



The sexual politics of citizenship and violence



Suzanne Franzway

University of South Australia, Adelaide 5001, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Citizenship
Gender
Sexual politics
Violence
The state

ABSTRACT

Violence against women appears to be endemic even in those societies where women have formal and equal citizenship. The influential theorist of citizenship, T.H. Marshall, found the status of women, or at least married women to be 'in some important respects peculiar'. Women in social democratic societies seem to have overcome those peculiarities and achieved full citizenship. And yet women's rights as citizens continue to be undermined by violence, specifically gender-based violence. In order to address the question about the apparent failure of citizenship rights to protect women from persistent violence this paper will suggest that the state is integral to our understandings as well as to any useful strategies for change. Based on the argument that citizenship is defined and practiced in terms of the sexual politics of contested gender relations, the paper argues that the state connects citizenship and violence. The persistence of violence against women is implicated in the sexual politics of citizenship. Hence, the challenge of violence against women is recognised as an issue for the state, citizenship and the whole community. Campaigns to recognise this challenge are becoming valuable sources of agency and activism as can be seen in recent campaigns and heightened media attention.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

'Don't you have problems like domestic violence, sexual harassment, things like that?' 'Oh yes,' they said, 'but these are not women's issues, they are community issues—they have to be solved by the whole community'. (Women living in slums of Bombay Batliwala, 2013).

The story of civil rights... is one of gradual addition of new rights to a status that was held to appertain to all adult members of the community—or perhaps one should say to all male members, since the status of women, or at least of married women, was in some important respects peculiar (Marshall, 1950).

Introduction

The women of Bombay see violence against women as community issues, as a problem for the whole society. The classic theorist, T.H. Marshall sees (married) women as having a peculiar status, which excludes them from full citizenship. While even married women now appear to have overcome their peculiarities and achieved full citizenship, their rights as citizens continue to be damaged by the persistence of violence against women. The question is raised, why does women's citizenship not provide them with more protection from what is specifically gender-based violence? How can the whole community solve this problem?

E-mail address: Suzanne.franzway@unisa.edu.au.

Such questions suggest that there are interconnections between citizenship, violence and gender. In this paper, I examine the meanings of each term and their historical, political and social interdependencies. On the question of how to address the problem of the persistence of violence, I further suggest that the state is integral to understandings as well as to strategies for change. I argue that citizenship is gendered, but that we need to reconsider the meaning of gender; that citizenship is constituted within the power of the state, and that power and thus violence is also integral to the state and is very much part of the dynamics of gender and citizenship.

Citizenship

Citizenship is a highly contested concept (Hall & Held, 1990; Hearn, Oleksy, & Golanska, 2010; Lister, 1997, 2003; Mann, 1987; Turner, 1997; Walby, 1994), but continues to be central to meanings and practices of everyday life. It is now thought to be a sign of modernity and of justice, freedom, equality, dignity and integrity of the self. Yuval-Davis and Werbner describe citizenship as 'inflected by identity, social positioning, cultural assumptions, institutional practices and a sense of belonging' (Yuval-Davis & Werbner, 1999 4). Historically, the notion of citizenship emerged in conjunction with the development of structured and ordered power in forms of the state. It is the state which enables, supports and secures citizenship. The rights, duties and freedoms of citizenship depend on a structured and ordered power; disorder and chaos undermine the status and practices of citizenship. The state's power relies on its control of violence, institutionalised in its control of the

military and the police. Gender has always been integral to the state and to citizenship. Race, ethnicity and structural inequalities of class, caste and status likewise are important (depending on context) to the fluid concept of citizenship, but each requires specific historical and epistemological argument to untangle the intersectionality of their constructs and effects.

Mainstream definitions of citizenship tend to avoid attention to either gender or violence. For example, citizenship may be defined as 'passive and active membership of individuals within a nation-state with universalistic rights and obligations at specified levels of equality' (Janoski & Gran, 2002: 3). Debates on definitions of citizenship focus on the question of the universal rights of individuals rather than challenging the conceptualisation of individuals as gender-neutral, reinforced by the all-encompassing notions of universalistic rights and obligations. Strategically, universal rights may enable greater legitimacy and discursive leverage in legislatures and the courts than specific group rights are likely to (Kymlicka, 1995).

Feminist theorists do contest the universality of citizenship arguing that 'there are assumptions within the broad concept of citizenship of universality, that citizenship status transcends "particularity and difference"' (Young, 1989: 250). Lister suggests citizenship can incorporate both meanings (Lister, 2002). By contrast Chantal Mouffe (1992) criticises those who attempt to replace the false universalism of traditional conceptualizations of citizenship with 'a sexually differentiated, "bi-gendered" conception of the individual and to bring women's so-called specific tasks into the very definition of citizenship' (Mouffe, 1992: 375). Instead of 'making sexual difference politically relevant to its definition', Mouffe argues for 'a new conception of citizenship where sexual difference should become effectively non pertinent' (Mouffe, 1992: 376). The problem with such suggestions is that the notions of sexual difference, women's specific tasks or bi-gendered conceptions is that they are constituted as static categories and fail to incorporate the dynamic of historical and social meanings of gender. The result is that critical thinking about citizenship and gender is limited to making claims for the visibility of difference while the importance of the power of the state to citizenship is sidelined.

Gender and sexual politics

Much of the research literature, theorising and analysis of citizenship and of violence tends to take the meaning of gender for granted; it is generally understood to refer to women as a social category, or to relations between women and men, or less often, to a diversity of sexualities. Women's disadvantaged situation in most societies is generally inferred by a gesture towards gender, such as in the phrase, gendered work, which implies unequal work for women as well as different work conditions from men. Focus on how women's inequality is produced and reproduced is relatively rare. To give just one example: Lister's discussion of the value and centrality of the concept of 'gendered citizenship' refers to the 'gendered experience of the public/private divide' (Lister, 2011: 32). She goes on to point to 'the gendered division of labor and time as well as questions of bodily integrity.' The clear implication is that women's experience is disadvantaged relative to men's experience. When terms such as experience and divisions of labour are qualified by 'gendered', as in these examples, we understand their meaning to incorporate not only that different genders are involved but also that the genders are unequal to the advantage of men. Or more precisely, to the advantage of heterosexual men. How this comes about and how it continues is unspoken. Women's disadvantage just is. It exists without any apparent causes or as a result of any material, discursive, historical or current struggles.

The notion of gender relied on here carries implicit assumptions about inequality, which has the unfortunate consequence that women appear to be always and already unequal. And so nothing can be done to change the position fundamentally. Alternatively, when gender is invisible or the category such as the individual member of

the nation-state is gender-neutral, the effect is that nothing needs to be done. For feminists, neither position is acceptable. One useful move has been to bring 'the gendering of citizenship' into the light. As Jeff Hearn puts it, 'The silence that has persisted on the category of men [as gendered actors] in both theory and practice around citizenship' (Hearn, 2002: 246) can be made explicit by naming 'men as men'. However, this effectively continues to rely on the assumption men are not simply men, but that they are advantaged in relation to women, that they are unequally powerful. And it is this unequal power that needs to be addressed if progressive change is to be achieved.

In order to develop an understanding of gender as dynamic, social and implicated in power Franzway (2001) proposes a modified version of the term, sexual politics, derived from Kate Millet (1969). Sexual politics incorporates understandings of gender as fluid and relational, and centrally, that gender relations are continually being contested. In sexual politics, contested gender relations are dynamic and therefore open to change, including transformative challenges to women's disadvantage. Sexual politics is not simply a matter of women in conflict with men, but recognises the wide and mobile diversities of gendered identities. For example, non-heterosexual men have a chequered history in which they may join with other men in benefitting from male dominance, but at other times and places are subject to its most intense controls and constraints (Browne, Lim, & Brown, 2007; Seidman, 1997; Tiemeyer, 2013). The achievement of male dominance is constantly being re-claimed and re-asserted as it is challenged by the shifting and changing meanings and effects of gender, power, masculinities, femininities, bodies, and material, social and political contexts.

Structures of power are shaped by sexual politics re-producing the gender inequalities of the public/private divide and the patriarchal state. Relations of gender are never settled, although the apparent universality of male dominance and gender inequality gives that impression (Okin, 1991). If the sexual politics of relations of gender were fixed, the considerable and constant efforts to enforce and maintain male dominance of the relations of gender would not be needed (Bradley, 2013; Connell, 1987; Tuana, 2006; Walby, 2009). Such efforts may be simple, such as the bland television panel with no women speakers, or much more complex, such as the wilful ignorance about causes for workplace inequality (Franzway, Sharp, Mills, & Gill, 2009; Mills, Franzway, Gill, & Sharp, 2013), the cultural violence of sexual harassment, and the systemic inequalities integral to the sexual division of labour. These efforts limit and constrain those who are not (heterosexual) men from exercising their human capacities to learn and produce knowledge, to grow and create art and policy, technologies and social organisations, to build and lead communities, to embody public power. And yet, ways are found and created to circumvent or transcend such limitations and to challenge men's dominance of sexual politics (see for example Batliwala, 2013 on women's empowerment in India). The subordination of women demands unceasing attention, since subordination can never be finally stabilised. It is always being contested.

Citizenship and gender

Understood in these terms, I argue that gender has not been excluded or ignored in the development of citizenship. Citizenship has always been defined, understood and practiced in terms of gender. That is, of sexual politics. The definitions and content of citizenship changes with the sexual politics of contested gender relations around constructs of power from the emergence of the Athenian city state to the democratic nation-state. The earliest documented forms of citizenship developed in the city state of Athens in which only (free) men could be citizens. Neither slaves nor women could be citizens. As Gordon Childe observes: '...citizens secured leisure for politics and culture largely at the expense of their wives, of aliens who had no share in the government, and of slaves who had no rights whatever' (Childe, 1954: 207). Citizenship was defined in gendered terms, where gender was a specific criterion

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/375857>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/375857>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)