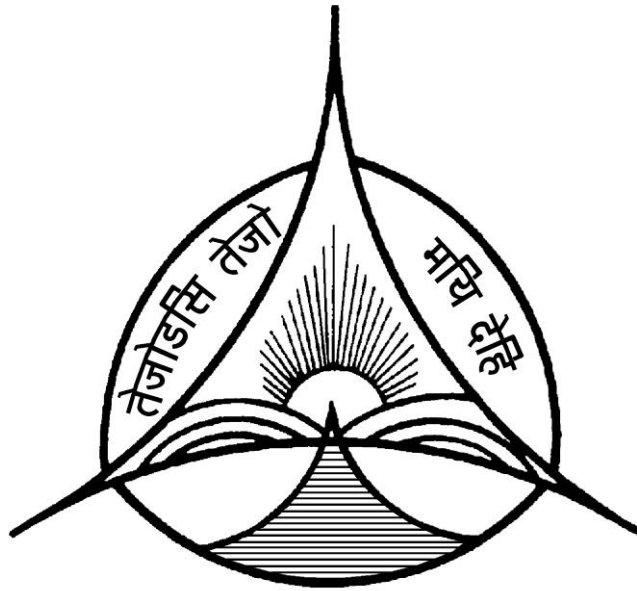


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*Citizenship* by Etienne Balibar; Translated by Thomas Scott-Railton. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2015

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This book, first published in Italian in 2012, consists of eight essays that initially appeared as lectures and in various written iterations between 2005 and 2013. Balibar, a leading, contemporary Marxist philosopher, was Althusser's student and collaborator. Although the ideas on citizenship and democracy can be traced back to his earlier works, in this book the two concepts are systematically connected in an argument which claims that (i) their relationship is 'anti-nomic', that is, the two are governed by opposite 'nomoi' (laws), and yet (ii) this antinomy offers a potential pathway for a transformation of the 'political' in terms of expanding citizenship and 'democratising democracy'. Balibar undertakes to demonstrate why the relationship is antinomic and how the antinomy can dialectically bring about this transformation. The implications of his philosophical argument on a very timely topic significantly resonate with contemporary political realities, both on the European continent and North America, ranging from Brexit, Trump's US, the Alternative für Deutschland, the rise of the far right and the emergence of national populism. Furthermore, his argument also resonates with the analyses of many social scientists who have written about citizenship, neo-liberalism, democracy, exclusions, and many other of Balibar's key concepts in this book.

Methodologically, he uses genealogical research, tracing his key concepts to their theoretical and practical origins, and following closely their transformations through contradictions ('antinomies') working dialectically. In the process of unfolding their genealogical tapestry, the connections between the concepts reveal themselves. When the 'antinomies' within each concept come to a point when continuation of the current practice becomes untenable, a transformation, a new dialectical synthesis, emerges from the process. As there is no inexorable necessity, no predictable outcome in a dialectical process, Balibar only attempts to make a political intervention through his book which is an act of 'active citizenship', pointing to a direction informed by reason and historical reflection. Balibar is not a writer easy to comprehend and the translation from the original French/Italian might be contributing to this. Following his complex and nuanced analysis—without getting lost in a plethora of side arguments and their practical implications—requires significant intellectual discipline, but, in the end, the persistent reader may be compensated by a sense of accomplishment, almost exhilaration at the insight gained.

He starts by examining how the pairing of the concepts of citizenship with democracy has happened through an inquiry starting from Aristotle through to the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* and to a number of contemporary writers. With respect to citizenship, traced back to the Aristotelian 'politeia', he identifies a key contradiction, in that it has both active/universal and exclusionary/destructive elements. One of the meanings of 'politeia' was that of a 'constitution of citizenship'. This 'constitution' signifies the construction of a 'body politic', the 'joining together of its various parties and the

institutional production of unity and public interest' (p. 8). This means that the ancient *politeia* consisted of (i) the sovereignty of citizens and the reciprocity or rotation of 'power' among the rights-holders; and (ii) the organisation of administrative and governmental duties into legal institutions. In practice, reciprocity had its limits in the inequality of citizens, predicated upon their competence. This later evolved into the exclusion of various borders.

But Aristotle's 'politeia' also gave rise to the notion of democracy. Democracy was one of the possible regimes in his famous tripartite division, while he used also the term 'politeia' to refer to a regime of constitutional rule which distributes powers among citizens according to the common good. Such a distribution of power rests upon the idea of competence of the citizenry, and this is how entire categories of people were excluded from the rotation of power. This gap between those represented and those who are not is the 'differential' of activity and passivity, or of democracy and oligarchy, that has become huge in modern 'democratic' societies (p. 16). Since 'rotation' of power is out, modern constitutional democracies have mechanisms and rules for legitimating representation, but they also have meta-legal norms for ensuring a balance of powers. This makes democracy not truly representative and in need of being continually 'invented' (Lefort 1981, cited in Balibar, p. 18) through the struggle of those not represented.

Yet another meaning of the Aristotelian 'politeia' is the constitution of citizenship not as a legal text, 'but as a historical process of constitution or of societal and institutional social formation... a question of "configuring the citizen" ...and [their] rights, duties and powers' (p. 12). This is an ongoing, conflictual and unpredictable process. This evolving and 'expansive' character of citizenship, always moving beyond existing 'borders', gave rise to the more contemporary and still largely aspirational conception of citizenship that refers to the universality of the political and legal form, extending from city to nation state to post-national community. This dynamic, uneven (because of its intersectional character) and thus contested, unpredictable, non-linear, expansive character of citizenship has been well described by contemporary feminist and other social scientists as well (e.g. Bakan and Stasiulis 2005; Yuval-Davis and Werbner 2005; Tastsoglou and Dobrowolsky 2006).

Balibar argues that it is important to return to the 'expansive' notion of citizenship for multiple reasons, and most importantly because (i) constitutions have historically evolved into legal forms, citizens have become passive, and democracy increasingly de-legitimised and thus unsustainable, being caught between 'resurgent populism' and nationalism, and (ii) the notion of *civil society* inherent in *politeia* is very promising for citizenship practice. Although contemporary civil society contains elements of de-democratising capitalist

markets, it also contains supra-state forms that question the legitimacy of state sovereignty and reach directly to citizens (e.g., 'No One is Illegal' movement).

But the antinomy within the notion of citizenship, between restrictive and expansive understandings, is not the only one. At the core of 'constitution of citizenship' is the notion of equaliberty, the genealogy, contradictions and dialectical developmental process of which

Balibar examines next. There are two opposing ‘constituent moments’ in *aequa libertas*, namely ‘insurrection’ and ‘constitution’. The insurrectional moment takes place every time there is a demand for new rights. If successful, the demand becomes legitimated and established into a new constitution that lays out new principles for separating those governing from the governed. But, insurrectional moments are temporary. The notion of the ‘people’ expands, as new groups and rights are added in a never-ending process. Here social scientists would differ from Balibar’s conceptualisation of citizenship as ever-expanding. Historically, steps back have been taken in terms of shrinking rights and categories of people excluded. Rights progression is not inevitable over time (Marshall, 1965).

The next antinomy examined by Balibar is that between citizenship and capitalism. Balibar focuses on the contradictions of incorporating social rights into citizenship in 20th century capitalism. He understands social rights as ‘a mechanism of universal solidarity at the level of the “body politic” and the state’ (p. 48), going beyond particular rights and social democracy. Historically, the ‘Keynesian compromise’ was about guaranteeing universal labour rights and introducing social reform programmes in certain Western countries (bringing about a potentially dangerous nexus of the social and national) in exchange for moderating labour demands on capital and the state. It came about *partly* as a result of the great external pressure of socialism in 20th century Europe. However, it could not, ultimately, eliminate class and gender divisions as these are the internal limitations of social democracy in a capitalist system. As a result, a series of anti-systemic (e.g., anti-colonial and post-colonial) revolutionary movements erupted in the late 1960s in Europe and beyond. Despite various strategic ‘displacements’, these developments could not halt the destabilisation of the social-national state. Thus, the internal contradictions of (social- national) citizenship under capitalism led to its downward slip.

In ‘Citizenship and Exclusion’ Balibar zeroes in on the various exclusions of citizenship in capitalism. The concept of exclusion or ‘border’ (external or internal), a necessity in capitalism, is, by definition, contradictory to that of universalised citizenship. The excluded youth in the French banlieues in 2005, the women who were recognised in the French revolution in ‘governance of the home’, or class and race differences in European post-colonial societies, all point to internal exclusions as part of the discourse of the universality of citizenship. The internal exclusion or ‘border’ does not appear in legal terms, but in its combination with representations and practices. As such it determines rights and citizenship. Feminist citizenship writers talk here about the private/public divide and how it excludes women women or limits their participation in the public sphere and the exercise of their citizenship. Balibar expresses his ideas on the inclusion/exclusion dynamic and citizenship in a number of ‘theses’. He emphasises the underlying rules of exclusions, their institutional foundations, the violent character of exclusion enforcement when their construction as ‘natural’ is contested, and the everyday collusion of groups of citizens to the exclusion of others through delegation of the authority to exclude to their representatives, and the ongoing struggle for inclusion of those excluded.

Balibar turns next to the 'aporia' of 'conflictual democracy' and identifies an inter-relationship between conflict, violence and democracy: conflict has historically been the means by which boundaries of exclusion were knocked down and rights and social citizenship were attained. On the other hand, democracy prevents certain kinds of conflict from ever obtaining a political form or be publicly debated, through mechanisms that are violent in themselves. Democracy is a regime that renders conflict legitimate, by transforming it from a 'savage' to a 'civilised' condition where it can be controlled. This taming and normalisation of conflict takes place through power relations and apparatuses within the state. 'Civilised' conflicts do not carry any real transformative potential. While normally citizens submit themselves to states, in times of crisis (as recently in many European states and the US), they begin openly questioning it, and the status quo loses its fragile legitimacy. Societies oscillate between moments of normalisation, which impose homogenous, constricting models, and moments of pluralism, or the recognition of differences, brought about through conflict.

The neo-liberal dimension of democracy on the ground in the late 20th and early 21st centuries is another important issue tackled by Balibar. He discusses Wendy Brown's classic 2003 argument on the differentiation between liberalism and neo-liberalism: in contrast to liberalism, neo-liberalism has abolished the separation between the economic/market and political/state spheres. The neo-liberal state, on the one hand distances itself from production, the commons, or the public sphere, while, on the other, intervenes deeply and permanently in civil society to mould private citizens in a way that they can unquestionably accept this. Brown considers this a process of de-democratisation or a retreat from the political, the emergence of the anti-political, and the end of demands for universalisable rights.

Balibar expands this argument and locates this de-democratisation of neo-liberalism in Marxist theory, considering it the logical conclusion of Marx's theory of commodification under capitalism. Balibar explains how Marx foresaw this nightmarish development that would signify the end of proletarian politics and the hope for revolution that could bring capitalism to an end. In an unpublished chapter that was meant to be included in the first book of *Capital*, Marx talked about the 'real submission' of labour under capital, the moulding of the labour force into a commodity useful for capitalism. The reader is to conclude that neoliberalism is no aberration from the workings of the capitalist system. The dialectic of class struggle and internal contradictions of capitalism has sadly not led to socialism. This total transformation of consciousness under neo-liberal capitalism and complete atomisation of society at the expense of the 'commons' has been the object of attention of many contemporary writers. Michael Sandel (2013) in a new classic work has conceptualised contemporary society no longer as a market economy but as a 'market society'. Balibar agrees with Castel and others that neo-liberalism ultimately results in atomisation, as individuals have lost their connections with a 'community of citizens'. He argues that this atomisation results in violence that is directed against 'others' by former citizens who are scared about themselves turned into 'others' next, the turn toward compensatory communities and the rise of populism. The recent US election has underscored

the latter point. Furthermore, neo-liberalism also signifies a crisis of representation, a complete loss of legitimacy of representative politics. Other contemporary writers, such as Tormey (2015), express a similar view on the ‘end of representative politics’.

How can the existing antinomy of citizenship and democracy be resolved in a way that averts descent into authoritarian populism, expands rights and eliminates exclusionary boundaries? How should individuals and societies respond to the existing crisis of both citizenship and democracy as they currently function? Balibar’s answer is about a democratic alternative ‘from below’, a movement for the ‘democratisation of democracy’. Echoing Gramsci and other Marxists, Balibar tells us that such a movement (i) would formally recognise the ‘insurrectional’ origins of citizenship and would give them institutional/legal form—starting from political constitutions; (ii) would entail a deep and ongoing transformation of institutions, and (iii) would entail an ongoing education and self-reflection of individuals as active citizens, engaged in the never-ending process of Marxian ‘permanent revolution’. Despite the increasing disillusionment with notions of representative democracy and social democracy and the nightmarish spectre of various authoritarianisms, Balibar’s analysis offers some optimism for the future, as he explains how the antinomy of citizenship and democracy MAY provide the conditions (p. 9) through a dialectical process, out of the current impasse. It is an affirmative agenda and a great challenge that Balibar lays out in *Citizenship*. The ball is now in the ‘active’ citizens’ court: how to make this happen?

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