

## Gender and Citizenship Models: Reflections from Feminist Literature

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### Abstract

Prominent literature on citizenship is both gender-neutral and gender-sensitive. Yet, as many feminist scholars have argued, the concept of citizenship itself has been historically framed as quintessentially male, thus excluding women from the equal status of citizenship. Therefore, in order for women to be fully recognized as citizens, feminist scholarship considers the re-articulation of the concept of citizenship as well as its related concepts of public and private. Along these lines, women's citizenship as a status and practice allows space for women's agency to be exerted in the civil society sphere as well as within the governmental domain of politics. The most important factor of women's political citizenship, women's self-identification as political actors, is crucial in order for them to exercise their political citizenship rights. This paper offers a theoretical insight into the concept of citizenship, citizenship theories and women's citizenship as political agency. Moreover, the paper presents three models of citizenship that have emerged from the feminists' attempts to re-gender the concept of citizenship aiming the deconstruction of power relations and attacking the concept of citizenship as being quintessentially male.

**Keywords:** gender, citizenship, feminist literature, women's agency, public, private

### 1. Introduction: What is Citizenship?

Citizenship can be seen as the relationship between a state and a citizen as well as the political relationship between citizens. At present there exist four main modern ideas of citizenship: a communitarian, a civic-republican, a neo-liberal and a social-liberal one (Voet 1998, 9). The most influential scholar of citizenship theory in Britain, T.H. Marshall, has defined citizenship as a "status bestowed on persons who are full members of a community" (Marshall 1950, 14). The key elements in Marshall's concept of citizenship are membership in a community, equality of the members of that community and rights and obligations that result from membership.

All these elements involve the relationship and regulations between the state and individuals as well as social relationships between different individuals within the state where they live. So, the first and foremost reference to citizenship is related to its meaning as a status, one that people can obtain as they live within a well-defined territory. The status of citizenship, according to Marshall, includes civil, political and social rights and obligations, and all those who possess this status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed (Marshall 1950, 28-29). This definition of citizenship is gender neutral; therefore it does not specify or distinguish rights or duties as belonging to either sex.

### 2. General Analysis of Citizenship: Influential Theoretical Views

#### 2.1 Citizenship theory according to T. H. Marshall

The civil, political and social aspects of citizenship as delineated by Marshall are related to specific packages of rights that are supposed to be equally distributed to all holders of the citizenship status. The rights obtained by the civil aspect are rights "necessary for individual freedom – the liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought and faith, the right to own property and to conclude valid contracts, and the right to justice... [i.e.] the right to defend and assert all one's own rights on terms of equality with others and by due process of law" (Marshall 1950, 10).

The political aspect of citizenship as explained by Marshall might also be recognized as including duties apart from rights when referring to political participation as part of citizenship. In this respect, the "right to participate in the exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political authority or as an elector of the members of such a body" (Marshall 1950, 10), explicitly states the obligation of citizens to employ their political capacity.

The third citizenship aspect according to Marshall is mostly linked to “the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society” (Marshall 1950, 11). So, if the civil element is related to the necessary rights for individual freedom, the political element has to do with the right to participate in the exercise of political power, while the social element involves the rights to welfare.

## 2.2 *Citizenship theory according to other authors*

Another definition of citizenship as expressed by Bryan Turner maintains that there exists a typology of citizenship that is based on two dimensions: the active/passive and the public/private. “The first concerns the passive or active nature of citizenship, depending on whether citizenship is developed from above (via the state) or from below (in terms of more local participatory institutions, such as trade unions). The second dimension is the relationship between the public and the private areas within civil society. A conservative view of citizenship (as passive and private) contrasts with a more revolutionary idea of active and public citizenship” (Turner 1990, 209). The active/passive discourse of citizenship that stems from the typology of Bryan Turner conceptualizes citizens either as mere subjects of absolute authority or as active political agents. Although these two dimensions are gender-blind or gender-neutral in their language, they have often been used by other scholars to describe gender differences in general and differences in relation to women’s citizenship in particular (Yuval-Davis 1997, 5). Hence, both Marshall and Turner view citizenship in terms of a relationship between individuals and the state, a relationship that is operationalized either in the form of a status or a practice depending on the particular citizenship context and activity.

Moreover, Thomas Janoski also relates citizenship to rights and obligations, which he classifies as belonging to different levels. “Citizenship rights and obligations exist at the individual, group or societal level... At the micro-level, the individual definition of citizenship focuses on how each person sees the relationship of rights and obligations within a framework of balance or exchange. It traces the development of the “self” in relation to the state as a critical part of citizenship, especially the development of self- or community-oriented attitudes and behaviors” (Janoski 1998, 11). The conceptualization of citizenship as closely related to the state-citizen relationship is unavoidable, especially if connected to the rights and duties discourse. However, as Janoski has pointed out, the set of rights and obligations can be differently applied to citizens depending on whether their relation to the sets of rights and obligations is based on personal or group level. T. H. Marshall’s definition on citizenship makes particular reference to citizenship as an individual rights based discourse where demands are addressed to the legislature and the state.

## 3. **Women and Citizenship**

### 3.1 *Women’s Citizenship as Rights and Duties*

Within the rights and duties discourse as part of citizenship literature, feminist scholars are particularly concerned with rights in terms of what women are entitled to. As a matter of fact, as Rian Voet states, all citizenship vocabularies relate citizenship to the rights that this status offers to citizens. However, citizenship rights, as she points out, “are not all the rights one can possibly think of, because there remains a key distinction between human rights and citizenship rights. Human rights may be defined in international resolutions, but citizenship rights are those rights that a particular state guarantees its citizens by law (Voet 1998, 60)”.

Citizenship rights are also divided into formal and substantive rights of citizenship, where formal rights include civil and political rights and substantive rights consist of social and economic citizenship rights. Yet, as Einhorn maintains, “gender-based constraints tend to make it difficult for women to implement their formal rights or to transform their formal rights into substantive rights, particularly within the currently dominant neo-liberal paradigm which emphasizes the responsibilities rather than the rights of citizenship (Einhorn 2001, 107)”.

From the perspective of the feminist scholar, Ruth Lister also explains citizenship’s relation with rights and duties as a dynamic process in which the two dimensions of status and practice interact with each other, linked through human agency (Lister 1997, 8). So, according to Lister, citizenship is both a status that primarily involves rights that are accorded to individuals and also a practice that involves responsibilities in relation to the wider society. To Lister, “citizenship as participation can be understood as an expression of human agency in the political arena, broadly defined; citizenship as rights enables people to exercise their agency as citizens” (Lister 2003, 4).

Yuval-Davis claims that a holistic definition of citizenship exceeds formal rights such as the right to carry a particular passport (Yuval-Davis 1999, 5). Moreover, rights are seen by Rian Voet as a means to achieve citizenship and according to her women should exercise their rights, especially in the political sphere, if they want to develop women’s

citizenship to what she refers to as "active and sex-equal citizenship"(Voet 1998, 11).

So, the rights discourse constitutes a solid ground for discussing women's opportunities, achievements or failures to attain their social, political and economic status as citizens. Yet, as Einhorn points out in the quote above, the rights discourse disregards intervening factors that limit women's potential of exercising their rights. For example, even though women are eligible by law to exercise their rights in the political sphere, their result is affected by the existent power structures where women's access is restricted.

### 3.2 Women's Citizenship as Political Agency: to be or to act?

As Phillips, another feminist, states, "the value of citizenship lies in the way it restates the importance of political activity" (Phillips 1993, 87). Also, Ursula Vogel associates citizenship with engagement in political actions, and according to her, "in its most general meaning 'citizenship' refers to an individual's status as a full member of a particular political community" (Vogel 1991, 62). The major importance of citizenship lies in the recognition of the strong political potential it possesses, whose appropriate exertion can be particularly positive for women. Basically, through citizenship all men and women are entitled to the right of participation and involvement either as representatives or as the electors of their representatives, even though, at present, women's participation in politics is disadvantaged.

Evidence shows that in most countries there exists a considerable gender gap between men and women's political activity, which varies from voting to other more active forms of political participation. However, as Lister maintains, the fact that many women manage to overcome numerous constraints means that they are either consciously or unconsciously committed to the ideals of political citizenship (Lister 1997, 147). Still, in order to be fully part of the political citizenship aspect, women have to engage with the formal and informal political system (Lister 1997, 155).

So, citizenship's political potential does not lie only within the concept of direct representation in the decision-making bodies. Citizenship is also the means of entitling citizens to having access to issues of importance for their daily life and changing the existing situation by providing alternative choices. As Keith Faulks puts it, "...citizenship provides a framework for the interaction between individuals within civil society" (Faulks 2000, 107). The consideration of citizenship as the generator of either individual or community action links active citizenship to civil society and creates an alternative way of exerting political influence without being incorporated into the existent political decision-making bodies. The importance of women's engagement as active citizens, either within the governmental structures or in the civil society domain lies not only in the fact that through their active participation they address women's issues, but, most importantly, in the fact that they identify and position themselves as political actors that can have an influence on their lives, those of other women as well as men's lives.

This paper argues that the discursive shift from citizenship as entitlement of rights and duties, to citizenship as enabler of agency through participation and engagement in local or broader issues puts emphasis on the individual citizens, which in their turn risk to be identified as a greater homogenous group. So, as Phillips has pointed out, the call to act as *citizens* first, implies action in individual terms instead of action undertaken as "women or men, black or white, manual worker or professional, home owner or council tenant" (Phillips 1993, 81). Moreover, the performed action as primarily addressed to individual citizens can sum up to the "greater collectivity" (Phillips 1993, 81), thus attributing agency only to citizens as such. In these terms, women's agency as women is not recognized.

What is worse, as Pateman righteously denounces, [w]omen's "contribution" is not seen as part of, or as relevant to, their citizenship, but as a necessary part of the private tasks proper to their sex" (Pateman 1998, 10). This denial of women's recognition of their political citizenship leads to the need of promoting women's equality as citizens but pointing out, at the same time, their open recognition as women, which to Pateman is crucial for women's political citizenship.

Clearly, not all citizens who are entitled to the status of citizenship are, at the same time, able or willing to be committed to problems whose solution they can foster through their personal engagement. In these lines, the status and practice of citizenship as used in Lister 's work are useful in making the distinction between citizens and active citizens, where Lister uses different verbs in order to distinguish between the two. So, according to Lister, "[t]o *be* a citizen, in the legal and sociological sense, means the enjoyment of the rights of citizenship necessary for agency and social and political participation. To *act* as a citizen involves fulfilling the full potential of the status. Those who do not fulfill that potential do not cease to be citizens" (Lister 2003: 5).

The same differentiation between active and non-active citizens is present in Rian Voet's term "full citizen". It further describes the meaning of active citizenship as related to participation in legislation or decision-making in public affairs as well as cooperation between citizens, which includes the reflection upon common goods, the bearing of responsibility and the ability to judge and decide (Voet 1998, 7). Moreover, Voet's concept of active citizenship is fragmented into different types of activities, revealing in this way the wide and inclusive nature of active citizenship

activities. So, as she puts it, "being an active citizen need no longer be a an 80-hour-a-week profession for a few during their whole working life, but a capacity in which many more people are involved at some stage in their life: in public office or other decision-making bodies, paid or voluntarily, elected or nominated (Voet 1998, 141). However, the common thread between all types of citizenship activities is that at some point they all engage the capacity of decision-making and fostering some change, thus acquiring the potential of becoming "political".

Voet's view on what she calls full citizenship also extends the concept of "being political" beyond decision-making bodies, recognizing in this way the broad meaning that can be applied to the political aspect of citizenship. "Full citizenship does not only consist of participation in decision-making, but also of having a political subjectivity, knowing how to play political roles, and being capable of political judgment. It means showing in your actions that you are not a subject, but a citizen; that you are not an obedient slave but someone who is capable of determining, together with others, the future of public affairs (Voet 1998, 138)."

#### **4. The Public Private Debate**

Framed as a dichotomy that associates a particular sex and its subsequent characteristics, specificities and performativities with a particular domain, the concept of the public-private division implies mainly patriarchal power relations and therefore is greatly criticized by many feminist scholars. Most literature on citizenship is criticized as being gender blind portraying citizenship as a "quintessentially male practice and ideal" (Hobson and Lister 2002). The historical portrayal of men as the norm for citizenship inclusion has automatically excluded women as not belonging to the citizen category.

Women's positioning as second class citizens goes back to their exclusion not only from the full citizenship status and practice but also to their isolation in activities belonging to the private sphere. As Ruth Lister puts it, "nowhere was this more obvious than in classical Greece where the active participation of male citizens in the public sphere was predicated on women's labor in the 'private' domestic sphere which rendered them as unfit for citizenship" (Lister 2003). In addition, Yuval-Davis and Werbner affirm, while referring to other feminist scholars as well, "...that the exclusion of women from citizenship was an intrinsic feature of their naturalization as embodiments of the private, the familial and the emotional. It was thus essential to the construction of the public sphere as masculine, rational, responsible and respectable. Women became the 'property' that allowed married men, even the working classes, the right to be active citizens in the public sphere (Yuval-Davis and Werbner 1999, 6)".

Therefore, as many feminist scholars have pointed out, it is evident that men's full recognition and inclusion as citizens in the public sphere is supported by the private sphere where women were historically transferred based on the claim that they were unable to develop the "male" superiority and features of citizenship. This is the reason why feminists argue for a re-articulation of the public and private, aiming in this way to challenge the clear distinction between what is considered public and what is considered as the private sphere.

The process of challenging the distinction between the two spheres, as Vogel points out, is connected to other issues that can in no way be ignored, especially as we take into account the historically inherited inequalities between men and women. So, in order to: "challenge the traditional distinctions between the public and private, political and non-political spheres as they have affected women will lead us to a question of wider implications – whether the spatial categories in which we tend to convey the meanings of citizenship are still adequate. Similarly, the prerequisites of women's participation refer to the obstruction of citizen equality by the unequal access to the resources of participation – money, knowledge, work patterns and, most pertinently, time (Vogel 1991, 78-79)". The issues here pointed out by Vogel are crucial when it comes to women's real life experiences and their daily activities as citizens.

In other words, as Ruth Lister states, it is exactly the ideological construction of the public private divide that is "pivotal to the feminist reinterpretation of citizenship" (Lister 1991, 120). Yet, feminist scholars have different views in relation to the public private boundary. For example, Carol Pateman and Ursula Vogel challenge the association of the public sphere to the political and the private sphere to the family domain. Moreover, other feminists use the slogan "the personal is political" in attempts to blur the clear-cut division between what is considered public and what private. Jean Bethke Elshtain opposes this slogan and is for the separation of the two spheres requiring the autonomy of the private realm of the family and its intimate relationships rather than the encroachment of the political (Elshtain 1981). In solution to the private public debate, Nira Yuval-Davis' suggests that if we agree that the "private" means the sphere where the individual is autonomous, the same thing can be extended to all social spheres where men and women can act both as part of social structures and collectivities with all the constraints provided by them, as well as autonomous individual agents, whether it is in the family, civil or political domain (Yuval-Davis 1997, 13).

## 5. Re-gendering Citizenship

Within the framework of theory on gender and citizenship, there exist three models of citizenship that have emerged from the feminists' attempts to re-gender the concept of citizenship aiming the deconstruction of power relations and attacking the concept of citizenship as being quintessentially male. The first model, which is centered on the allocation and exercise of rights and obligations, corresponds to the gender-neutral citizen, therefore making the gender of the citizen irrelevant (Voet, 1998). The key to the inclusion of the gender-neutral citizen, though, has been located in the public sphere. The priority of this model is that it might enable women to compete on equal terms with men in the political sphere and the labor market (Hobson and Lister 2002, 37).

Two main exponents of the gender-neutral citizenship, Susan Moller Okin and Anne Phillips, recognize the importance for citizenship change in the private sphere, particularly in the gendered division of labor (Hobson and Lister 2002, 37). Okin envisions a 'genderless' family and society (Okin 1989), while Phillips concentrates on the division of domestic labor as one that can provide the context where "the notion of the citizen could begin to assume its full meaning, and people could participate as equals in deciding their common goals" (Phillips 1991, 7).

The second model of the feminist attempts to re-gender the concept of citizenship is gender-differentiated citizenship, which appeals to "difference" rather than "equality" and puts great emphasis on women's experiences. The difference in women's experience according to this model is motherhood; therefore political motherhood is used as basis for promoting women's claims as social and political citizens (Pateman 1992; Elshtain 1981). This model of gendering citizenship, as Pateman points out, has been historically promoted through maternalist arguments in order to equate motherhood to the male civic republicanism, which is rooted in active political participation and the ability to bear arms (Pateman 1992).

Gender-pluralist citizenship, the third model, that is founded on group differentiated citizenship was first proposed by Mouffe and criticized by Young and others (Mouffe, 1992; Young, 1990). The gender pluralist approach to the regendering of citizenship allows for the accommodation of social divisions such as sexuality, class, race, religion and age, which all intersect with gender to shape men's or women's citizenship. What is more, they also help the diffusion of the gender binary at the center of the equality vs. difference dichotomy (Hobson and Lister 2002, 38).

## 6. Conclusions

By recognizing the political capacity in all citizens that act as such in the benefit of their lives and those of other citizens, feminists place agency in the heart of citizenship, this way transforming the citizenship status into an active practice as citizens. So, what is vital to stress with regards to women's engagement in formal and informal politics is women's agency, which as Birte Siim claims, lies at the heart of the theorization and politics of women's citizenship (Siim 2000). Through agency, women are positioned as actors instead of mere subjects, and as feminist theory on citizenship maintains, through the exertion of their agency, women are not positioned and framed as victims of "discriminatory and oppressive male-dominated political, economic and social institutions" (Lister 1997, 6). Yet, as Voet states, women can not be active citizens and agents in their communities or beyond if they do not first of all identify themselves as political actors (Voet 1998, 142). The self-identification as a political actor is very crucial in women's involvement in active citizenship activities because they can not undertake any kind of action for change unless they believe in their capacities to achieve certain goals.

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