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Citizenship, Time and Crisis

Abstract: Citizenship is a specific form of social and political closure, thus defining, in a dialectic relation, the changing "shape" of both political subjects and forms of government/statehood. Looking at citizenship as an institution of political subjectivity and statehood, I would like to raise two questions concerning its relation to (historical) time. How does the dual function of citizenship as a form of social closure and a tool for self-emancipation change in times of crisis? What is the relationship between citizenship and moments of historical ruptures, be it wars, revolutions, or times of political transformation? Does citizenship contribute to shaping the temporal dimension of statehood on the one hand and of moments of collective or individual self-emancipation? Citizenship is simultaneously a discursive and a material structure. The hypothesis I want to bring forward is that it shapes our understanding of historical time according to these dimensions.

Key Words: Citizenship, Time, Temporality, Revolution, Crisis

Teresa Pullano is a researcher at the CNR-IRPPS in Rome, Italy. Her research focuses on policies concerning European citizenship in connection to freedom of movement within the EU. She is interested in analyzing the restructuring of contemporary citizenship in Europe as a specific form and structure of statehood. On these issues, she published the book "La citoyenneté européenne: un espace quasi-étatique" (Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2014).

When asked to present a paper for the conference "War, Trade and the Divisive Power of Citizenship" (Europainstitut, Basel, September 22 – 23, 2022), which was the closing event of the SNF project on "The Divisive Power of Citizenship", I immediately thought about writing something about citizenship and historical time. I had the unique opportunity to deal with this topic in front of an interdisciplinary audience, many of whom were historians. I always felt that the reflection on the relationship between citizenship and historical time was not present in the debates in political theory and political philosophy concerning citizenship. I was not interested in understanding how the category of citizenship was shaped under specific historical conditions, or even how it evolved – a subject on which a vast body of literature exists. I was looking for a discussion of the mutual dialectic between the institutions that shape political subjectivity, or citizenship, and a different understanding of what historical time is. Does the category of modern citizenship provide stability to the subjects of democratic societies? Does it wither away in times of societal and political disruption and upheaval? What is left of the relation between citizenship and revolutionary ruptures? Very little is available on these topics in the academic literature, maybe due to their highly interdisciplinary nature.

To approach the question, in the paper I start drafting a definition of citizenship as a category of analysis. I then move toward discussing how specific understandings of citizenship as political subjectivity impose themselves in a given epoch. I then look at the level of the subjects: do they feel at pace with these forms of citizenship as political institutions or do they have a different way of reflecting upon their own individual understanding of political time and how it fits, or does not fit, into the general understanding of the epoch? Is the discrepancy between the individual and collective desires to reshape historical time and the institution of citizenship the engine of ruptures, revolts and finally change in the same category of citizenship? Finally, I reflect upon the link between times of crisis and how they affect the institution of citizenship.

I start with a broad definition of citizenship as the category that defines membership in a political community. As such, citizenship implies the constitution of a political body in which its members share common participation. This community can take different forms, such as the one of the city (urban citizenship), the people of a broader collective (the nation, the state or a supranational political entity), or even humanity (cosmopolitan citizenship). In its modern form, since the democratic revolutions of the eighteenth century and especially the "Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen" of 1789 written under the French Revolution, citizenship is tied to the formation of "the people" as the sovereign political subject, in opposition to the power of God or the King under monarchical rule. Modern citizenship thus runs in parallel to the modern

process of secularization of political life, under which political power is no longer an affair of "religious" or "divine" character but is immanent to the body politic of the people. Thus, modern citizenship is associated with two different processes that both have the constitution of the people as the sovereign political subject at its center: the process of democratization, on the one hand, and the constitution of the nation-state, on the other. Citizenship is an institution with a dual character. It is an instrument for struggles towards people's democratic self-ruling and the drive towards freedom and equality (or "equaliberty", according to Étienne Balibar) within the members of a political community. At the same time, citizenship, under modern conditions often in association with nationality, regulates membership within a (national) state and regulates the rights and duties deriving from it as well as demarcating the boundary between those who belong to a (national) state and aliens. The institution of and the struggles for citizenship have an insurrectional dimension and express the striving towards self-emancipation of the individual and collective political subjects. Citizenship, understood in its emancipatory and democratic dimension, is the tool for and the crystallization of civil society's counter-power to the one of government or the state. As such, citizenship indicates the power of the (individual) political subject to shape her public and political life. This emancipatory and empowering dimension of the modern institution of citizenship is always accompanied by the other dimension of citizenship as a tool for governmental power to shape the collective and individual forms of public and private life of the people. Indeed, citizenship becomes a tool to separate the members of a given state from aliens, as well as a means to regulate the participation of the subjects to the life of the state. Citizenship is thus a tool of government, dividing up and differentiating social and political subjects and their rights and duties in a given state. Moreover, I argue that citizenship is an instrument through which statehood, and thus the contours of the political community, are constantly drawn and redrawn. The legal dimension of citizenship and its applications are a powerful tool to shift the spatial and temporal frontiers of statehood.

Starting from this dual dimension of citizenship, I would like to situate it as a pivotal institution in regulating the civil society-state nexus. To do so, we need to develop a dynamic approach to citizenship rather than a static one. Rather than seeing citizenship mainly as a status, defined by certain rights and duties at a given moment and in a given place, I suggest we conceive it as a dynamic form and a political and social process. Citizenship is not a static set of legal provisions, one of the perspectives often adopted by the mainstream literature on the topic.[1] As such, it should be instead analyzed as a specific form of social and political closure, thus defining, in a

1 For a critical overview of the mainstream literature on citizenship, see Dimitry Kochenov, *Citizenship* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019).

dialectic relation, the changing "shape" of both political subjects and forms of government/statehood. Citizenship is an institution that allows for the challenging of a given form of statehood and political organization in its insurrectional capacity and is a crucial element in the definition of statehood itself. This second aspect is well discussed by Rogers Brubaker, who writes: "(...) the modern state is not simply a territorial organization but a membership organization, an association of citizens".[2]

Suppose we adopt this dynamic approach to citizenship as a social and political process. In that case, the question shifts from "what is citizenship, that is, which rights and duties are attached to it?" to "how does the institution of citizenship contribute to the process of constituting oneself or a group of people as a political subject?" (insurrectional dimension; citizenship as a process of social and political emancipation) and to "how does citizenship act as an essential institution in shaping forms of (self)-government?" (the constitutional dimension of citizenship). Citizenship is thus a form of social and political closure that defines the structure of statehood and acts as a tool for self-emancipation from relations of domination. Looking at citizenship as an institution of political subjectivity and statehood, I would like to raise two questions concerning its relation to (historical) time.

1. How does the dual function of citizenship as a form of social closure and a tool for self-emancipation change in times of crisis? What is the relationship between citizenship and moments of historical ruptures, be it wars, revolutions, or times of political transformation?

2. Does citizenship contribute to shaping the temporal dimension of statehood on the one hand and of moments of collective or individual self-emancipation?

To sketch a path toward answering these questions, I first need to better define citizenship, in general, in historical time. Secondly, I must also tackle the relationship between citizenship and European modernization. Citizenship is simultaneously a discursive and a material structure. The hypothesis I want to bring forward is that it shapes our understanding of historical time according to these dimensions.

2 Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 21.

The Discourse of Citizenship and Its Relation to Historical Time

Citizenship as a Reflexive Institution

As a discursive category, citizenship can be understood as a reflexive institution: it works as a specific grammar through which individual and collective subjects institute themselves as political subjects. There are different ways of thinking about citizenship as a reflexive institution in historical times. Wittrock, following the Basel philosopher Karl Jaspers, argues that "our understanding of history is related to the emergence and institutionalization of forms of critical reflexivity."[3] These forms of critical reflexivity express "the capacity of human beings to reflect upon and to give expression to an image of the world as having the potential of being different from what it was perceived to be here and now."[4] According to Jaspers, the emergence of these institutionalized forms of critical reflexivity inaugurated history as the epoch of reflexive, historical consciousness, or what he names the Axial Age.[5] Could citizenship be understood as such an institutionalized form of critical reflexivity? And if yes, which kinds of historical reflexivity does it bring with it?

More precisely, citizenship has a transformative dimension, which corresponds to what Jaspers named reflexive consciousness: the ability to transcend the immediately given through reason. While the definition of "reason" here can be quite problematic, I would retain the hypothesis that citizenship, as an institutionalized (or not) form of critical reflexivity, has a transformative power that also entails the temporal and historical dimension.

For Jaspers, historical reflexivity also entails a sense of contingency, that is, the awareness of the bounded temporal nature of human experience. To some extent, we could say that this speaks of the relationship between citizenship and secularization. Still, I am interested in a second dimension of thinking of citizenship as a form of the temporal border: to what extent do transformations of citizenship as a form of critical reflexivity indicate transformations in understanding the historical dimension we are in?

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3 Björn Wittrock, "Social Theory and Global History: The Three Cultural Crystallizations," *Thesis Eleven* 65, no. 1 (2001): 33.

4 Wittrock, "Social Theory and Global History," 33.

5 On this point, see Karl Jaspers, "The Axial Age of Human History: A Base for the Unity of Mankind", *Commentary*, November 1948, accessed on 30 November 2022, https://www.commentary.org/articles/karl-jaspers/the-axial-age-of-human-historya-base-for-the-unity-of-mankind/. In particular, Jaspers writes: "If there does exist such a thing as an axis, or turning point, in history, it must be based on observable or recorded fact; and it must be valid for all men, including Christians. Such an axis would be that point in history where man first discovered the notion of himself that he has realized since, the point in time where there occurred that shaping of man's being which has produced the most important results. And the existence of this turning point would have to be, if not absolutely demonstrable, at least convincing on an empirical basis for Europeans, for Asiatics, and for all men, without the need to appeal to the criterion of a definite religious doctrine. Only thus could it provide a common frame of historical self-understanding.
Such a historical axis, or turning point, seems to be situated in the years around 500 BCE, in the intellectual development that took place between 800 and 200 BCE. There lies, it appears to me, the most crucial turning point in history; it was then that man as he is today was born. Let us, for the sake of brevity, refer to this period as the 'axial age'."

According to Jaspers and then Eisenstadt's theory of the Axial Age, historical reflexivity is associated with macro-institutional transformations within culturally entrenched structural principles.[6] This is, of course, debatable. Still, one of the questions, which is also posed by global history on the one hand and by globalization studies on the other, is the transnational dimension of such forms of critical reflexivity as citizenship and of its transformative power (or not) beyond its specific discursive and material formations.

Still, one key question is: what is the global dimension of citizenship as a form of critical reflexivity? To what extent do changes in the relationship between citizenship and historical time within Europe on the subjective and the governmental levels relate to a global dimension and vice versa?

Citizenship as Simultaneity and Anachronism: The Path Towards Emancipation

Looking at citizenship as an institution of both political subjectivity and forms of statehood, I would like to raise some questions about its historical dimension. First of all, which understanding of time or temporality can we refer to concerning the double dimension of citizenship, that is, its insurrectional or subjective dimension and its governmental or structural dimension? Reflecting upon how transformations of citizenship can mark an understanding of a historical or a larger period, an epoch as in the Axial Age discourse can overshadow contextual and individual differences in the citizenship-time nexus. To what extent is citizenship a tool for subverting the course of time, be it of an epoch (for example, through revolutions or the conquest of larger sets of rights for a larger amount of people) or an individual life?

The French philosopher Jacques Rancière proposes an investigation of the category of "anachronism". First of all, Rancière defines an anachronism as the fact that something happens that would not have been thought possible either at the time or retrospectively. He discusses Lucien Febvre's refutation of Rabelais' atheism in *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century*.[7] One first question is: what is the link between citizenship and unexpected turns of events at a given time and at a given place? This can be thought of either progressively or in a regressive manner. What happens when crises bring about an unexpected and eventually "anachronistic" regression regarding citizenship rights and capacity? What is deemed "possible" at a given time

6 Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, "The axial age: The emergence of transcendental visions and the rise of clerics," *European Journal of Sociology* 23, no. 2 (1982): 294–314.

7 Lucien Febvre, The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

and on which grounds?[8] Rancière then deals with a second question: which kind of temporality does history refer to? He treats this question through an elaboration of the categories of time, narration and politics. Different forms of temporality and of rationality are connected to different understandings of historical knowledge. Rancière, following Aristotle, names them as history and poetry. He writes: "The question of the scientific rationality of history is, from the outset, part of the wider problem of poetic rationality, or simply put, fiction. The question of historical knowledge was raised and must be settled on the field of poetics".[9]

Following Aristotle, Rancière argues that poetry is more philosophical than history, which for him meant the mere chronicling of facts. Indeed, "Poetry's superiority is the superiority of one form of temporality over another. History tells the things as they happen in their particularity, one after another, whereas poetry constructs a causal plot that tells us *how* they could happen, and how they happen as a consequence of their very possibility".[10] The kind of temporality we are dealing with here is the second one (poetry), dealing with time as the possible, both in empirical terms and as the result of a specific discourse concerning time and temporality. Citizenship, as one of the conditions of possibility of both political subjectivity and forms of government, is related to historical time as the analysis of the possible. Rancière goes on to argue that "this possibility itself, according to Aristotle, takes on two forms: necessity or verisimilitude."[11]

Both these forms of historical rationality are opposed to what Rancière names the "bad" form of time, that is "the time of mere succession in which things happen one after another, as particular and contingent facts – we could say the time of 'real' (not invented) facts".[12] Historical rationality does not depend on verification, but rather on "the specific form of temporality, the poetic form of temporality that links moments in time as causes and effects".[13]

Citizenship, I argue, intervenes precisely in relation to this form of temporality as poetry. Citizenship, in this meaning, is a "form of action and of life" and as such it relates to temporality. Following Rancière: "But the hierarchy opposing two forms of temporal connection on the

8 Holocaust denialists are understood by Rancière as the product of an understanding of history limited to what is deemed possible, as he writes: "[...] this radicalization itself (of Holocaust negativists) was the flipside of the common wisdom typical for post-democratic realism which pretended to stick in every way to the 'possible.'" Jacques Rancière, "Anachronism and the Conflict of Times," *Diacritics* 48, no. 2 (2020): 111.

9 Ibid., 112.

10 Rancière, "Anachronism and the Conflict of Times," 112.

11 Ibid., 112.

12 Ibid., 112.

13 Ibid., 112.

horizontal axis of time succession is itself dependent on another hierarchy, which is a hierarchy of forms of activity and ultimately a hierarchy of forms of life".[14] Citizenship is essentially related to temporality. Citizens are those individuals leading a public life, engaged in transforming themselves and the conditions of possibility of their lives, and thus engaged in transforming time itself: "the time of those who imagine ends and connect the means necessary for reaching them, even at the risk of seeing the chain of causes they have initiated bring about effects contrary to what they intended".[15] Passive citizens are those living in the private realm, a realm in which there is no time, meaning there is no attempt to change the course of events: "On the other side there was the time of those who were called passive men, not because they did nothing but because their activity took place within the time of events happening one after the other, with no ends other than those of immediate survival, no errors, no shift in fortune, no form of poetic rationality."[16]

There are different ways of being in time, influencing temporality as a succession of events. Citizenship, as a way of being political, comes into relation with different manners of being in time, that is, of building oneself as a subject in time. In opposition to an understanding of time as a succession of events, or even as a cause-effect rationality, there is an understanding of time as coexistence and simultaneity. As Rancière writes, "[t]he moment is no longer a link in a chain connecting past and future, cause and effect, it is defined as a principle of coexistence between a multiplicity of situations and activities which otherwise follow various temporal lines – slow or fast, linear or cyclical, straight or broken."[17]

The time of coexistence destroys both the hierarchy of time and the distinction between the time of active men or citizens and passive ones: "It is a time no longer made out of successive instances but of moments that penetrate each other and expand in various directions".[18] This is what Rancière calls the time of the everyday, an egalitarian time which is also the subversive time of the proletarians that he discusses in his essay *Proletarian Nights*: "The everyday has been materially changed and symbolically subverted".[19] Citizenship can mean both understandings of time, the time of the public life versus the time of the everyday, private life, as in Arendt,[20] or the subversive time of anonymous acts of citizenship which subvert the course of things, as in Rosa

14 Ibid., 113.
15 Rancière, "Anachronism and the Conflict of Times," 113.
16 Ibid., 113.
17 Ibid., 114.
18 Ibid., 115.
19 Jacques Rancière, *Proletarian Nights: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France* (London: Verso, 2012), as quoted in Rancière, "Anachronism and the Conflict of Times," 115.
20 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

Parks' acts or as in James Baldwin's narrative.[21] This time is conceptualized by Rancière as the time of emancipation: "This is what coexistence ultimately means [...] the time of the men and women who set out to experiment with forms of life, thought, emotion, and passion that their condition forbade".[22]

To what extent can the category of citizenship make sense of time as dispersion, contingency, simultaneity and thus emancipation rather than time as an organic unity in which the parts are subjected to the whole, as for example the understanding of an epoch or even national time? Simultaneity means the presence of several times in the same time, "not only the presence of the past in the present but also the encounter and clash between several lines of temporality".[23]

Citizenship, as an institution and as the discursive and material condensation of forms of life, expresses both temporality as anachronism and simultaneity, that is as the possibility of changing the given course of time, changing what is deemed possible in an epoch, and temporality as the crystallization of an epoch as a common and totalizing form of life. As Rancière writes: "The democratic time of coexistence woven by modern fiction is hijacked by another time, the time of the epoch thought of as a whole. The epoch is not simply a division within the historical continuum, it is a time unit based on the model of the living, organic totality that nineteenth-century sociology had contrasted with the revolutionary rupture of the "social bond".[24]

The emancipatory character of citizenship, or its "divisive power" at a given time, in a moment of historical crisis, is thus closely linked to how citizenship itself is understood as relating to historical time.

21 James Baldwin, *Collected Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1998).
22 Rancière, "Anachronism and the Conflict of Times," 116.
23 Ibid., 116.
24 Rancière, "Anachronism and the Conflict of Times," 116–17.

Reshaping Citizenship in Times of Crisis

So far, I have sketched a path toward a theory of the correlation between citizenship and time as political and historical categories. At this point, allow me to get back to the first question I raised at the beginning of the essay. I asked how the dual function of citizenship as a form of social closure and a tool of emancipation changes in times of crisis. Looking at citizenship as a form of social closure, I defined it as a reflexive institution. I also asked to what extent transformations of citizenship as a form of critical reflexivity indicate transformations in understanding the historical dimension we are in.

Time, Event and Crisis

Following Jaspers and Eisenstadt, historical reflexivity is associated with macro-institutional transformations within culturally entrenched structural principles. Citizenship, as a reflexive institution or structure, tends to have a certain stability over time. How do changes happen in a given situation or around specific events that would produce a transformation? A crisis is thus an event that shakes the stability of citizenship as a reflexive social structure and produces a change in the relation between the reflexive institution and historical time. According to Sewell:

> moments of accelerated change, I would argue, are initiated and carried forward by historical events. […] events typically do more than carry out a rearrangement of practices made necessary by gradual and cumulative social change. Historical events tend to transform social relations in ways that could not be fully predicted from the gradual changes that may have made them possible. What makes historical events so important to theorize is that they reshape history, imparting an unforeseen direction to social development and altering the nature of the causal nexus in which social interactions take place.[25]

Events can thus be defined as a sequence of occurrences that transform reflexive institutions and structures. Still, ruptures in the order of things happen constantly, but they do not necessarily determine the crisis and transformation of reflexive institutions. As Sewell argues:

> An occurrence only becomes a historical event, in the sense in which I use the term, when it touches off a chain of occurrences that durably transforms previous structures and practices. This happens above all when a rupture in one structural and spatial location also produces reinforcing ruptures in other locations.[26]

To be transformative, ruptures need to disarticulate the previous structural network, making it difficult to repair and making the rearticulation of the same reflexive structure possible. Historical ruptures reshape reflexive institutions, bringing to light new forms of understanding

25 William H. Sewell Jr., "Historical Events as Transformations of Structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille," *Theory and Society* 25, no. 6 (1996): 843.
26 Ibid., 843.

for assemblages that could not otherwise be explained using old reflexive institutions, and thus reframing the political and philosophical grammar of an epoch. Sewell, discussing the taking of the Bastille in 1789 as the transformative event that was identified with the revolution itself, explains how "the epoch-making cultural change – the invention of a new and enduring political category [the one of the revolution] – could, therefore, only take place in tandem with practical changes in institutional and military power relations".[27] The relationship between the French Revolution and modern citizenship is well-documented.[28] Still, very little research has been done on how citizenship is changing as a result of revolutions, wars, or other crisis events since then. Of course, the debate on citizenship and globalization is very rich, but it does not take the angle of reflecting on ruptures in citizenship as a reflexive institution. The perspective is rather one of the incremental changes to modern democratic citizenship, from the national model to the multi-level one. There is no discussion on shifts in the structure of modern democratic citizenship itself. Francis Fukuyama's diagnosis of the end of history after the victory of the liberal order[29] seems to have been fully applied to citizenship, a category that cannot be radically transformed anymore.[30]

As Wagner-Pacifici argues, historical events and ruptures like the French Revolution have as their effects the forging of new political subjects, thus the transformation of citizenship as a reflexive institution. To do so, historical subjects across multiple domains must undertake enormous efforts, as well as "the deployment of objects and acts under the frames of icons, speech acts, gestures, symbols, and more".[31] Transforming crisis and ruptures into new temporal and political lines, as well as into new forms of subjectivity, is a rare event. We must ask the question: is there still politics without the possibility of changing the course of time and shaping it into a new beginning?[32]

27 Ibid., 853.

28 Rogers Brubaker, "The French Revolution and the Invention of Citizenship," *French Politics and Society* 7, no. 3 (1989): 30–49.

29 Reference to the work of Fukuyama.

30 Yascha Mounk, "The End of History Revisited," *Journal of Democracy* 31, no 1 (2020): 22–35.

31 Robin Wagner-Pacifici, "What is an Event and Are We in One?," *Sociologica* 15, no. 1 (2021): 13.

32 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

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