

## **Citizenship concepts and geography**

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### **Abstract**

This chapter introduces how different theories of citizenship have been used in geography and the significance of space and place to concepts of citizenship. In particular it compares Western and non-Western understandings of citizenship by outlining concepts of citizenship that have emerged in ‘Western’ countries and their changing relationship to the nation-state. The chapter also discusses the formation and significance of ‘non-Western’ conceptualizations of citizenship using selected examples to illustrate the arguments. Finally, the chapter considers relational and post-national accounts of citizenship, and raises the possibilities of hybridised and practices of global citizenship that transcend the nation-state, and challenges Western/non Western binaries of citizenship.

**Keywords:** active citizenship, activism, citizenship, community, duties, global citizenship, nation-state, orientalism, public sphere, religion, rights, scale, subjectivity, voluntarism, transnationalism

### **Introduction**

Citizenship is an important idea in geography. Broadly speaking, citizenship refers to a person’s relationship with a political unit but the precise ways in which it has been thought of and practiced by geographers reflect different historical, philosophical, political and cultural traditions. Some scholars analyse citizenship normatively as a political philosophy or legal status, while others draw attention to the practices of citizenship, such as how communal duties are accepted and performed by citizens, but also present the potential for contesting citizenship. Geographers have contrasted state-sanctioned forms of active, communal citizenship with activist forms of citizenship that use spaces as sites of protest. Others have argued that greater attention should be given to everyday forms of citizenship and what this tells us about de facto and de jure exclusion and inclusion in spaces below the level of nation state. Despite debate about its use, concepts of citizenship are gaining attention in geography for their ability to analyse and influence how social, cultural and political processes combine to shape particular places.

Citizenship has widely been used in the West to describe a person's relationship with a nation-state and, in particular, the rights and duties that are associated with it. It also defines and confers legal-status on the membership of the nation-state and, with it, forms of political and social inclusion. Citizenship further functions as a social compact between citizens and the state, such that citizens assign to the state the authority to govern and, in turn, obey the rules set out by the state and are entitled to rights. Consequently, considerable attention has been given to the importance of individual liberty, privacy and 'the right to rights' with national frameworks of citizenship. Increasingly, these concepts of citizenship are being challenged as new forms and iterations of citizenship are recognised in spaces above, below and beyond the nation-state. Within citizenship studies, a turn towards 'citizenship after orientalism' has also give greater attention to the genealogies and practices of citizenship in non-Western societies, thus challenging and re-conceptualising Western interpretations of citizenship. Yet, far from weakening the concept of citizenship, these debates are leading to new, spatially attuned concepts of citizenship that recognise the significance of geography to citizenship and vice versa.

This chapter introduces these issues and is organised around three themes. First, it outlines concepts of citizenship that have emerged in 'Western' countries and their changing relationship to the nation-state. The second section discusses the formation and significance of 'non-Western' conceptualizations of citizenship using selected examples to illustrate the arguments. While we do not mean to reify cultural distinctions between Western and non-Western societies, this structure allows us to highlight qualitative aspects of how citizenship has evolved differently in different parts of the world. The final discussion considers relational and post-national accounts of citizenship, and raises the possibilities of hybridised and practices of global citizenship that transcend the nation-state, and challenges Western/non Western binaries of citizenship.

### **Expressions of citizenship in Western societies**

The Western contractual model of citizenship takes as its premise that citizens are rights-bearing and rights-claiming individuals. The Ancient Greek polis, in which citizens exercised their claims to rights in the agora (public square), is seen as the classical model through which modern citizenship evolved. In the fourth century BC, Aristotle's 'The Politics' argued that people were political beings whose potential could only be recognised by participating in a *polis* or city state. These ideas established some of the broader principles that have influenced some Western ideals of citizenship. Three aspects are particularly important. First, citizenship stressed the ideals of service and privileges: citizens had not only rights but also duties to participate in public, political and judicial processes. Second, citizenship was inclusionary and, by definition, exclusionary as well. Citizenship was only available to men over twenty who were heads of their households, slave owners, warriors and of a recognised genealogy. Citizenship was elitist; very few enjoyed its benefits. Finally, citizenship was also bound to a particular territory, in this case the city-state. Thus, a citizen of Athens was only a citizen of Athens rather than Sparta or another city state. A city's territorial limits defined the physical extent of citizenship but, at the same time, wove citizens into its social, political and economic fabric.

Many of these practices were lost in the West with the rise of feudalism in Medieval Europe, though, of course, other versions of citizenship existed in other, non-Western places. Citizenship re-emerged in the West during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century to bolster the growth of the nation-state. Sociologist T.H Marshall's (1950 [1992]) seminal essay on 'Citizenship and Social Class'

traced the development of civic, political and social rights in England. Significantly, his work observed a shift from forms of justice and welfare that were locally administered to local people, to the development of socio-judicial networks that aimed to deliver universal rights at a national level. In part, this was in response to migrations that took citizens from their place of birth to cities or other places of work. Citizenship provided identity, a degree of social control and, significantly uniform rights at a national level. Marshall's essay celebrates a liberal model of citizenship that has been important in many Western countries, especially the United Kingdom. In part, it reflects the hopes inspired by the post-war formation of the welfare state and National Health Service (NHS) as means of delivering social rights to all. In contrast to the Greek model, citizenship and the rights associated with it were regarded as universal. The extent to which this is the case has been a cause for concern by geographers, many of whom have examined the difference between *de jure* (legal) and *de facto* (the reality) rights of citizens within and between different states, prompting speculation that many are still excluded from full citizenship on the grounds of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age or disability. Marshall's work remains significant but was criticized by later commentators for its focus on England, gender blindness, and an apparent historical predetermination that glosses over many of the struggles associated with gaining, claiming and maintaining rights.

Many countries, even in the Global North, did not follow the same progression of rights. Different models of citizenship have developed based on the distinct historical and political circumstances of particular nation-states. These distinguish between the extent, type and performance of rights as well as the significance placed on public space. A key distinction, for example, has been between liberal models of citizenship that emphasize rights, public space, and the significance of government in delivering these, and Republican models that place more emphasis on duty, community and locality. The latter is influential in the USA, reflecting a historic mistrust of 'big government' and a championing of the individual and local community over that of the state. Emphasis is placed on active political and social participation at the local level through, for example, town-hall meetings, religious congregations, voluntary and civic groups. Often these ideals are supported by public acts, such as swearing allegiance to a flag, to remind people that their status as citizens was achieved through struggle and that they have a duty to the state. The balance between rights and duties constitutes a shifting and contested political terrain. Over recent years, many neo-liberal Western governments have retreated from the state's responsibility to provide social and welfare rights and, instead, placed greater obligations on the private and voluntary sector. This has required individuals and communities to live as active rather than passive citizens by participating in and supporting voluntary, community-based forms of action.

Different forms of citizenship have different spatialities. Thus, in states which prioritize active models, local meeting places or voluntary organisations encapsulate what is valued about citizenship. By contrast government offices and public services reflect the values of liberal citizenship. Nevertheless, all of these forms of citizenship are bound by and into the territory of the state. Thus, rights and duties serve to bind citizens into the political-judicial-social networks of a nation-state to such an extent that they are usually lost when sovereign borders are crossed (a British citizen, for example, does not have rights to free health care at the point of delivery in the USA as he or she would in the UK). Formally and legally, Western models of citizenship, however diverse, remain wedded to the nation-state. In contrast, non-Western thinking has challenged the idea that citizenship should be bound to the nation-state, as the following section examines.

### **Expressions of citizenship in non-Western societies**

Outside of Europe, citizenship was introduced through the extension of a Westphalian system of sovereignty and territoriality to other parts of the world. Citizenship, as a means of organizing national membership, became extended to other political units desiring to be part of an international community of nation-states. For countries that underwent colonization and decolonization, modern citizenship was often introduced in unsolicited, violent, and contradictory ways. Postcolonial scholars and intellectuals argue against the imposition of Western citizenship values in non-Western contexts. They note that citizenship rights need to be understood relationally and grounded in specific histories of different regions, rather than through ideological or discursive lens. How political subjectivities are recognized, interpreted, and organized hierarchically are deeply entwined with the ways in which forms of knowledge about colonialism and colonial subjects were represented. Studying political subjectivity through Western-centric approaches towards citizenship means researchers may miss other types of political subjectivities. Citizenship theorist Engin Isin thus called for studies of 'citizenship after orientalism' that would uncover the ways in which colonial discourses and practices instituted certain 'norms' of citizenship or disqualified other forms of indigenous political subjectivity. This would allow for recovering previously concealed political knowledges and practices that can forge new conceptualizations of the political subject. Investigating how people outside of Western polities thought about and developed practices of self-rule, rights and contestation elicits approaches that can decentre hegemonic Western conceptions of citizenship that were transplanted to those polities through colonialism and modernization.

Colonial powers encouraged colonized societies to maintain their cultural identities and manage their communities in a separately from the public sphere (e.g. using customary laws). Such communities were thus regarded as cultural communities rather than political communities. In investigating the religious institutions known as mathas in India, anthropologist Aye Ikegame argues that the withdrawal of the religious into the private sphere in Western political thought meant that colonialist and orientalist thinking presumed that civil society did not exist in non-Western societies. Yet the mathas and the gurus who functioned as religious leaders provided social welfare to the communities they served and exercised authority over certain matters. Moreover, conflict over royal honours between competing mathas resembled what is recognised popularly today as protests and demonstrations. However, the social and political roles of the mathas cannot be grasped if we remain bound to a lens that ignore the political cultures of other regions that do not fit within the state-civil society binary more common in Western analyses of citizenship.

In fact expressions of citizenship have existed in non-Western societies even prior to colonialism. Sociologist Jurgen Habermas' theory of the public sphere as an epochal space of public discussions over government policy provided an account of how citizenship subjectivities emerged. This account has been critiqued for privileging the male bourgeois subject. However, alternative accounts, such as those by Nancy Fraser or Hannah Arendt that are premised on feminist critiques or rights-based arguments respectively, in turn privilege a particular account of citizenship subjectivity that makes a claim to and exercises rights (contesting an identifiable authority with the intention of revision). This approach reduces political action to assertion despite the existence of other forms of political subjectivity that struggle against oppression that is diffused or arbitrary yet encompassing, thus differentiating citizenship acts from citizenship claims.

Moreover, the pre-colonial imaginary of the state in non-Western societies may have a different spatial organisation from the Westphalian model with the former reflecting the diffusion of

power from the centre to the peripheries, and where peripheral segments exhibit the freedom to switch their allegiances contingently. With the construction of the modern-state, remnants of this spatial organisation remain. For example, in Thailand, the Tai Kingdoms that pre-date modern Thailand conceptualised difference in a spatial rather than ethnic way such that those who dwelled further away (space of wildness) from the centre of power (space of civility) could gain greater status over time as long as they moved closer to the centre. The concept of zomia provides further insights on how hill tribes (also known as highlanders or aboriginals) in mainland Southeast Asia continue to retain a separate identity from 'the modern nation-state. Nonetheless, within the institution of the nation-state, some hill tribes have partnered local and international non-governmental organisations, invoking international conventions such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), to demand from their respective governments citizenship documents that confer legal status and recognition to their communities.

Citizenship in different parts of the world also evolved incrementally through an amalgamation of citizenship traditions and practices from other places. Contemporary Chinese citizenship, for example, draws on a variety of political influences ranging from the late Qing and early Republican period to those from Europe and Japan. The Chinese political philosophy of *tianxia* (all-under-heaven) seeks to forge a sense of nationhood that is shared by the different ethnic groups represented in China. However, this approach privileges Han Chinese identity and connotes a distinctive geographical worldview of how international relations between political units should be organized, with China at the center of the world. The relationship between the state and people (e.g. *guomin*, *gongmin*, *shimin*, *laobaixing*, *gongren*) elides direct translation to English and reflect the multiple ways in which citizenship has evolved in China through changes in the political system, juridical and administrative framework, and the economy. In other words, citizenship outside of Western societies may adopt a hybridized model which resembles recognizable features of Western forms of citizenship in part, but also deserves recognition as practices that legitimately depart from expectations of how citizenship should be practiced in accordance with Western liberal traditions and the nation-state model.

### **New Geographies of Citizenship?**

Our accounts of the similarities and differences in how citizenship has evolved in Western and non-Western societies signal that it is inadequate to approach citizenship as a normative or prescriptive model of how societies should be socially ordered. Geographers have explored the different spaces in which citizenship is played out. Attentiveness to the different local contexts in which citizenship developed positions geographers to contribute new perspectives that decenter the hegemony of Western interpretations of citizenship. Moreover, geographical perspectives offer insights on the significance of spaces above and below the state to the formation, identity and performance of heterogeneous forms of citizenship. Four key directions can be identified.

First, postmodern views of citizenship recognize diversity and difference, emphasising cultural and social rather than national identities. The scope of work in this area is diverse and includes studies of aboriginal peoples, gender, sexual citizenship, religion, age and disability. Here, geographers are starting to recognise the significance of different spaces to the formation of citizenship. Feminist geographers, for example, have argued that too much emphasis has hitherto been placed on public space, which is often dominated by men. Their work has refocused attention on private spaces of citizenship, the significance of the home as well as ways in which women have forged new, public spaces of citizenship to empower women and other marginalised groups. For example, the spaces of schools, shops, nurseries and community

groups have been used to improve the visibility and voice of women and, in turn, provided platforms to campaign for better rights.

Likewise, religious spaces serve as important crucibles where political subjectivity can be manifested in societies in which the demarcation between secular and religious social worlds are fluid and dynamic. Another example pertains to the significance of highland and lowland spatial distinctions in non-Western societies that separate hill tribes culturally from the populations that lie closer to the center of power associated with the modern nation-state. Just as with the movements by aboriginal peoples in Western societies seeking to claim their indigenous rights and land reserves, the mobilization of hill tribes in non-Western parts of the world challenges prevailing models of citizenship and assimilationist policies instituted by the nation-state.

Second, an important body of work has sought to re-conceptualize citizenship as global rather than national. In part, this has been driven by the ‘mobilities turn’ in geography, which has emphasised the movement of people, material objects and ideas between national boundaries and other spaces. As some groups of people travel, work, live and communicate across borders, concepts of transnational and cosmopolitan citizenship are challenging models of citizenship that are based on the nation-state. Thus, some work has focused on the ways that flows of ideas, information and people between spaces can shape cultural citizenship and loosen moorings to the state. Religious beliefs or ethnic traditions may, for example, transcend boundaries and connect citizens to wider networks of practitioners. The Falungong movement, for example, leverages upon both practitioners within the Chinese diaspora and those who are non-Chinese but adhere to the group’s religious and political beliefs, to lobby international state and non-state actors in protesting against the suppression of the group’s activities in China, allowing alternative expressions of political subjectivity within the nation and beyond. Citizenship might therefore be conceived as relational rather than absolute, something that is constituted by its connections with different people and places rather than something defined by the borders of the nation-state. Citizenship remains inherently geographical but, rather than being entirely defined by fixed boundaries, it is also fluid, mobile and multi-dimensional in nature.

Third, and related to this, citizens from different places can also be enrolled in networks that transcend national boundaries to strive for political and social change at a global level. Examples include transnational coalitions such as the Fairtrade movement or new social movements exemplified by the Occupy movement starting 2011 in New York and spreading to other parts of the world. These forms of citizenship gains strength through linkages above the state to similar sites with similar aims in different places, cutting across borders. Thus, a Fairtrade shop becomes a place where consumptive practices can link, speak and care for ‘distant others’ and, in doing so, lobby for change. Similarly, new social networks crystallise in symbolic places of protest to not only challenge a global political order but also point towards new forms of global citizenry that is global rather than national in outlook. An example is of the Umbrella Movement or Occupy Central in Hong Kong during 2014, which drew inspiration from the global Occupy movement and sought to demand a real choice over the political candidates standing for the 2017 general elections, rather than those pre-nominated by the central government in Beijing. The democratic aspirations of those Hong Kong citizens are borne out of earlier experience with British-style governance in the former colony before the 1997 handover of power back to China. On a macro-level the Occupy movement symbolize a wave of global demands for redressing political, social and economic injustice. While the sites themselves are often temporary, their transnational nature means that these sites citizenship can ‘jump scales’ and make efforts to secure rights at a national or global scale.

Lastly, poststructuralist citizenship scholars approach citizenship as modes of political being that are enacted through encounters rather than in terms of membership to a nation-state or any notion of community that assumes the subjects of political life can be determined in advance and brought together in a political unit that assumes boundaries and unity within. Rather, the relational focus in such renderings of citizenship means that citizens are brought together through who we engage with and how we engage with one another, locally and extra-locally. A range of connections are possible such as by inhabiting proximate spaces, travel to distant places, internet technology and other forms of shared agendas and solidarity. Such connections are contingent and constantly changing depending on life circumstances and the possibilities for engagement across spaces and scales. This also means that the central authority figure, normally considered the government of a nation-state, shifts according to the formation of those connections and how the power relations ensuing become constituted. Such an approach allows citizenship analyses to capture not only those who are present as citizens of a nation-state, but also those persons rendered absent or are considered irregular in normalised accounts of citizenship and membership within and beyond the nation-state (i.e. hill tribes, aboriginals, emigrants or irregular migrants).

To conclude, this chapter on citizenship brought together concepts of citizenship found in both Western and non-Western contexts in order to underline the specific spatial and cultural contexts in which expressions and practices of citizenship have developed. Geographers can contribute to analyses of citizenship by not only being spatially attuned to local histories and mores, but also engaging in scalar analyses of how political subjectivities are manifested at the local, national, regional and transnational levels.

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Activism, citizenship, governmentality, colonialism, decolonization, feminism, indigeneity, nation-state, orientalism, religion, scale, society, subjectivity, transnationalism, urban citizenship, rural citizenship, volunteering.

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