

Acts of affective citizenship?: Possibilities and limitations.

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Abstract:

After briefly discussing the ‘affective turn’ in citizenship studies, this afterword discusses the political mobilisation of affect to consider when, where, and how affect may be connected to citizenship. It asks: What does it mean and do to speak of *affective* acts as acts of affective citizenship? I argue that the phrase ‘affective citizenship’ attaches affect to a very specific object: citizenship. Studying affective citizenship requires attention to how some feelings attach themselves to citizenship and to how citizenship itself can evoke certain feelings. But affective citizenship does not occur ‘naturally’: it arises from, requires and/or produces knowledge, labour, and (new) ‘feeling rules’ (Hochschild in de Wilde and Duyvendak). I conclude with a call for more research into the dynamics of affective citizenship that go beyond a simple opposition between those simply conceived of as agents of disciplinary power and those seen as (resisting) subjects of disciplinary power.

Keywords:

affective citizenship, acts of citizenship, emotions, feelings, investment, knowledge

The ‘affective turn’ has landed in citizenship studies. We might view the publication of this special issue as an ‘arrival’, a formal recognition of affective citizenship as a legitimate object of study in the multidisciplinary field of citizenship studies. Affective citizenship has undoubtedly expanded our understanding of citizenship and added to the scholarship that destabilises it as a strictly legal, institutional product of state authority and rationality. In turn, this volume contributes to the ever-expanding area of ‘affective citizenship’ by including articles that reveal both its exclusionary and emancipatory potential. I use this afterword as a springboard from which to consider where affective citizenship is today and where it might be going.

As the editors to this volume intimate in their introduction, considerations of the role of emotions and affect in political life long precede the formulation of the concept ‘affective citizenship’ (Di Gregorio and Merolli 2017). Similarly, cultural and social studies of affect are part of long historical traditions that are seldom recognised, such as phenomenology and feminist critiques of the Cartesian mind-body split (see the Afterword in Ahmed 2014; Zerilli 2015). I am not going to rehearse the extensive debates about the relationship between affect and emotions here. I will simply state that I share the views of many critics who have some concerns about how the ‘turn to affect’ so separates affect and emotions that it risks rearranging the Cartesian mind-body split rather than dismantling it by privileging affect over reason (Ahmed 2014; Zerilli 2015). I am not interested in separating affect as pre-conceptual and pre-discursive from emotions as conceptual and discursive. Rather, I conceive of affect and emotions as irreducibly entangled; as Sara Ahmed puts it (2014, 208), ‘[e]motions . . . involve bodily processes of affecting and being affected.’ Following on from that, I use the term affect to designate a generic category of emotions and feelings, including embodied and sensory feelings through which we experience the world, and through which worlds, subjects, and objects are enacted and brought forth.

Furthermore, against the tendency to locate emotions (in contrast to affect) back in the realm of the personal and the subjective (e.g. Massumi 2002, 28), I align myself with feminist theorists of affect and emotions who approach affect as *at once* deeply felt and embodied *and* social and public (indicatively, Ahmed 2014; Berlant 2011; Brennan 2004; Cvetkovich 2003, 2007; Ngai 2002; Zerilli 2015). There is a political cultural economy of affect; a logic to how, through formal and informal institutional arrangements, some feelings are validated while others are not. And this (in)validation attaches itself to bodies: fear, for example, is seen as legitimately felt by some bodies (real or abstract, such as the state) while it attaches itself to other bodies that are deemed to be fearsome (Ahmed 2014). In short, the distribution of power and inequality works through affective as well as material and discursive forces (Fortier forthcoming a; Hunter 2015).

With this in mind, and as the collection of articles gathered in this special issue demonstrates, thinking of ‘affective citizenship’ can go some way toward unsettling strict cognitivist conceptions of the modern liberal citizen as well as rationalist ideals of politics (Zerilli 2015, 261). An interesting feature of this collection is that it shows both the constraining power of affective citizenship and its emancipatory potential. Put simply, it evenly distributes analyses of top-down processes on the one hand and acts of affective citizenship from below on the other. Such practices, however, are not as separate as they might appear to be. Rather, when read together these articles show the ‘Janus face’ of citizenship, as Sarah Wiebe has put it

elsewhere (2016): it is simultaneously a governing technology to define and demarcate populations and a potential instrument of contestation and transformation for citizens (c.f. Cruikshank 1999). The contributions of Bagelman (2017) and Vradi and Dayal (2017) reveal how affective citizenship can be a site of radical modes of belonging that might be shaped by or framed within governing technologies of population management and demarcation, but one that also refuses to be determined by it.

This raises an interesting question about the political mobilisation of affect and when, where and how it may be connected to citizenship. Put simply, how and when is the political mobilisation of affect an ‘act of citizenship’? This is what struck me from this collection, and what some of the authors themselves have been struggling with, such as Jen Bagelman (2017) when she asks in a footnote ‘to what degree is the term “citizenship” effective in capturing the sort of affective political mobilization’ discussed in her article about ‘extractivists’ in Canada. When are acts of solidarity, empathy, hospitality, dissent, or attachment about neighbourliness, friendliness, belonging, struggles for survival, or expressive performances of democratic freedom (Bassell 2014 on the latter), and when are they either or also about citizenship?

I use ‘acts of citizenship’ to refer to both institutional and individual practices of making citizens or citizenship, including practices that seek to redefine, decentre, or even refuse citizenship. For even in refusing it, citizenship is the object of the act. First, acts of citizenship concern technologies of governmentality deployed by states, corporations, or other sites of disciplinary power that prescribe what it means to be a good citizen in what I elsewhere refer to as forms of ‘governing through affect’ (2010). Second, in the sense that Isin and Nielsen (2008) mobilise the phrase, ‘acts of citizenship’ refer to those instances when individual actors constitute themselves as citizens. Studying acts of citizenship, Isin suggests, ‘requires a focus on those moments when, regardless of status and substance, subjects constitute themselves as citizens – or, better still, *as those to whom the right to have rights is due*’ (2008, 18, my emphasis). The latter part of his definition is key, for not all acts of political engagement are necessarily about subjects *claiming* their right to have rights, or about making/remaking/refusing citizenship. It is beyond the scope of this article to elaborate on the analytical implications of the concept of acts of citizenship, including my concerns about the risk of it over-reaching into domains that are not always about addressing citizenship as such, but rather about citizens exercising their democratic and political rights. For the purposes that interest me here, I think of acts of citizenship as performative instances of making or (un/re)making citizenship that can come from a range of institutional, organisational, collective, or individual actors.

The question that follows is: what does it mean and do to speak of *affective* acts as acts of affective citizenship? It can be argued that *all* practices of citizenship are affective insofar as, as the editors of this volume attest, ‘the assumptions about human relationships that inform [them] have always, implicitly, dealt with affect, emotion, and non-rational aspects of political life.’ (Di Gregorio and Merolli 2017) Does this mean that the concept of ‘affective citizenship’ is redundant? What do we mean by affective citizenship?

Crucially, the phrase ‘affective citizenship’ attaches affect to a very specific object: citizenship. And citizenship is always bound up within government or corporate disciplinary power relations and place-based politics. Affective citizenship focuses on *one* aspect of how

citizenship ‘takes place’ by emphasising how it is affective – how it involves emotions, feelings, bodies. Furthermore, as John Clarke et al. point out,

this ‘taking place’ has to be understood not only as a metaphor (denoting an event happening), but also as consequential in spatial terms. Citizenship happens in places; citizens act in places; citizenship is practised (or not) in particular places. We begin from an interest in why some places (sites, scales, settings) are deemed (by states, social movements, citizens, etc.) to be ‘proper’ ones for citizenship, while others are not. (2014, 131)

Similarly, with affective citizenship we can begin by asking why some feelings are deemed to be proper ones for citizenship, while others are not. As Ahmed (2014, 211 *inter alia*) suggests regarding the link between emotions and their objects, studying affective citizenship requires attention to how some feelings attach themselves to citizenship – for example the feelings of belonging or rightful presence – and to how citizenship itself can bring up certain feelings – such as the feeling of safety that the state is presumed to have the responsibility of ensuring for all its citizens (Weber 2008). Critically attending to such questions takes us to the ‘ontological politics’ of citizenship (Mol 2002 in Fortier forthcoming b) – or as Beauchamps (2017) states in this volume, to ‘a certain politics of truth’: how feelings are deemed to reflect or express the truth of citizenship as well as the truth of the citizen. But as articles in this issue show, the question of which feelings are deemed good or bad reflections of citizenship or the citizen is highly contested. In addition, the struggle over legitimate feelings is also a struggle over legitimate knowledge (e.g. Wieber 2016), insofar as affect and cognition are deeply entangled (Ahmed 2015; Zerilli 2015). Knowing how to feel about citizenship (Merolli 2017 in this issue), how to act and feel as citizens (de Wilde and Duyvendak 2017 in this issue), including how to protest as citizens (Bagelman 2017, Beauchamps 2017 in this issue) or against the terms of citizenship (Vrasti and Dayal 2017 in this issue) is invariably bound up with what we know about citizenship and its (failed) promises, much of which is assumed and taken for granted. In this respect, Marie Beauchamps’ article is a welcome reminder of the historical legacy of ‘the co-constitution of law and emotions’ in the formation of citizenship at the time of the French Revolution, when ‘citizenship became a decisive category in the new national juridical and political system’. While ideas of citizenship as *national* membership have been radically challenged since the French Revolution (Behnabib 2007; Soysal 1995, Isin 2012), what Beauchamps highlights is the foundational character of affect in the constitution of citizenship and of the state-citizen relation. I shall return to this point later, but first I want to briefly comment on the labour of affective citizenship.

Indeed, some of the articles featured in this issue bring to bear the extent to which affective citizenship is labour intensive. This includes what Arlie Hochschild (1983, 11, 19) has called ‘the “emotional labor” involved in the transmutation of private sentiments into public acts’. But what I want to emphasise here is the physical and emotional commitment required in practices of affective citizenship: be it the work of policy practitioners, of ‘dissident’ citizens, of indigenous peoples set to protect their lands and their way of life, of those seeking naturalisation and of those seeking to make it more difficult for them, or those offering sanctuary to minoritised citizens or noncitizens. Attachment is an investment and in turn, calls for more investments when threatened. Affective citizenship does not exist on its own nor does it occur ‘naturally’: it arises

from, requires and/or produces physical (bodily, geographical, architectural), financial, material (e.g. sculptures, paddles, tests) investments to sustain or re-orient or alter it.

What is also at stake in some acts of affective citizenship is the struggle over bodies and embodiment: how to read bodies, how to know bodies, and how to recognise the range of bodily knowledges that result from a complex mix of historical, cultural, societal and environmental exposures. From the former Canadian government's attempt to ban the face veil for the oath of citizenship because it was deemed 'offensive' to the nation (Merolli 2017), to the reading of bodies to discern 'hidden' emotions (Beauchamps 2017), to a politics of rightful presence and the Sanctuary City that opens its spaces to undocumented, racially minoritised, working class, queer, and differently abled bodies (Vrasti and Dayal 2017) – all these instances exemplify the deep enmeshment of bodies, feelings, knowledge in the politics and practices of citizenship.

The articles in this collection shed light on the clashes that arise between 'feeling rules' (Hochschild in de Wilde and Duyvendak) and unruly feelings. Feeling rules leave little room for unknown, unexpected, unacceptable, undesirable, or unintelligible feelings and they testify to how, as I argue elsewhere (2010), affect is organised around a political economy of feelings. The design, circulation and distribution of legitimate feelings for and within the community delineate the codes of conduct of the good affective citizen and establishes a differential political value in the currency of feelings. Put differently, exploring affective citizenship requires focusing on its complex logic: how the feelings that attach to citizenship are unevenly distributed across gendered, racialised, sexualised, classed bodies – some citizens feel safer than others; some citizens are deemed safer than others – and in turn, how subjects' feelings about citizenship are not all equally valued – not all desires for citizenship are deemed equally desirable (Fortier 2013). Affective citizenship critically intervenes against this logic by stressing that it is subject of contestation.

Such clashes, or 'interpretive gaps' in Beauchamp's words, can result in a range of lived, embodied, visceral effects and affects of state rule on individuals; from disappointment, anger, exhaustion, and anxiety, to neurotic behaviours and being in a 'hyperactive state of alert' (Wiebe 2016). Researching affective citizenship can take us to 'the psychic life of power', in Judith Butler's (1997) words, that is, to the 'psychosocial' (in the broad sense of the term) dynamics of citizenship practices and their varying effects on subjects. Here, analysing affective citizenship asks 'what is the psychic form that power takes? (Butler 1997, 2) and locates the psychic life of power specifically in the relational dynamics between different parties. And those parties can be a combination of a number of actors: so-called 'agents of the state', state subjects, policies and laws, policy subjects, policy creators or implementers, corporations and their representatives, the state, consumers, local residents, local/national governments, etc. In short, affective citizenship offers an understanding of contemporary conditions of personal life and subject formations and how they relate to citizenship. Such analyses yield fruitful critical insights into how attachments to citizenship can facilitate but also cripple emancipatory projects, and even, as Beauchamps reminds us, lead to denaturalisation or death.

But the 'interpretive gap' between feeling rules and unruly feelings is one that does not simply map itself onto the opposition between various forms of disciplinary power on the one hand, and subjects expressing, feeling and embodying citizenship 'otherwise' on the other. To be

sure, affect is constitutive of, and channelled into, practices of governance – for example the current climate of fear allows for framing ‘the state as a body endangered by migrants’ (Bigo 2002, 68) and feeds into the tightening of access to citizenship in several Western countries since the late 1990s, as well as the rise of denaturalisation and deportation as the favoured responses against the perceived threatening subjects (Beauchamps 2017; de Genova and Peutz 2010). But affect is also a historically foundational feature of the state-citizen relation, as Beauchamps reminds us. More specifically, I argue elsewhere (extending from Honig 2001) that anxiety is not simply an epochal feature on state practices of citizenship, but that it is foundational to the state-citizen relation and that it exists in an ambivalent relationship with desire (forthcoming a). Consequently, this forces a reconception not only of citizenship as performative, but also of the state as performative rather than as a pre-given, disembodied and unified decision-maker (Weber 1998, Sharma and Gupta 2006). Furthermore, this opens onto much needed research that recognises how *all* actors who are variously affected by a state policy – as well as other forms of disciplinary prescriptions such as those decreed by private corporations – variously experience, interpret, enact and feel those policies.

In this respect, I welcome de Wilde and Duyvendak’s (2017) discussion of how local government representatives (as well as local residents) experience a policy aimed at community-building that the government representatives are tasked to implement in a neighbourhood on the periphery of Amsterdam. This type of research advances understandings of the local affects and effects of practices of governing through affect such as those described by de Wilde and Duyvendak. But more than that: this kind of research also allows for a recognition that ‘policy practitioners’, as de Wilde and Duyvendak call them, are more ‘fully human’ than they are often made out to be when they are conceived of simply as ‘agents of the state’ (Hunter 2015). Those whose role it is to implement a policy are not necessarily simply instrumental about it – through there is a measure of that, as de Wilde and Duyvendak point out. They are also affected by what they do, who they meet, how *they* are positioned, and their own (at times ambivalent) relationship to the state (see Fortier, forthcoming a). This kind of research on affective citizenship invites an analysis of what Shona Hunter calls a ‘relational politics’, the ‘messy and uncontrollable agency constitutive of the everyday state’ (2015, 16) and ‘the everyday actions, investments and practices of the multiple and shifting range of people and other material and symbolic objects that make up the state.’ (2015, 5).

Furthering our understanding of affective citizenship requires moving beyond a view that posits those representing state or corporate interests as simply opposed to and as part of different ‘cultures’ than those who are the subjects affected and targeted by those interests. Rather, the object is to draw out how all these actors may be ‘implicated in a set of shared and divergent forces that bring [them] together and move [them] apart.’ (Povinelli 2011, 84). Only in this way can we gain a fuller grasp of the ways in which power and inequality work through affect, and which may help us to move closer to a transformative politics of affective citizenship.

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