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Citizenship

John Barry
Queens University Belfast

‘Activism is the rent I pay for living on this planet’, Alice Walker

Introduction: Actually existing liberal democracy: a view from the foothills of power

One dominant theme in green and indeed other radical/progressive analyses of contemporary citizenship theory and practice is the reduction of ‘citizen’ to ‘voter’ and/or ‘taxpayer’ under liberal political theory and liberal democratic political practice. This reduction is often used to explain the dominance of consumer (and producer) identities, interests and valued practices over those of (active and participatory) forms of democratic citizenship.

I have direct political experience of the dominance of the taxpayer identity and framing of citizenship within local politics. As a local government councillor in Northern Ireland (for the Green Party), I said in one council meeting that I had noticed that all the other councillors regularly spoke of local people as ‘rate payers’ and ‘tax payers’ rather than referring to them as ‘citizens’. I said that this struck me as odd, since while paying rates is part of what local citizens do, this does not exhaust their political identity. I suggested that viewing them as citizens with rights spoke to local government as an essential element of democracy, and that in my view the role of the local government cannot and should not be reduced merely to a service delivery mechanism. This, I went on, would be to reduce the essentially *political* relationship between local elected representatives and local governance institutions (in this case the local council) to a simple exchange relationship. In other words, to essentially view the relationship as an economic one between those who pay for a service (local rate payers) and the service provider (the council).

The reaction of my fellow councillors was telling. Universally I was criticised and ridiculed for daring to suggest such an idea. I was mocked for my comments, called a ‘radical’, a ‘Marxist’ and other names. One councillor dismissed my position on the grounds that it would be ridiculous to go around calling local people ‘citizen’ when we meet them (though interestingly the reverse of this position was not explored by this councillor i.e. greeting people as ‘rate payer’). What does this small experience tell us about the state of democracy and citizenship? And what may it tell us of the connection between citizenship and sustainability? Does a lack of engagement with and care for democracy lead to a similar lack of concern and care for the nonhuman world? And more importantly, does this then also lead to

a lack of democratic, collective decision-making over human-nonhuman relations? If the crisis of unsustainability is also a crisis of democratic politics (Gore, 2007), does this mean that more democracy is the solution? If passive forms of citizenship or practices of non-citizenship are somehow causally implicated in unsustainability, does that mean simply encouraging more active forms of citizenship will have the opposite effect and help move societies away from unsustainability?

This chapter will seek to explore some of the connections (causal and other) between the decline in active citizenship, the displacement of citizenship by consumer identities and interests and the shift to a transactional mode of democratic politics and how and in what ways these are connected with the rise of unsustainability. It will also suggest possible responses, proposing an account of 'green republican citizenship' as an appropriate theory and practice of establishing a link between democracy and democratisation and the transition from unsustainability. The chapter begins from the (not uncontroversial) position that debt-based consumer capitalism (and especially its more recent neoliberal incarnation), is simply incompatible with a version of democratic politics and associated norms and practices of citizenship required for the transition away from unsustainable development (Barry, 2012). This chapter also outlines an explicitly 'green republican' conception of citizenship as an appropriate way to integrate democratic citizenship and the creation of a more sustainable political and socio-ecological order.

Liberal Clientelism, Green Republicanism and Citizenship

In terms of the 'notes from the foothills of power' outlined above, a key feature of a green republican conception of citizenship can be discerned in its antipathy to the 'dependent clientelism' at the heart of the views of the councillors who rejected viewing local people as citizens. Clientelism here is understood as the selective distribution of public or other resources in exchange for voting or party support, and has been long documented as a feature of most liberal representative democratic systems (Piattoni, 2004). While clientelism does encompass forms of corrupted citizen-party/politician relationships, there is a more mundane, less dramatic clientelism that is equally, if not more corrupting of a healthy democratic politics. This is clientelism based on citizens not being informed about or feeling disempowered to navigate the political and policy process (to find benefits, question public officials or statutory agencies, make their views known for example). And this of course places political parties or politicians in the position as 'gatekeepers' in providing that information to citizens and offering a service to citizens as clients, in exchange, implicitly or explicitly, for political or electoral support. And in creating this sense of dependence, such clientelism also creates *unequal* citizens who are in some cases reduced to pre-modern status

of being a contingent and insecure recipient of goods or services. An International Labour Organization report on 'economic security' picks up on this issue: 'It has often been said that the modern movement for human rights represents the painful evolution from clientelism to citizenship, where 'the citizen' is someone with individual and collective rights, rather than merely someone who relies on charity, welfare, or paternalistic gestures... Well meaning paternalism easily blurs into discretionary and arbitrary coercion' (International Labor Organization, 2004: 7)

Thus, from a democratic and republican point of view this clientelism leaves the opportunity for abuse of power, for arbitrariness to establish itself where equality and giving people what they are due should be the guiding principles. The avoidance and protection from arbitrary coercion and domination are key defining features of a green republican political vision of democratic citizenship. But why should this matter from a sustainability or green political point of view? Several reasons can be given for this, and indeed there has been much research on the topic over the last two decades (Doherty and de Geus, 1996; Smith, 2000; Dobson, 2003). For reasons of space I will outline three.

Firstly, clientelism can undermine democratic politics by reducing the citizen to a passive consumer/client/voter/tax-payer, and the creation of a political culture which does not encourage or reward citizens becoming interested and involved and participants in the governance of their society. To put it provocatively (here viewing exaggeration as when the truth loses its temper), in so doing it effectively 'infantilises' citizens, creates interests and passive political identities.

Secondly, clientelism can become a key feature of a 'captured' democratic system that is controlled by elites and special interest groups, and therefore a corruption of democracy as 'rule by the people, of the people, for the people'. On both conceptual and empirical grounds there is a strong correlation between sustainable policies and collective actions and more democratic, participative and inclusive forms of democratic decision-making. For example, there is some evidence of a disjuncture between elites and citizens when it comes to certain risky technological policies in relation to promoting economic growth. Results from deliberative citizens' experiments seem to indicate that the general public is more risk adverse and more inclined to support precautionary approaches to risky technological innovations than political and economic elites (Dryzek et al, 2009). As they note, 'If precautionary worldviews are as pervasive in reflective publics as we suggest, then the generally Promethean positions of governing elites cannot be legitimated by deliberative means – at least when it comes to issues of technological risk'. (Dryzek et al, 2009: 34). This is suggestive of the view that the more open and deliberative the political process with active encouragement and involvement of

citizens in decision-making, the less likely we are to see policies for technologically risky economic growth policies. This suggests that alternatives to unsustainable economic growth as a permanent feature and objective of an advanced economy, such as 'economic security' or notions of wellbeing, may enjoy more democratic support (Barry, 2012: 161). But if, and only if, such decisions about the economy for example are democratised and made the subject of citizen rather than elite or expert decision-making.

Thirdly, and related to the last point of elite and expert dominating, the apolitical, consumer logic of clientelism (itself simply being used here as a focal point for the undermining of active citizenship in capitalist-consumer liberal democracies) increases the prevalence of apolitical or often anti-political market-based 'solutions' to the problems of unsustainability. These are usually technological in nature and while of course technological innovation is to be welcomed in the transition from unsustainability, part of the danger of such 'techno-fix' solutions is in mostly focusing on the 'ecological' or resource aspect of unsustainability they tend to offer narrow apolitical, often individualistic, and resolutely non-collective analyses and responses (Maniates, 2002).

In this way, as Beck puts it, technologically-orientated economic growth is presented and perceived by most citizens as 'legitimate social change without democratic political legitimation' (1992: 214). This naive notion would be worrying at the best of times, but when such social change is wreaking wholesale ecological destruction on current and future generations it is ecocidal to assume such 'progress' is natural or automatic or safe being managed by elites (corporate and state). On the other hand, citizens under these circumstances are not offered the opportunity to consider that the choice to live in a less unsustainable society is, from a green republican point of view, the choice to live in a *different type of society*. Not the *same* society with low-carbon light bulbs or more recycling, i.e. an environmentally sustainable and resource efficient capitalism with unequal power relations, socio-economic inequalities etc. still intact. Thus, essential features of a green republican citizenship (indeed of any 'green' conception of citizenship I would suggest) are that it is politically transformative and transgressive, radical and emancipatory-critical (Scerri, 2013). In the next section I outline what, on first gloss, looks like an odd candidate or vehicle for such a transformative, emancipatory form of green republican citizenship practice, namely compulsory 'civic sustainability service'.

The Green Republican Case for Compulsory 'Civic Sustainability Service'

One of the reasons for seeking to explore the civic republican tradition relates to recent discussions about the 'greening' of citizenship (Scerri,

2012; Barry, 2012; Trachtenberg, 2010; Gabrielson and Paredy, 2010; Gabrielson, 2007; Latta, 2007) and the greening of the state within green political theory (Eckersley, 2004; Barry and Eckersley, 2003). An obvious concern here is that the heavily duty-based conception of republican citizenship would be too burdensome, reducing the many other possible identities, interests and activities individuals have to a dominant or master identity. Another is the 'perfectionism' or imposition of one view of the 'good life' that some suggest underpin the republican stress on active citizenship. However, while republicanism certainly emphasises the importance of active citizens doing their duties, participating and defending the collective way of life of their free community, green republican politics does not require that there be one commonly held view of the good life (Honahan, 2003). Indeed, for republicanism, pluralism and contestation is as (if not more) important for democratic politics than consensus and agreement.

At the same time, prominent contemporary republican theorists such as Philip Pettit are clear that the republican promotion of and stress upon active political citizenship is not based on the ethical or metaphysical superiority of politics and political activism over other modes of life. Rather, citizenship is a means to securing liberty as non-domination not necessarily an end in itself (Pettit, 1997). *Freedom as non-domination* (as opposed to the liberal conception of *freedom as non-interference*) is institutionalised independence from arbitrary power. This requires active citizenship and involvement in public life and defending and contesting the common good, a central part of which is ecological sustainability. Such activism is central and constitutive of a political order in which freedom can be created and sustained. In this way, green republicanism therefore sees no significant problem in holding a view of citizenship as both *instrumentally and intrinsically* valuable.

Civic sustainability service –forms of compulsory service (enforced by the state) for sustainable (including but not limited to strictly *ecological or environmental*) goals, is similar in form to the national service we find in many states today. This service could take the form of all citizens having to give up some proportion of their time to engage in a range of sustainability activities. These activities could include cleaning up a polluted beach or river, working in community-based recycling schemes, working in socially deprived areas, assisting campaigns to decrease social inequality and social exclusion, participating in public information initiatives about sustainability or environmental education, working on community-farms or community wind-farms, becoming a development worker or human rights activist overseas and so on. Such forms of 'citizen work' could be integrated with educational or self-reflective activities to enable citizens to discuss and experience such activities as forms of social learning. Such forms of work/service could help, for example, citizenship

education (of the type we have in many curricula in different countries) to become both more real and more meaningful. In this way distinctly 'green' dimensions of citizenship could be cultivated. The amount of time given up to sustainability service could range from one year (post-education) in the service of the common good, to a couple of hours each week over a longer period.

One might view it in terms of Marx's notion of 'socially necessary labour', that is labour which has to be done in order for society and its members to flourish. Or Michael Walzer's argument, updating Marx's point, in his *Spheres of Justice* where he argues that equal citizenship and the creation and sustaining of a healthy democratic community requires *all* citizens undertake an equal share of the gruelling work that makes society function (Walzer, 1983). The distribution of work in all its forms (i.e. not just formally paid 'employment' but also unwaged and informal/community or domestic work, including gendered reproductive labour, or political work in being an active citizen) is of central concern for green politics (Barry, 2013). And as Crabtree and Field suggest, 'A free society often makes claims on its people, from compulsory schooling to paying taxes and defending the nation in a time of peril. Civic service can be just such a legitimate demand' (Crabtree and Field, 2009).

The idea of compulsory sustainability service exhibits an obvious state-focused conception of green citizenship, perfectly in keeping with the republican tradition, which classically is very state-centric (or rather city-state centred. More importantly, any positive connotations of such compulsory citizenship practices, seem to depend in part on whether the state which demands and enforces such obligatory work/time is a 'green' or 'greening' one or not (Eckersley, 2003). On the face of it, it does seem less objectionable (though of course not without other grounds for objection) if such compulsory forms of green citizenship are authorised by a green state that is working towards sustainability. As Dagger notes, 'To paraphrase Edmund Burke, we should be sure that our country is deserving of service before we require or recommend that someone serve it' (Dagger, 2001: 27). For this reason, sustainability citizenship service should not be viewed simply as citizens obeying state injunctions, it also can require, as indicated below, forms of resistance citizenship activism *against* the state (and other vested anti-sustainability interests) (Barry, 2005).

Equally, another possible objection to compulsory sustainability service is that in a grossly unequal society, the operation of such schemes would result in the unemployed, the poor and marginalised being the ones who do the bulk of this compulsory work. Therefore a precondition for the justification of compulsory public service for sustainability ends requires the creation of a more equal society. That is, a precondition for such practices of 'green republican' citizenship is some degree of, 'rough equality', which is not only in keeping with the

egalitarian ethos of green republicanism, but also a constitutive aspect of democratic citizenship itself.

Forms of Sustainable Economic Citizenship – The Social Economy and Cooperatives

How the economy is conceptualized, managed and institutionalized is one of the key, if not the key, issue for the transition away from unsustainability. The reasons for this are rather simple. The first is that the human economy represents the material metabolism between humanity and the nonhuman world (energy, resources, pollution etc.), thus how it is viewed and the principles or objectives by which it is organised determines whether our species is sustainable or not. The second is that the manner in which the human economy is organized determines in whole or part, how unequal or not the society is and the distribution of power and resources, and the dominant view of the 'good life'. And, pertinent to the discussion of citizenship here, the organisation of the economy determines the extent to which notions and practices of solidarity, individual and collective autonomy and self-direction and determination, democratic decision-making etc., are included or excluded within the economic-productive sphere of society.

Within that extremely broad issue of green political economy (Barry, 2012; Cato, 2012; Boyle and Simms, 2008), I wish to focus on arguments for the growth of the 'social economy' and cooperative forms of economic activity, as both a necessary feature of any sustainable economy and a way of achieving non-ecological (specifically citizenship) goals of green politics. One of the reasons for focusing on the social economy is that the current dominance of a free market capitalist organization of the economy, and a still existing, but shrinking state/public sector economy, is both ecologically irrational – unsustainable largely because of the imperative of carbon-fuelled economic growth (Barry, 2012) – and socially irrational – creating greater socio-economic inequalities, eroding quality of life and undermining active democratic citizenship (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009).

For Smith, one of the reasons for a strong link between the social economy and sustainability is that, 'The *ethos* of the social economy orientates organisations towards mutual, communal or general interests...Ethos is complemented by a second characteristic of social economy organizations – their democratic *structure*...the social economy offers a number of interesting institutional designs within which different forms of participation can be practised' (2005: 278-9). Thus, unlike either state-bureaucratic or private-capitalist forms of economic organization, the social economy, *ceteris paribus*, provides a better institutional 'fit' for green democratic, egalitarian, solidarity and active citizenship goals (Barry, 2012; Barry and Smith, 2005).

The social economy can act as a site enabling important citizenship skills and experiences to be developed. Indeed, an emerging aspect of green political economy scholarship is the claim that the achievement of these positive extra-economic benefits requires linking the growth of the social economy explicitly to the creation of a 'post-growth' economic order which can effectively provide the space for the reduction and transformation (including democratisation) of both the state and capitalist spheres of economic production, distribution and consumption (Barry, 2012).

The social economy, by virtue of its cooperative and democratic potentials, can also contribute to cultivating and supporting more active senses of citizenship (Barry and Smith, 2005: 257–9). That is, the social economy and principles of 'co-production' (Cahn, 2000; Stephens, Royle-Collins, and Boyle, 2008) can foster a sense of the individual qua economic/productive agent as an active citizen rather than passive consumer (market economy) or welfare recipient (public sector economy). As Iris Marion Young has argued, the self-organizing and self-directed character of the social economy is such that '[d]emocracy and social justice would be enhanced in most societies if civic associations provided even more goods and services' (2000: 166), a point also echoed by Smith (2005: 276). The upshot of this is that such self-organizing activity involves learning and practicing skills of conflict resolution, awareness of and resistance to prevailing power relations, and perhaps above all the experience that collective action works, and that economic production does not have to be always located in either the state or formal market economy.

Going further into some specific forms of social economic organisation, there a strong connection can be made between the ecological and non-ecological goals of sustainability and worker cooperatives (Carter, 1996) as a form of social economy organisation that ought to be favoured by green and sustainability advocates. As Tom Malleon has cogently put it,

in the 20th century the democratic movement crashed headlong into the locked factory gate. This is why *my democratic totem is that of a worker cooperative, since the expansion of democracy into workplaces, and throughout the economy more generally, represents the next major step in the expansion of human freedom*. The old fight for the franchise continues today in the form of the struggle for economic suffrage and economic citizenship. (Malleon, 2013)

Two other reasons present themselves as to why worker cooperatives should be favoured by those interested in the transition from unsustainability. The first is that beyond a certain level of production and per capita profit, a worker-managed firm will seek to limit its size

and production capacity, as opposed to an inexorable competitive 'grow or die' business strategy. As Rosen and Schweickart point out, "since worker-self-managed firms want to maximize profit per worker rather than total profits, they are inherently less expansionary than are capitalist firms...Increasing the number of employees also dilutes the democratic influence within the firm of the existing members" (Rosen and Schweickart, 2006: 23). At the same time it is likely (and the evidence is there to demonstrate this) that worker managed firms will achieve 'work-life' balance patterns that encourage any productivity gains being translated into more free time (Schor, 2010) as opposed to more wage income and consumption. Or to put it simply, a green republican economy aims: *to have more people working less, rather than less people working more*. This would enhance human flourishing, a vital component of which is meaningful free time for people. But it would also provide more people with the opportunity to be involved in democratic politics.

Resistance is Fertile: Green Citizenship and Contestatory Politics

A final area for discussion in relation to citizenship within green/sustainability debates relates to what might be called 'contestatory' collective political action. 'Sustainability service' could also be interpreted as meaning that there is an obligation within 'sustainability citizenship' to engage in forms of political struggle against underlying structural causes of ecological degradation, socio-economic inequality, poverty, ill-health and other non-ecological components of unsustainability.

In other words, one can think of the 'necessary work' that is a constitutive aspect of 'sustainability citizenship' as including politically orientated 'resistance work' and is not simply equated with 'compliance' to state-backed forms of sustainability service and work (Barry, 2012, 2005). In casting sustainability citizenship service in this contestatory form, we both move towards the agonistic politics of republicanism as well as a more radical politics of green citizenship. Such contestatory forms of citizenship action fit within what Honohan outlines as republican notions of civic virtue – which she suggests 'takes various forms, from more passive self-restraint to active public service and even to resistance. It does not mean simply more *obedience or deference to authority* than in a liberal system. It should be noted that it is an obligation between citizens rather than to any central authority' (Honohan, 2002: 166; emphasis added).

Arguing for a conception of what might be called '*sustainability necessary resistance work*' trades on the same argument often found in debates about injustice. Namely, in the face of prevailing injustices there is a need to both recognise these injustices as injustices, but also to seek to remedy through appropriate political action. That is,

just as we can say that the first demand of justice is to fight against injustice (Simon, 1995), as well as comply with the demands of maintaining a system of justice, equally we can say that the first demand of sustainable development is to fight against unsustainable development as well as comply with the demands of sustainable development.

It rather telling that in official ‘citizenship studies’ within mainstream education in most countries, in official reviews of citizenship provision, (Tonge and Mycock, 2010), political analysis of the importance of citizenship in modern democracies (Crick, 2005), including arguments for greening the citizenship curriculum (Dobson, 2003), or forms of ‘education for sustainable development’ (Hume and Barry, 2014), resistance and practices of political struggle such as non-violent direct action (NVDA) as valued forms of citizenship action are conspicuous by their absence. Official citizenship education typically views NVDA as a historically interesting, but ‘abnormal’ form of citizenship, not fitting within a ‘normal’ understanding of citizen identity. Thus, from a green republican view of citizenship, *agonistic* political action, *contesting* existing state or social norms or laws, does not become seen as a normal and healthy element of a vibrant democratic society. Yet, this contestatory mode of citizenship should be valued and encouraged (as opposed to being either neglected or reluctantly tolerated and endured).

Conclusion

Citizenship is a central feature of green political and ethical theory. From the green republican perspective outlined here it is an indispensable element of the democratic promise of the transition from unsustainability. Citizenship is not simply of instrumental or strategic benefit in the sense that more active and resistance forms of citizenship action and collective agency are required for this transition. Citizenship, especially when viewed and presented in green republican terms, is also a deeply ethical status, practice and identity. Active democratic citizenship is a precious gift, vulnerable, artificially created, socially maintained and always contingent. It requires, like freedom itself, constant vigilance and protection from those forces (including internal, psychological ones) that would erode or leech it of its ethical (and activist) core. This ethical core of citizenship is both recognition of it as a legitimate way to structure and acknowledge our co-dependence on one another, and also the status and identity of citizenship as bestowing dignity upon individuals in their expression of autonomy as free moral and politically creative and imaginative agents. This creative capacity for choice is a constituent element of citizenship – to see that the transition from unsustainability is not some automatic transmission mechanism but a creative, political-ethical choice to live in a different type of society.

As theorists as different as Hannah Arendt and Paulo Friere have noted, citizens cannot be 'created' in the classroom but rather must be made and remade in actual political action. And perhaps a starting point in relation to contemporary citizenship action (and inaction) in relation to unsustainability is just that: to recognise that our current situation is marked by unsustainability and to make unsustainability rather than sustainability the focus of citizenship action. And from there to think through changes and struggles required to collectively chart a transition away from unsustainability, and in the process to accept our own responsibility and choice to maintain unsustainability or choose and struggle for sustainability. And ultimately, to accept that this form of green/sustainability citizenship action cannot be done for us, but only by us. And finally to ask ourselves the simple question: what if we are the people we've been waiting for?

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