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Comunicação: Citizenship with a European dimension

Good morning.

First of all, I would like to thank Ilga for this invitation.

I was asked to speak about Citizenship with a European dimension.

Citizenship is a human rights issue. It is the strange idea that everyone has the right to have rights. And that everyone is equal before the law. It's still much more an idea than a practice. But what would be of our world without ideas? Ideas change the world. Or we would not be sitting here all together to argue the idea of active citizenship and LGBT people and parents.

Part I – What is citizenship?

Citizenship is a right. A citizen is a social actor in a political formation (Almeida, 2004: 45). To be a citizen is to belong to a community. Citizenship is a status given to a person that belongs to an imagined community (namely a state).

Citizenship is, therefore, often understood as belonging in and participation in the cultural community of the nation (Brubaker 1992; Jason, 2013).

But citizenship is not merely a status or a location (Jason, 2013: 39).

¹ Integrado no Projecto Cidadania Activa:

<http://www.uc.pt/fpce/investigacao/ocis/projectos/eurocidpt/Projeto>

² <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/html.cfm/index373PT.html>

³ <http://ilga-portugal.pt/ilga/index.php>

The word citizenship comes out from the word city. Some scholars argue that the idea of citizenship was born with the idea of democracy, in ancient Greece, as a sign of bond to the city-state (and no longer to kinship or clan) and of fear of slavery. Or, in other words, a sign of the importance of freedom. Citizens had the right to speak publicly at the *polis*. All the others, the non-citizens (women, slaves) did not. The same frame mark is known in ancient Rome.

Citizenship then, as Hindess points out, can be seen as a disciplinary process that operates as a conspiracy against, rather than toward participation. Pointing to the history of the term in the ancient Greek society, the author reminds us that citizenship was based on the decisions of a privileged few over a large mass who were effectively disempowered (Hindess, 2004: 306). The growth of modern democracies has only exacerbated this process, where the idea of direct participation has been lost to indirect participation effected largely through elections, and the idea of the republic consumed by the idea of the nation (Jason, 2013: 36-37).

With the French Revolution, the idea expands to link citizenship with popular sovereignty.

Today, we think of Citizens as people entitled to have freedoms, political and individual rights, regardless of their identification with particular nation-state (Messer, 1993: 230; Turner, 1997: 281; ONU, 2003: 3; Agamben, 2008: 91).

Of course, the notion of the individual, the citizen, as agent, is clearly ideological, when faced with legal obstacles. It is still a notion that should not be ruled out in this context, as in any other that relates to the idea of human rights, citizenship, agency and equality.

Citizenship has had almost always an element of exclusion, in the sense that *citizenship* derives meaning, in part, by excluding non-citizens from basic rights and privileges.

So, what if the human rights discourse was a hoax? A moral, restrictive and repressive legislative service produced by and for the normative elite interests?

That is, what if the human rights discourse has served to legitimize and to perpetuate the invisibility and marginalization of specific groups?

The institutional discourse of human rights, which legitimizes any idea, fight, or campaign becomes, in the light of that assumption, an instrument of biopower under the control of policy makers, voted to lobby campaigns, informed by social agendas and ideologies, positions or beliefs.

The fight for citizenship is the fight for human rights. And both are fights for power. Thus, as Jason argues, “to enjoy the experience of permanent rights, the hall mark of civil society, the experience of citizenship is in the nature of a location in political society” (Jason, 2013: iii). The anthropologist claims that “citizenship is based on discourses of secularism, assimilation and multiculturalism” (Jason, 2013: 5).

Citizenship is not a mere practice that stabilize the status-quo, but also acts, and most of the time, generates radical ruptures that create space for the establishment of new citizenship experiences (Jason, 2013: 25). That is truly the idea of citizenship with a European dimension. Ruptures are fundamental for us, Europeans.

Contemporary citizenship is conceptualized and debated according to the language of rights as arising from the history of the idea of citizenship and its emergence in Western political philosophy.

So, many scholarships assume the definition of “citizenship” to be a formal, constitutional status that evokes certain rights and obligations. Circumscribed by theoretical, juridical or academic presuppositions about the nature and culture of citizenship, such studies pay little attention to historical and contemporary practices of citizenship, or active participation in relationships of vectors such as affiliation and definitions of the general welfare.

This inattention to heterogeneous practices in the use of this term, which is invoked more and more as a claim to certain rights (such as human rights, social rights, civic rights, parenting rights), by social movements worldwide, gives rise to very general or

even speculative analyses of these practices in the world today (Janet Roitman, 2007: 187; Jason, 2013: 26).

A citizen is a person within a place. All places have government. Within this framework of understanding, “government” designates not just the activities of the state and its institutions but more broadly any rational effort to influence or guide the conduct of human beings through acting upon their hopes, desires, circumstances, or environment” (Inda 2005: 1; Jason, 2013: 27).

Citizenship should also include the responses of people to the efforts at influencing behavior, expanding the ambit of citizenship that has been traditionally restricted to the public sphere.

What is crucial, however, to the direction that Inda and Jason provide, is a particular approach to analyzing modern political power, where “one recognizes the state as only one element, even though admittedly a rather important one, in a multiple network of actors, organizations, and entities involved in exercising authority over the conduct of individuals and populations” (Jason, 2013: 27).

Isin suggests that the body politic “assembles all other spaces within its orbit and creates spaces of influence, presence and domination” (Isin, 2007: 223). Isin points to the city as the space where citizenship is constituted, through the practices of contestation, and negotiation. The city was the birth place of citizenship, and still is its most beloved place of action.

Barry Hindess (2000), on the other hand, draws the attention to another manner in which citizenship is constituted at the international level. This constitution, the author argues, is one that operates as an international management of populations. The objective of citizenship, he proposes, is to fix individuals as members not just of definite countries, but of definite national societies. He argues that “societies are presented as substantial and enduring collectivities, exhibiting their own cultural patterns, possessing definite social and political structures, and, in some cases, developing a sense of national identity” (Jason, 2013: 29). Hindess highlights that not

only is there an international space in which citizenship is constituted, and that the discursive or citizenship practices at this level involve the assertion of the idea of national polities as being constituted by homogenous national societies (Jason, 2013: 29).

The highlighting of this internationalist dimension of citizenship is particularly important because it displaces the nation-state as the center of the focus of citizenship studies.

This view of citizenship produces a shift from recognition of citizenship as status, to one of citizenship as practice (Bosniak, 2000). It also allows citizenship to be seen as a relational practice, where citizenship is constituted through changing relationships with various groups (Jason, 2013: 31).

The state is the first political institution to promise equality, even though in the economic arena this is not necessarily carried out, as we have seen. But this promise is crucial to the struggles of groups, providing a useful resource, as well as the basis on which the state maintains its centrality in the imagination of the people (Jason, 2013: 33).

However, today the state is not the central meaning of the citizenship. The social and civil groups, national and international, are the basis of the citizenship struggle. As Pell indicates, “the rights of citizenship are produced through, and are a result of, practices by those involved in specific struggles to define, alter, and expand the meaning of belonging within a political community” (Pell 2008: 148; Jason, 2013: 34). The central basis of the citizenship struggle is therefore not the state community, but the political community.

As Benei (2009) argues, the attention to citizenship practices opens space to see how the state seeks to fix national identity (which is what citizenship tends to be collapsed into) through quotidian practices in schools, services and public functions; and the

manner in which these practices are negotiated by individuals and communities in the spaces of daily and ritual life (Benei, 2009).

Part II – Where does European citizenship should lead?

The right to citizenship is the right to equality. And equality means the right to be different and still enjoy those rights.

Only assigning equal citizenship to those in the margins can we eliminate discrimination.

However, what we see is that behind the moral imperatives, debtors to the expansion of human rights rhetoric, we also find the logic of the mechanisms regulating the migration of legality and illegality regarding access to territories, resources and citizenship.

The strategies of governmentality allied to anti-citizenship techniques promoted with guidelines of the excluded, on the one hand, and the perpetuation of the invisibility of “those others in the margins”, on the other hand, promotes violations to human rights, establishing a climate of silence, prejudice and violence.

As Jason puts it, “where citizenship is seen as a conspiracy to discipline persons into members of national groups best located in their national territory, and only rarely straying outside of it, citizenship can also be seen as the practices taken up by the members of these population groups against such disciplining” (Jason, 2013: 37).

This understanding of citizenship as a *room for manoeuvre* works well with a conceptualisation of citizenship as relational, as constantly evolving, expanding, and as constructed between various social spaces (Idem).

Neveu has also argued that citizenship should be seen, not so much as a kind of identity, as much as “a specific political role, a way to expose dissent and find temporary agreements so as to “make society” (Neveu, 2005: 200; Jason, 2013: 37).

Citizenship is not just a given right. It's an action, a constant fight, an act. The act is postulated as a creative rupture of the habitus, of the costume. In so doing, these moments "shift established practices, status and order" and in disrupting the habitus "create new possibilities, (to) claim rights and impose obligations" (Isin and Neilsen 2008: 10).

Isin differentiates between the "active citizen" and the "activist citizen" (Isin 2008: 38). The active citizen is one who is merely engaged in the practices of citizenship, the dull repetition of rituals that constitute the habitus.

The activist citizen, on the other hand, is the one who is engaged in creative rupture, who in the process of actualizing the act, opens up space for new costumes to be born and established (Jason, 2013: 40).

"Only rights can stop the wrongs", as my former research informants cry out (that is, sex workers worldwide). Only assigning equal citizenship to all can eliminate discrimination and stigma. Only by applying human rights it is possible to eliminate violence and give rights to all. That is the idea of citizenship with a European dimension. The birth place of human rights and citizenship is a privileged territory of possibilities for the activist citizen.

The struggle for the universality of citizenship and, thus, of human rights, is a struggle of culture. Culture is everything, including social and political relationships, social movements, power, and public opinion. Human rights and citizenship are culture. And culture is produce and reinvented by individuals, by social agents with the will to change the world, through activist and engaged political participation.

And, finally, if I may express a more personal view, it is my strong believe that, sooner or later, LGBT people will have total citizenship rights, not only marriage, but parenting. My heart is with this citizenship fight.

Thank you.

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