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Book Review: Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives by Ruth Lister

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Ruth Lister’s *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives* attempts to make a significant contribution to contemporary discussions of citizenship by combining the insights of political, social, and feminist theory with the literature on migration, the nation-state, and practical social policy. She does this using a unique framework that emphasizes the social and political dimensions of citizenship. In an interesting and provocative account of the insights, controversies, and problematics of contemporary debates over the nature and status of citizenship, Lister challenges and exposes the alleged gender-neutrality of the discourse of citizenship and offers a model of global citizenship based on a “more ‘just order of inclusions and exclusions’” (63). Scholars and policy activists interested in retaining a notion of citizenship rights that incorporates the particularity of the diverse experiences of women within and across cultures will find this book a refreshing alternative to traditional universalistic understandings of citizenship.

Lister divides her book into two sections, the first focusing on the development of a theoretical framework of citizenship and its relationship to women’s citizenship and the second attempting to illuminate the policy dilemmas associated with the promotion of women’s social and political citizenship. In each section she addresses the question of whether the concept “citizenship” can be refigured to adequately and legitimately include women in a way that recognizes the shifting character of women’s multiple identities. Her analysis reveals her strong understanding of the policy implications of women’s citizenship, but the theoretical tools she deploys are weak and unoriginal.

Within contemporary feminist debates over the concept of citizenship, models tend to coalesce around two positions, liberal equality and recognition of difference. The former is usu-
ally understood as requiring that citizenship laws and practices respect and protect women’s rights by including women on equal terms. The latter seeks to reconfigure political institutions to accommodate and embrace the unique capacities and experiences of women. Using international human rights law as the foundation for her model of global citizenship, Lister rejects these dualistic formulations of equality versus difference and calls for a conception of citizenship that emphasizes the creative tension between the universal and the particular. Lister tries to overcome the problems of inclusion and exclusion generated by the recognition of the multiplicity of women’s social and political identities by transcribing “at the international level the values of responsibility, individual rights and democracy associated with nation-state citizenship and in so doing promote the inclusionary over the exclusionary side of the citizenship coin” (57). However, this approach is plagued by a number of theoretical problems. Lister inadvertently privileges the liberal side of the dichotomy she claims to avoid by reverting to a conception of global citizenship premised upon a universalist ideal of human rights. She also fails to conceptualize adequately the equality-difference debate by defining difference in terms of private sphere values, particularly caring obligations.

Lister argues that some notion of rights and responsibilities transcending the nation-state is essential to any global conception of citizenship. On her account, the exclusionary tendencies of citizenship primarily arise from the power of nation-states over questions of migration. Shifting sovereignty to the international realm would expand the boundaries of inclusion to recognize fully women as multiple and diverse identities endowed with the same citizenship rights as men. However, because women experience multiple barriers to the enjoyment of full citizenship rights within nation-states, simply shifting levels of sovereignty and jurisdiction without transforming the ideal of
citizenship itself would likely reproduce the exclusionary problems of nation-state citizenship for women.

Lister might evade this problem through her appeal to international human rights law as the source of citizenship. She argues that the "discourse of human rights represents a recourse for migrants and asylum-seekers, counterpoised against the exclusionary boundaries around citizenship and membership drawn by individual nation-states" (60). Accordingly, we need only develop the infrastructure of global citizenship necessary to the enforcement of international rights and duties to realize an inclusionary conception of citizenship. Lister fails to see that this move simply adopts the liberal equality solution to the question of exclusion, though at a level beyond the nation-state. International human rights law promotes universal human rights, based on a theoretical conception of the person derived from the Kantian tradition of liberalism and within a legal structure based on constitutional democracy. In fact, the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" states that "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world." Such language cannot be reconciled with a non-universalist notion of citizenship. Though Lister embraces what she calls a "differentiated universalism" in her understanding of human rights, her reliance upon and privileging of a liberal conception of the person undermines her claim to transcended the equality-difference debate.

Moreover, Lister argues that the value of the discourse of citizenship lies in its ability to highlight the responsibilities of affluent nation-states to "those in the 'developing world' who lack the resources to translate human rights, as defined in the UN Covenant, into effective citizenship rights" (60). For her, the practical solution to the problems of international citizenship is to transfer economic resources to developing countries for the
establishment of liberal democratic institutions. This (a) presumes the universal model she elsewhere critiques and (b) ignores problems of cultural difference by assuming a teleology of development, where economic progress leads inevitably to advances in participation and citizenship. Such confidence is not borne out by recent developments.

Central to Lister’s attempt to synthesize equality and difference in women’s citizenship is her argument for a differentiated universalism through which citizenship rights are expressed in both particularist and universalist terms. In developing the “creative tension” between the universal and the particular in women’s citizenship, Lister argues for a reconceptualization of the public/private dichotomy that has traditionally served to marginalize women politically, socially, and economically. On her account, retaining a distinction between the public and private is a useful tool both for understanding the barriers women face in the attainment of citizenship rights and for underscoring the theoretical and policy implications of the caring obligations of citizenship when this distinction is recognized as fluid and political.

Because the sexual division of labor in the private sphere shapes access to the labor market and thus to social citizenship rights, recognizing the distinction between the public and private as a political construct is essential to women’s access to the public sphere. For Lister, this recognition does not and should not imply a denigration of the caring obligations historically associated with the private sphere. Rather, this recognition highlights the importance of social policy that emphasizes equal access to the public sphere while promoting the caring obligations of individual men and of the state in the private sphere. Though Lister acknowledges that the degree to which women are excluded from the public sphere and their particular experiences within the private are multiple and varied in and across cultures, focusing
on care as the key to a woman friendly notion of citizenship fails to adequately address the subtleties of the debates over difference. The legitimization and enforcement of men’s caring obligations and subsequently of the caring responsibilities of the state would bring down some of the physical barriers to women’s social citizenship rights; however, the language of care cannot avoid essentialist undertones that highlight difference in a way that potentially removes women from participating in a political realm dominated by hierarchical notions of power. Lister contends that recognizing informal modes of participation as legitimate in the formation of citizenship status would combat this problem. Unfortunately, it is equally likely to fail because it tends to reinforce rather than overcome women’s exclusion from the public sphere.

In Part II of her book, Lister considers some of the policy dilemmas associated with the promotion of women’s citizenship and outlines a broad political and social policy agenda. Though her policy recommendations are somewhat undermined by the theoretical problems of her model of global citizenship, Lister’s grasp of the relationship between theory and practice serves as a model for both political and feminist theorists in their own assessments of citizenship. Lister’s discussion of current policies affecting women’s citizenship as both a status and a practice are full of rich examples that clearly illuminate the problems of creating policies guided by care while continually recognizing the diversity of women. She argues for a “policy framework that is able to incorporate care as an expression of difference into the citizenship standard itself but in a way that does not undermine progress towards gender equality” (201) by using parental leave and public education policy to encourage a shift in the sexual division of labor. Public policy should seek to reduce female poverty and promote women’s economic independence in order to strengthen women’s labor market position.
Doing this requires occupational desegregation and pay equity in addition to promoting "time to care" both through the right to take (limited) time out of the labor market to care and through policies to facilitate the synchronisation of employment and care" (203).

Crucial to Lister's policy agenda are family leave and the development of quality, affordable care services. Though parental and family leave legislation has created the formal structures for a shift in caring obligations to include men, Lister rightly points out that social attitudes toward work discourage male use of parental leave. On Lister's account, possible solutions to this problem include full-wage replacement and reserved leave for fathers, but ultimately a change in male attitudes toward employment and challenges by women to the male model of employment are the key factors in creating a woman friendly notion of global citizenship. Attitudinal changes would require massive public education policies designed to transform a male-centered workplace culture. Though these policy recommendations may provide some solutions for global citizenship, their reliance upon a universalist conception of human rights as the foundation of citizenship perpetuates the problems of exclusion associated with traditional understandings of women's citizenship. Moreover, they are simply unoriginal. Feminist theorists have long argued for these same policies and, though Lister's discussions of the public policy implications of global citizenship clearly delineate the problems associated with the current institution of these policies, she fails to offer a unique solution.

Because Lister's discussions of particular debates within the citizenship literature, such as the nature and implications of the public/private divide, the endorsement of the legitimacy of informal modes of participation, and the reconciliation of care and justice as complementary, are generally derivative and seem not to take into account much of the recent literature on citizen-
ship, scholars interested in understanding feminist theory and citizenship would find more fruitful discussions in Mary Dietz, Will Kymlicka, Anne Phillips, or Iris Marion Young. Where Lister tries to "get beyond" the theoretical problems of global citizenship, she often simply changes the terms of the debate without recognizing how these changes Reinstate the same problems.

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British historian Jeremy Black of the University of Exeter has attempted to demonstrate the role of bellicose culture as a cause of war. Covering a great span of history from the year 1450 until the present, Professor Black offers the thesis that societies or governments with war-oriented values are more likely to choose fighting as an option whenever crises and other diplomatic decision-making contexts arise. The author does assure the reader that bellicose culture is not the only major force accounting for war even though culture has an important role.

The promising title of *Why Wars Happen* quickly becomes a theoretical disappointment. Professor Black barely goes beyond the commonsense assertion that warlike perceptions rooted in society contribute to the occurrence of war. In fact, his work is tautological in the sense that he packs over five centuries of warfare into less than 250 pages of text so that he can remind the reader again and again that bellicose attitudes are at work. Black does raise interesting questions about culture such as how