

Citizenship and Republicanism in a Multicultural Nation

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The juxtaposition of the notions of citizenship and the idea of republicanism in the context of Australia as a multicultural nation immediately raises the difficult and critical question of what we mean by a 'nation', and equally, what constitutes the sense of Australian identity. In the time allocated to me, I can hardly do justice to this challenging and most intriguing question, except to pause to share some brief reflection on some key issues related to citizenship and republicanism.

The recent dialogue between two perceptive historians of different orientations, Stuart Macintyre and John Hirst (see Macintyre, Hirst, et al. 1993), contains some useful insights into how we may grapple with the challenge of a multicultural nation, in effect, the challenge of pluralism. Both writers focus on the notion of citizenship, though admittedly from different standpoints to provide an answer to the difficult questions posed by the stark reality of pluralism in all aspects of political and social life. How we construct and characterise this complex pluralism, socially and culturally differentiated in terms of class, gender, race, and culture, is bound to be significant for the way we understand our sense of 'nationhood'. Regrettably, we may have distorted the reality of this pluralism by exaggerating and romanticising some facets of difference, such as one's historic origin, or cultural attributes and culture, and ignoring the often overriding effects of the immigrant experience.

For Macintyre (1993), the primary need is to reconceptualise the concept of the nation, and nationalism - or the sense of being 'Australian' in terms of citizenship status. To quote Macintyre:

What strikes me most forcibly in the late 20th century is that we have lost the language of citizenship within which we can talk about Australian nationalism now. In a sense it seems to be far more important to re-establish citizenship than it is to redefine the nation. If we do manage to re-establish some sort of language and form of citizenship, then I think, the sort of nationalism we have will not be shrill nationalism because you won't have to keep asserting it... it will retain some of the core values of earlier nationalism and above all be able to accommodate change. (1993, p 29).

What constitutes this notion of citizenship remains unspecified. According to Macintyre (1993), this characterisation, needs to take into account, 'civic pluralism', which, he says was always present in Australian society.

Contrary to Macintyre (1993), I believe the pluralism of today is qualitatively different and is more apparent than at the turn of the century. After all, as we approach 100 years of political nationhood as a Federation, we need to pause and recall that historically, the adoption of an exclusionist policy of settlement was one of the cardinal features of the 1901 Federation consensus. And, as Mary Willard (1967) has argued convincingly, what lay behind this orthodoxy was "the preservation of British Australian nationality". The nation was conceived of in political and cultural terms; the political nation was synonymous with the cultural nation. The latter represents in terms of the shared values and characteristics of Anglo-Celtic culture, though of course this was never all-encompassing as demonstrated by the experience of the Irish.

You could not have one without the other; hence, the assimilationists demanded political and cultural assimilation for integration; and, despite two decades of multiculturalism, this conjunction remains problematic. In the words of Humphrey McQueen (1986), what this denotes is the conflation of race, nation and colour. This was not just a characteristic of racism, but a distinctive feature of the Australian cultural ethos and political reality; and, as I have argued elsewhere (Jayasuriya 1991), the Achilles heel of Australian multiculturalism as well.

Interestingly with the formal rejection of the old racism based on racial superiority, there exists a new racism which marginalises and devalues ethnic minorities on the grounds that they threaten the cultural integrity of the indigenous community. This new racism, often expressed as a xenophobic nationalism (eg., in the demand for a *One Australia* as John Howard expressed it), is predicated on political and cultural assimilation.

We need at all costs to avoid the excesses of an ethnocentric nationalism, the "shrill nationalism", which Macintyre warns us against. Nationalism does not have to be based on the concept of a cultural nation, and associated cultural and ethnocentric characteristics. Doyle (1993) points out that "nationalism can also be about equity and freedom" as in the case of the French Revolution where nationalism was largely equated in the claim that "the people were sovereign". This was a political concept which was based on "the idea of a nation (as) a community based on political equality and democracy" (Kellas p 27, 1991). To this end, we need to ask how does one make the distinction between a political and cultural nation in a manner consistent with maintaining a sense of nationhood, and reclaiming the right of full membership of the nation for these marginal groups who continue to remain peripheral and non-participatory because of difference? It also means that the earlier identifications of multiculturalism as cultural pluralism have failed singularly to distinguish between the political and cultural meanings of nationhood.

The answer, I believe, along with Macintyre (1993), and Stephen Castles (1993), lies in a revitalised concept of citizenship, which forms the 'basis' of the universal and inclusionary model of citizenship we currently have in Australia. This proposed renegotiation departs from the conventional view of citizenship in liberal political theory. But, without foregoing the obvious benefits of such a view, we need to extend its meaning and significance to incorporate difference. A radical concept of citizenship needs, first and foremost, to acknowledge that, to quote an English feminist theorist, Anne Phillips, "when a society is socially differentiated, then citizenship must be equally so" (Phillips, 1992, p 3). In other words, this modifies conventional views of "universal citizenship" which highlights equity and universality, and instead, alerts us to the need to accommodate difference. The conventional view of citizenship, blind to particularity and difference, is disinclined to recognize difference in matters of public policy such as through affirmative action or differential treatment accorded to minority groups. The major problem, I believe, in most liberal democratic societies is to acknowledge, in the democratic process, the importance and significance of diversity and difference. This, among other considerations, necessarily involves a recognition of 'groups rights' which are anathema to classical liberalism.

Castles (1993), through his notion of 'multicultural citizenship', and I myself employing the concept of 'democratic pluralism' (Jayasuriya 1993), have from slightly different systematic points of view, advocated the need to adopt a more radical view of citizenship. This acknowledges difference in the pursuit of citizenship as a matter of rights, equality, and justice, and is not committed simply to the rhetoric of equity and access, or political citizenship in the form of protecting negative rights.

But, as Kamenka (1993) goes on to observe, the nation rests on the "daily plebiscite, on the will and ability to live together in a largely shared political culture". It is this 'civic culture' and its

public virtues, eg., the democratic spirit of tolerance, the rule of law, and respect for liberty, all of which we have from our liberal democratic inheritance, an inheritance which will always remain with us. The Australian emigre scholar, Robert Hughes (1992), exemplifies the importance of the 'civic virtues' of this political culture by pointing out that these qualities are also characteristic of liberal multiculturalism, as opposed to the excesses of 'identity politics' cloaked around cultural difference. Hughes reminds us that multiculturalism provides "a convenient abode of tact, tentativeness, and open-mindedness (which serves) as a counterweight to cultural arrogance and chauvinism and the tendency to universalize the particular".

In short, it is these 'civic virtues' which provide the cement to bind us together. Central to this is the notion of citizenship and its institutional manifestation such as through the exercise of political and social rights. It is these political and social rights which serve to integrate and contribute to nation building. After all, the objective of nation building is to integrate and harmonize divided segments of society. Citizenship in this sense is a powerful integrating factor. However, if citizenship is to contribute substantially to nation building, this will of necessity require us to distinguish sharply between a political nation and a cultural nation.

More importantly, I would add that the adoption of a radical view of citizenship which acknowledges that we live in a plural community needs to go beyond the narrow confines of classical liberalism, by incorporating a sense of community in defining the common good. But, common good should not be conceived as a single substantive idea or seen as the hegemonic imposition of the values of the dominant groups. Rather it is to be understood as an expression of the shared political values within a democratic community. It is this need to redefine and renegotiate the notion of citizenship in a contemporary society, in the 'multicultural nation', that we discover the crucial and vital link with the ongoing republican debate.

John Hirsute (1993) has made this connection very pointedly in his response to Stuart Macintyre (1993), in the dialogue we referred to earlier, by stating that "you can revivify the notion of citizenship only after the achievement of republicanism". But, is the achievement of republicanism merely a question of replacing the Queen as the Head of State? Admittedly, this formal and symbolic repudiation of monarchical government is essential as it above all, provides a demonstration of our independence and integrity as an independent sovereign nation. This is no doubt important and critical, but the real significance of the Republican debate is not just about the desirability but the inevitability of constitutional reform. Indeed, Bob Hawke (1993) was right on track when he stated that "the Republican debate is properly bound up with the constitutional reform debate" for the compelling reason, as Hawke argues, we can no longer "be bound by a document, framed by the founding fathers of our federation a hundred years ago". The prospect of constitutional reform is probably the most fundamental issue ethnic minority communities have to contend with in the foreseeable future. This will not just have to be in forums dealing with constitutional conventions but more forcefully by entering directly into the Republican debate.

The limited confines of this presentation do not permit me to explore the complexities of the Republican debate as it is currently unfolding. If constitutional change is envisaged, as I indeed hope it will be, we need to generate a greater degree of understanding and awareness of the general as well as the specific issues which bear directly on ethnic minority communities, as interest groups in the larger Australian society. We need, in particular, to take cognisance of the republican debate, extending across the transatlantic, and not overlook the fact that the republican idea was first nurtured in historical traditions, quite distinct and alien to our own. These ideas were born in ancient Rome, and subsequently nurtured in renaissance Italy, revolutionary France, and more recently in the United States. One dominant feature of this republican tradition, which has had a varied mixture of conservative and progressive ideas,

has been the stress on stability arising from 'civic virtues'.

It is these 'civic virtues', which, as pointed out by Robert Hughes (1992), reside in a liberal notion of multiculturalism, and may well provide some of the ingredients for a revitalized citizenship based on justice, equality, and rights. These citizen rights need to be generated and entrenched in constitutional safeguards embodied in a Bill of Rights. The reactivation of a Bill of Rights, or a Charter of Rights as in Canada, incorporating political and social rights, among other considerations, must be accorded the highest priority by ethnic minority groups, in advancing the case for a new Republican constitution. We should remind ourselves that the Canadian Charter of Rights was "not a minor addition to the Canadian system but a profound wrenching transformation... (bringing) new groups into the Canadian constitutional order and (giving) them constitutional identities" (Cairns, 1988, p 6). The republican political tradition, with its emphasis on citizenship and civic virtue, provides a means of engaging in the constitutional debate that goes beyond discussions of formal political arrangements.

In this respect, a task that we face is to engage in debate to reconstruct a liberal democratic order that takes seriously the importance of difference. Habermas has recently argued, that democracy is about "communication and argument". The 'public sphere' is the arena in which this communicatory discourse takes place. This rhetorical conception of democracy is valuable for us, because it highlights the fact that we take part in this communicatory democracy. This implies political, not cultural empowerment through participation. But, more fundamentally, the 'public sphere' itself needs to be organized such that it facilitates the inclusion of previously marginalised groups. The construction of the civic culture remains our major task.

To conclude, as I believe, the return of an 'unmixed nation' is an empty dream, the rampant pluralism will need to be incorporated

into the social and moral fabric of society and accommodated within its institutional and structural framework. For this purpose, it is important that we incorporate the pluralism of society within the whole spectrum of its institutions, with a range of new and different social forms, images and styles of conduct. In such a context, there will be new social identifications and political legitimacy with a focus on the politics of state formation based on a revitalised concept of citizenship.

It is my plea that the logic and morality of pluralism, dictated by the demands of civil society enmeshed in a global economy, need to be informed and infused by the tenets and philosophy of a democratic citizenship, in order to strengthen social bonds and identifications characterizing Australian society. As we move towards 100 years of Federation, and a new Republican constitution, clearly, as Chantal Mouffe correctly observes, "only a pluralistic conception of citizenship can take account of the current proliferation of new political aspirations... and accommodate the specificity and multiplicity of democratic demands" (1988, p 31) of the evolving Australian society.

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