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Social Citizenship and Cultural Citizenship. The Role of Social Rights in Promoting Cultural Citizenship

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Abstract

Through a brief reconstruction of the debate on social rights, the first part of the article aims at problematizing the general distinction between social and cultural citizenship together with their mutual connections and overlapping. It is argued that, far from being conceivable as impermeable boundaries, the separations between cultural and social rights are rather porous and flexible. In its second part, the article tackles more specifically the problem, focusing on the particular European conception of cultural citizenship. In its conclusion the role of a universalist system of education for the full enjoyment of cultural citizenship is highlighted.

Keywords: citizenship, social rights, cultural rights, European identity.

1. Social citizenship and cultural citizenship

Elaborated in the first half of the last century mainly by British sociology and political theory (Zolo, 1994), the classical definition of citizenship has always been linked to the sphere of belonging, of rights and of duties¹. From the institutional point of view, a space exists for citizenship and it is essentially that of the Nation-State. The citizen belongs to the Nation-State, which confers identity upon him. And like all identities, that of the citizen is also constructed

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¹ I realize that the expression implies a non-problematic, predictable relationship between the sphere of rights and that of belonging. It is in fact not so. An in-depth investigation of the issue would lead this paper far beyond its aims and its length. Without attempting a full explanation, it will suffice here to recall Brubaker (1989); Baccelli (1994, 1997); Faist (2001); Kivisto, Faist (2009).

through difference. This means that the Nation-State applies legal principles of exclusion and inclusion to determine, time by time, who its own members are. From this viewpoint, citizenship entails a network of criteria to distinguish the citizen from the foreigner.

The clearest and most exact picture of this concept of citizenship is the well-known one by T. Marshall. In his text *Citizenship and Social Class*, as brief as it is influential, the British sociologist observes how the modern form of western citizenship, as constructed in Europe after the Second World War, is made up of an integrated system of rights composed of three different elements: the civil, the political and the social (Marshall 1992/1950). By the civil element, Marshall refers to those rights that guarantee individual freedoms, such as the freedom of speech, of thought, of religion, but also that of owning property and stipulating contracts. In his opinion, the institutions directly connected to this family of rights are the courts of justice which allow the individual a defence of his own rights in a state of equality with respect to all the other citizens. With regard to the second element, Marshall is thinking above all of the political rights of active and passive suffrage, guaranteed by the existence and regular working of parliamentary institutions at a national and at a local level. Lastly, by social rights he refers to all the services provided by the welfare state to promote the well-being of the population. In his words:

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. The institutions most closely connected with it are the educational system and the social services (Marshall 1992/1950: 149).

As we see, in the classic, twentieth-century version of citizenship there seems to be no space whatever for any cultural dimension of rights, only their social dimension. Yet in Marshall's words it is difficult not to hear an echo of the impact that the cultural dimension might have on the whole citizenship issue. It is particularly noticeable when he makes a direct reference to the right to live the life of a civilized being according to the prevailing standards of any given society. We inevitably tend to add certain adjectives to the word 'standard': moral, social and lastly cultural.

Before investigating the question further, we should explain more clearly the topic of social rights of citizenship, the really distinctive trait of Marshall's theory. Such rights, as we have just seen, are closely connected to the bureaucratic-organizational set-up of the welfare state. This means that the concession of such rights depends on the existence of economic resources coming from a taxation system and thus ultimately from some form of

redistribution of wealth. And it is exactly this reason that convinces Marshall to consider this type of right as essential for the maintenance of social integration.

Beyond the important solidarity-symbolic element present in the system that finances welfare on the basis of the progressive taxation of income (Flora and Heidenheimer, 1983), social rights profoundly alter the structure of social disparity. In creating a health system, an education system, a system of assistance and support for the benefit of all, according to Marshall the use of such services translates what would otherwise unquestionably be status disparities into income disparities. To put it more clearly, if there were no state schools, public hospitals, state universities, social services etc., the differences between the social classes would constitute substantial identity differences, with those less well-off unable to be sure of having even the resources necessary for a satisfactory, secure life. Thanks to social rights, however, the differences between the rich and the poor can be included in the register of income, in principle a good deal less sensitive; with the former gaining advantage exclusively in the field of private consumption². One citizen earns more, the other less, but both have financed, and can count on, the same network of social security. That is, both have access to the same schools for their children, the same hospitals for treatment and the same rest homes for the care of their elderly. And more: guaranteeing a universalistic education system, in theory social citizenship brings about one of the essential characteristics of the liberal democracies, i.e., the equality *ex-ante* of all citizens. This means that everyone, on paper, has the same chances of social success. Thus in Marshall's theory, social citizenship, far from opposing capitalist development, is actually functional to it, contributing to a vital extent to tone down the tensions that, by its very nature, it introduces into the social body (Abramson, 2009).

Over the last decades of the twentieth century, the advancing crisis in the welfare state and the consequent dismantling of many of its services triggered a particularly attentive critical revision of Marshall's view of citizenship. The point most frequently debated by scholars concerns the wisdom of considering the set of services foreseen by the social component of citizenship in terms of rights in their literal sense. The debate has gone in many directions. One that to me seems especially interesting regards the figure of the citizen expressed in the very concept of a social right. To be less cryptic, civil rights and political rights envisage an active, productive citizen who expresses his own opinion, sets up

² If we wish to insist on the topic, we might say with Brillante (1994: 206) that 'in the history of citizenship qualitative disparity between men has progressively changed into quantitative or economic disparity, not only following the extension of citizenship to an increasing number of members of society, but also thanks to a progressive enhancement of the status of citizen'.

associations, stipulates contracts, votes for his own representatives. Social rights, however, refer to a passive citizen who uses services. This is, for example, the opinion of thinkers such as J. Barbalet (1988), P. Barcellona (1988) and D. Zolo (1994). Furthermore, according to Barbalet (1988), while the first two families of rights are enjoyed in a standard way by all citizens, the latter undergo a fairly heterogeneous series of variables that make their juridical formalization difficult, if not impossible. Zolo also expresses a similar position in this matter when he observes that ‘in the case of social rights it is a question of expectations regarding public services [...] which, together with relevant organizational and procedural elements, present above all an issue regarding content and therefore use up an extraordinarily high quantity of resources’ (Zolo, 1994: 30).

Yet beyond the issue of resources, to be dealt with further on, we should concentrate on the content issue mentioned by Zolo. Take, for example, the right to health, unquestionably one of the cornerstones of social citizenship. As Brillante (1994) suggests, it is true that it may easily be actualized in the right to health assistance. However, it is also true that, from the empirical point of view, it passes through a series of operative contingencies which time by time greatly modify its enjoyment. If an experience within a health structure, or the treatment received from a doctor, nurse or any other operator is not firstly a positive experience from the human point of view, what will be said of the way in which the State guarantees its social citizenship? It is evident that a service foreseen in theory as uniform may become during its actual performance different from time to time according to contexts, people and, above all, cultures to which all these belong.

And this brings us to what Marshall said regarding the prevailing standards that hold within a given society. It is clear enough that the cultural plurality featured in our societies makes it very hard to give one single definition of what the “prevailing standard” should mean. To go back to the issue previously mentioned, the existence of different cultures, of different ways of understanding what is to be meant by health treatment, for example, introduces complications by no means secondary to the egalitarian enjoyment of the right to health.

Identical remarks can easily be directed at the second cornerstone of social citizenship, that is the right to education. On this issue, I think it useful to recall events in the United States regarding what anthropologist Renato Rosaldo has defined as the debate on curricula (Rosaldo, 1994). At the end of the Eighties at the University of Stanford, there was some discussion on what the basic education for an undergraduate student should be. What were the ‘minimum notions’ he should possess? What books should he have read? These questions concerned all undergraduate students of Stanford since they were obliged to pass a course on western civilization based on a core list of 15 texts, having the

supposed aim of outlining the symbolic network epitomizing American culture. The titles were the following:

Genesis

A selection of passages from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*

A Greek tragedy

Plato, *The Republic*

The New Testament

Dante, *Inferno*

More, *Utopia*

Machiavelli, *The Prince*

Luther, *On Christian Freedom*

Galilei, *The Starry Messenger*, *The Assayer*

Augustine, *Confessions*

Voltaire, *Candide*

Marx and Engels, *The Communist Party Manifesto*

Freud, *Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, *Civilization and its Discontents*

In commenting on this bibliographical apparatus, Rosaldo (1994) suggests imagining the situation of a Stanford professor in front of a first-year class, half of them women, 45% Afro-Americans and 3% Hispanics, and having to set up a course on texts all written by men, most of them white, none of them having American citizenship. After a long discussion, the Faculty Senate of Stanford decided to give the teachers a free hand in the making of their own book lists, different time by time, in order to meet the requirements emerging during their encounters with the students³. In this case too we have to see how cultural diversity exercised pressure on the application of a social right.

We must proceed in this direction to observe a first concept of cultural citizenship. The enjoyment of rights, especially social rights, does not come about in a cultural vacuum. With all due respect for Marshall, who was indeed then in a position to speak in the singular of a prevailing standard and social heritage, we have to take into account the fact that within a Nation-State the identities and belongings are multiple, transversal and complex, and that the twentieth-century citizenship dream of subsuming and unifying the whole of cultural diversity contained within it has definitively vanished. Cultural citizenship first of all has to do with the recognition and respect for differences; secondly, with the attempt, as difficult and risky as it is urgent, right and proper, to take them into full account in modulating the network of rights and duties.

³ On this topic, see also the interesting article by H. Lindenberger (1990).

2. Cultural citizenship as cosmopolitan citizenship

Needless to say, in order to have the core list of fifteen books in the programme of the western civilization course reviewed, there were protests, action on the part of the Stanford Faculty Senate, demonstrations on campus, arguments and clashes among colleagues of the various departments and among the students, etc. Nor should we neglect the media pandemonium that such events caused; it even reached our shores and flooded the press agendas in Italy. For instance, *La Stampa* newspaper bore the headline *I classici banditi*; again, in *La Stampa*, Cavalli-Sforza wrote an article under the heading *Alla ricerca di un Dante nero, Searching for a Black Dante*. Before all this, however, in order for the list of 15 to be abrogated, someone had to realize that the proposed books listed for the course on western civilization was, let us say, detrimental to the cultural rights of a large part of the university population and that, simply through its codification, it would go a great way towards marginalizing most of the ethnic groups present in Stanford. In clearer terms, to obtain revision of the fifteen-book list there had to be someone capable of recognizing that it contained an expression of the power to nominate, i.e., the expression of a force of social construction of reality for the purpose of evaluating certain groups and silencing others. Furthermore, in having its own demands for a revision of the western culture course book requirement accepted, the protest movement also contributed to a process of social construction of reality.

To my mind, in these mechanisms a second acceptance of the concept of cultural citizenship appears implicit. Such an acceptance essentially indicates the right to take part in the discursive mechanisms that socially construct the world in which we live. Above all, the cosmopolitan character of this second prospect needs to be stressed and disconnected, so to speak, from the prospects of the Nation-State from which the classical conceptions of citizenship have always stemmed (Delanty, 2001). Apart from the political sympathies it has always featured, cultural citizenship conceived of in this way foresees a continual participation of the subjects and the groups present within civil society in defining and redefining social reality, whether national or supranational.

3. Europe and cultural citizenship

I realize that these considerations risk appearing vague and transitory. Please allow me, therefore, to supply a concrete example of this way of understanding cultural citizenship. One of the most recurrent topics in the sphere of European tenders included in the Horizon 2020 programme is the

so-called European Cultural Heritage, intended as the means or device to be used in order to construct a European identity and culture. This is one of the leitmotifs of Union funding. The reasons behind this insistence on the part of the EU for identity and culture are easy to understand.

The history of European integration shows a clear confrontation between two different schools of thought, the neo-functionalist and the federalist (Bekemans, 1990). The former, prevalent for a long time, thinks that integration can be achieved through the constitution of a common economic space. In this view, integration would emerge as a spill-over from the economic sphere which would gradually invest the other social spheres such as those of politics, law and culture (Haas, 1958; George, 1985). The federalist school, on the other hand, sees integration as being achieved mainly by means of politics, through planning and realizing a series of community institutions for the creation from scratch of a supranational administrative structure (Brugmans, 1969).

In order to understand fully the reasons for the failure of both visions, it may be useful to return to the conclusions of the think-tank on the cultural and spiritual dimension of Europe, appointed in 2002 by the then President of the UE, Romano Prodi (Biedenkopf, Geremek, Michalski, 2005). These conclusions certify the definitive decline of the founding project of Europe regarding the processes of economic expansion. Markets – it is said – do indeed lay the economic foundations for the existence of the Union as a political entity, but they can by no means be considered as the only energies on which to find its development. If, on the one hand, it is true that the economy supplies the essential resources for a prosperous community life, on the other it is also true that it triggers forces which, if not appropriately managed, cause lacerations of the social body which cannot heal. For these reasons, it is evident that the political future of the Union requires a solidarity basis strong enough to succeed in compensating the centrifugal tendencies perforce entailed in the functioning of markets.

However, the same group again warns against hoping to find such a solidarity basis in the legal cohesion that until today has guaranteed consistence and cogency for the institutional complex of the Union. Imposing their will from on high, so to speak, without incorporating the common wishes of a European *demos*, the Community institutions do nothing but raise feelings of distance and otherness in the citizens of the different member states (Tsaliki, 2007). The constraint is felt with no comprehension of the reasons behind it. Therefore, what Europe appears to need so urgently has something to do with a real sense of common belonging, a sense felt by each of the citizens living within its political space, something able to bridge that deep gap of legitimation that so seriously jeopardizes the life of its institutions. The problem, then, lies

in managing to stimulate such a feeling, in identifying the sources inspiring it and in planning the most effective devices for its propagation.

In this regard, the concepts of culture and identity seem to indicate a way out of the impasse, a basis on which we can attempt to construct a third route, alternative both to the neo-functionalist and to the federalist approach (Sassatelli, 2002). To be more exact, the development of a European culture, in the sense of a symbolic aggregate accepted and shared by most Union inhabitants, would be a starting point on which to build common identification practices. Inevitably, the point concerns what must be understood by European culture and identity. What symbolical system can be considered typically European? What does it mean to feel that one is European? What is the relationship between European identity and the other spheres of belonging (national, regional, local) that characterize the life of Community citizens?

The Union has answered these questions with a range of arguments that can be summarized by the expression *united in diversity*. Very briefly, the identity project of Europe in no way intends to offer itself as an alternative to the different national identities, nor to set itself up as a synthesis of them all, or even worse, as a patchwork of them all. Rather, it does intend to set out from the symbolical heritages of the various national communities, although on the basis of their multi-vocal value (Kertzer, 1988; Wagner-Pacifi, Schwartz, 1991; Cerulo, 1997) or, if you prefer, on the dialogue value. It would in fact be precisely the debate on traditions, history, expectations and the ways of implementing values within each national culture to fuel and carry forward progressively what must be understood as European culture and identity. In other words, European culture and identity cannot and must not be considered as things or as facts, but as processes. This means that the answer to the above questions lies essentially in their continuous re-proposal and, for as long as Europe is something present and not past, they can never find an ultimate answer. All in all, the culture and identity of Europe consist in their recursive negotiation (Biedenkopf, Geremek, Michalski, 2005). In speaking of cultural citizenship, I believe that it is in this direction we must look, in a direction enabling subjects to call into question continuously the identity of others and, above all, their own.

4. More regarding social rights

In conclusion, allow me to return for an instant to the social component of citizenship. A further reason for Marshall's interpreters believing that it

cannot properly be understood in terms of rights is that the enjoyment of welfare services depends above all on conditions (economic, organizational or other kinds) that are not completely dependent on the State's wishes. That is, the enjoyment of the voting right or of the right to stipulate valid contracts does not depend on particular resources. But what can be said of the rights to education and health? The rationalization of expenditure with the closure of small hospitals in the provinces, the introduction and the rising costs of fees for medical visits, the on-going reduction in social spending: do all these have consequences for the enjoyment of the right to health? The same can easily be said of the right to education. What is meant by education? What does good educational training mean today? What are the conditions, whether structural, organizational or of human resources, necessary and sufficient to guarantee an excellent education for everyone? On the basis of these reasons, many interpreters of Marshall's citizenship have maintained that actually social rights are not effectively rights but services dispensed by the State to its own citizens whose numbers may be enlarged or, more probably, restricted on the basis, as Balrbalet (1988) writes, of conditional opportunities. That is, on the basis of conditions, economic conditions especially but not only, in which the state institutions find themselves.

To such objections we may respond by attempting to observe the relations existing between the three components of citizenship. As we said at the outset, in Marshall's opinion citizenship is made up of an *integrated* system of three different spheres of rights. We may therefore wonder what is meant by integration and how it comes about. A suggestion in this direction is to be found in the same text by Marshall (1950). At the beginning of his essay he observes how the right to justice, while being part of the civil sphere of citizenship, represents something of a different order, which performs a function that is fundamental with respect to the other two components of modern citizenship, in that it makes it possible to affirm and defend all individual rights in conditions of equality with the other citizens. In other terms, although a civil right in the fullest sense, the right to justice exercises control on the enjoyment both of political rights and of social rights. From this point of view, then, it would appear misleading to think of the three components of modern citizenship as being rigidly separated. Indeed, as Brillante (1994) suggests, the boundaries between them seem to be fairly permeable, enabling a prolific exchange among the different rights of which they are composed.

So, we have to wonder what the role of social rights is towards the other two families of rights. We saw in the literature of sociology how, in virtue of the nature of their funding, they perform a function that is essentially integrative for the whole social complex. But beyond their undoubtedly important symbolical services, the point is to attempt to observe the practical work they

carry out for the complex of citizenship itself, and then immediately for the general solidity of democratic systems. To be precise, is it possible to imagine full enjoyment of civil and political rights without social rights being guaranteed? Without guaranteeing a minimum of education, health, social security, could we count on the orderly working of the political and civil spheres of citizenship? We do not have to go far for an answer. It is enough to look at what happens in Italy in the regions where the welfare state has for the most part been dismantled. For example, I do not believe it is a coincidence that phenomena like vote-buying are more or less endemic in those areas where the enjoyment of social citizenship is little more than a chimera. Nor that it is coincidental that the political and civil life of the country is clearly more lively in the areas where the social state has a consolidated tradition. For obvious reasons. Without being guaranteed the basic necessities for a secure, satisfying life, citizens risk degenerating into subjects and consequently having to beg for the chance to gain those concessions that they should claim as their rights. Social rights may therefore rest on conditional opportunities⁴, but from the empirical point of view they seem to be an essential component of the correct functioning of the overall juridical system of citizenship.

Having cleared up this point, I would like to conclude by taking the reflection a little further, to show how social rights, especially educational rights, represent an essential juncture to guarantee the cultural component of citizenship as well. We have seen how cultural citizenship basically means the practice of participation in the discursive formations structuring our reality. The European example seems to me extremely pertinent. On the same subject, it has been remarked (Sassatelli, 2002) that beyond the concrete results achieved by European research projects in the field of the common cultural heritage, the really positive effect is to be found in the dialogue they trigger between researchers from the various European universities. In other words, the real effect in terms of identity and European culture is in the encounter that necessarily comes about among those taking part in these projects. Think, for instance, of the Erasmus Project. A programme of exchanges between university students, with the aim of stimulating among young people the awareness of belonging to a supranational society to which they themselves can make a contribution.

⁴ From this point of view, we may note that civil rights as well, not to speak of political rights, rest on conditional opportunities. See Plant (1986). On the other hand, it is unquestionably true, as Zolo (1994) suggests, that the investment of resources necessary for the so-called first-generation rights is certainly less onerous than that necessary to guarantee social rights.

The point, however, obviously involves those who, in practice, are placed in a position to take part in these initiatives. Who are the subjects who more than others have the opportunity to take part in these exchanges? Are there any barriers which, in terms of capital, whether economic, cultural or social, limit this individual in his cultural citizenship? If, for instance, we adopt the European outlook on cultural citizenship we may perhaps wonder about the distinguishing characteristics of the groups in charge of the projects financed. It is evident that educational training of high quality, accessible and continually up-dated, is the main condition to be fulfilled if we are talking about cultural citizenship. And, once again, when we talk of education, there is no way we can avoid talking about schools, universities and the whole of their administrative, and obviously also political, organization.

One last note. Take what R. Delanty (2001) wrote on what is to be understood by cultural citizenship:

Thus citizenship as cultural citizenship is about the status of culture as discursively constructed. [...] The advantage of cultural citizenship in this sense is that it shifts the focus of citizenship onto common experiences, learning processes and discourses of empowerment. The power to name, create meaning, construct personal biographies and narratives by gaining control over the flow of information, goods and cultural processes is an important dimension of citizenship as an active process. In this regard what needs to be stressed is the learning dimension of citizenship as a constructivist process. (Delanty, 2001: 64).

According to what Delanty believes, the role played by educational rights in promoting cultural citizenship is, to my way of thinking, quite self-evident. What I consider needs to be noted and may indeed be the basis for future in-depth work is the active conception on the part of the subject that cultural citizenship envisages. It would appear that in some way the cultural dimension of citizenship transforms that citizen, a passive consumer of state services, into a subject who actively sets in motion his own competence and his own creativity in the construction of those symbolical worlds through which he himself is passing.

In any case, at the root of this form of citizenship we again find social rights. And permit me to remark how even – and above all – in this case a universalistic form of social rights, educational rights in particular, is absolutely necessary if we do not want cultural citizenship to be a politically correct label used as a mask to further an umpteenth propagation of inequality in the distribution of power: cosmopolitan élites who, worldwide, talk over the heads of the masses, increasingly culturally deprived and shut up within the narrow confines of the Nation-State.

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