen as a normative subject, linked to social, sexual or cultural identities and practices, to communities of interest (Giddens, 1991; Beck *et al.*, 1994; Bennett, 1998). What binds both types of citizenship is that they simultaneously exclude and include; they set boundaries as to who is in or out, thereby constructing the identities of all involved.

Communication has always played an important mediating role regarding the facilitation of the debate on, the articulation of and the struggle for new citizenship rights. As Urry (1999: 318) argued, '[c]itizenship has always necessitated symbolic resources distributed through various means of mass communication'. Citizenship thus refers to the process that leads to the articulation of certain rights, the forging of a societal consensus about the nature and extent of rights and obligations, about the balance between different often conflicting rights. The public sphere is a central – albeit contested – notion in this regard.

From a liberal perspective, the public gathering is conceived as the marketplace of ideas. While pluralism is heralded as an important democratic value, at the same time, the personal autonomy of individuals is emphasized in determining which ideas prevail over others. Thus, from a liberal perspective a consensus is reached if a majority of individuals make the same or similar choices.

Opposed to this procedural and individualized conception of democracy and the articulation of the common as a marketplace of ideas, embedded in the US first amendment tradition, is a more West European conception of the public sphere, embedded in values such as equality, reason, deliberation, and discourse. The most well-known representative of this tradition is the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas. He argues that discourse becomes democratic through communicative rationality, which

recalls older ideas of logos, inasmuch as it brings along with it the connotations of a noncoercively unifying, consensus-building force of a discourse in which the participants overcome their at first subjectively based views in favor of a rationally motivated agreement' (Habermas, 1990: 315).

He thereby emphasizes that communicative action ideally requires equal positions of the participants and open access for citizens to the deliberative process. Besides this, Habermas' idealtyp also presupposes citizens to be rational and knowledgeable, active and informed. Deliberative processes should also be centred on the common good and not on self-interest. In addition, citizens should be willing to modify or change their views as a result of debate and discussion, and the strength of the argument is more important than the

status of those who make it. From this deliberative perspective, reaching a consensus is, thus, more a process involving different actors, than a procedure to count the number of personal preferences. It should also be informed by rational argumentations, respect for difference as well as the ability to change views.

Habermas' normative account of a public sphere striving to reach a societal consensus through rational discourse within an ideal speech situation has been extensively criticized (Calhoun, 1992; Benhabib, 1996; Mouffe, 1999). The critiques that ideal speech is a flawed concept, consensus always a temporary ceasefire in a world criss-crossed by ongoing conflicts and that fragmentation leads to multiple public spheres are most relevant here. The public sphere is neither so harmonious and rational nor so unified, as Habermas would like it to be. Instead, the public sphere is seen as an arena of (antagonistic and agonistic) contention, of opposing and conflicting discourses, ideas and interests, increasingly fragmented into what Gitlin (1998) calls 'public sphericules'. Mouffe (1999: 757) points out that a conception of the public sphere must take into account the 'multiplicity of voices that a pluralist society encompasses', as well as 'the complexity of the power structure that this network of differences implies'. From a post-structuralist position, Mouffe argues that a plurality of oppositional discourses and social organization is not to the detriment of democracy, but indeed central to current notions of political mobilization and participation. Within a democratic or civic culture, passions and fierce disagreements should, according to her, not be eliminated in favor of consensus, but to be actively mobilized and incorporated into the democratic project. Post-modernist challenges to the deliberative model also point to the danger that striving towards a consensus, through debate and argumentation, between inherently conflicting interests within each society, re-enforces the hegemony and dominance of ruling elites rather than bring about empowerment and social change (Lyotard, 1984).

However, respect of other persuasions, consensus building, mutual tolerance towards difference and what Dahlgren (2005: 153) calls 'the integrative societal function of the public sphere' remain very useful normative values for any democracy. It is equally important to not slide into indifference, intolerance and outright violence between communities, religions and ethnicities. But at the same time, politics and democracy is as much about conflict and opposing conceptions of the public interest than it is about reaching a (temporary) consensus in society.

Throughout the argument developed earlier, media were always seen to be present in the background, sometimes leaping towards the front stage, facilitating or even accelerating some of the outlined developments. They represent an underlying opportunity structure, playing a crucial and instrumental role in the different struggles for the extension of citizenship rights (Meyer and Minkoff, 2004). So much so, that communication itself has been the object of a struggle on citizenship for over 25 years, with the MacBride report as an official

starting point (MacBride, 1980; Traber and Nordenstreng, 1992). More than two decades later, we live in a distinctly different world with old and new challenges. After UNESCO officially abandoned the new information and communication order in 1989, the debate regarding communication rights shifted to civil society. By the end of the 1990s, several initiatives taken by activists and academics in conjunction with large coalitions of civil society organizations had adapted and refined the pleas and arguments for communication rights, to make them face up to those new challenges, without forgetting the old ones. Examples of these are the People's Communication Charter [1], The Seattle Statement (Schuler, 2000), The Communication Rights in the Information Society Charter [2] and the World Summit on the Information Society Civil Society Declaration *Shaping Information Societies to Human Needs* [3]. However, the attempts, recently invigorated by the WSIS-process, to politicize media and communication in terms of a democratic struggle for communication rights have until now largely failed. The mantra of liberalization, free trade, media concentration and copyright protection, ruling media and communication remains as strong and unquestionable as ever. This further undermines the public interests that were deemed inherent to media and communication a few decades ago. It also can be seen as one more symptom of how the citizen is increasingly being reduced to the consumer.

The communication rights discourse represents a counter-hegemonic reaction against the commodification of information and communicational tools. It pleads for a participatory and citizen-oriented approach to information and communication, embedded in an open and transparent democratic culture, with an emphasis on:

- Access to infrastructure, capabilities, skills, services, qualitative content
- Real diversity and pluralism of channels of expression and media outlets
- Vibrant and pluralistic public spheres that go beyond the mainstream and respect difference and minority views
- Independence, ethical norms and protection of journalists
- The common good, knowledge sharing and decommodification of information
- Fair trade and sustainable development
- Support for participatory citizens media initiatives.

This struggle and subsequent attempts to politicize media and communication and to move this debate away from economic interests towards a human rights and citizen-centred perspective has had a troublesome and conflictual history (Ó Siochrú, 2004; Padovani and Nordenstreng, 2005). The current dominant neo-liberal mantras of copy-right protection, of light auto-regulation regimes or reducing regulation to a technical matter and of auctioning the spectrum to the highest bidders, as well as the huge economic and above all commercial interests ruling media and communication in the post-monopoly

era, do not represent a very favorable environment to adopt and enact such participatory discourses focussing on citizen empowerment, on pluralism as in diversity of content/opinions, and on normative values that go beyond the materialistic. Needless to say that there is still a long struggle ahead to make (global) communication rights more tangible and, above all, enforceable.

Notes for Section One: Introduction

- [1] <http://www.pccharter.net/charteren.html>.
 [2] <http://www.crisinfo.org/content/view/full/98/>.
 [3] <http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/geneva/civil-society-declaration.pdf>.

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