

Excerpts from
Common Passion, Different Voices
Reflections on Citizenship and Intersubjectivity

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This relationship of personal/individual responsibility for the government we choose translates into *our* political responsibility for *our political choices*; or, responsibility of all those who belong to a (political) community. The complexity of the problem is that this relationship of personal responsibility spreads, or to put it more precisely, bifurcates: firstly, to other members of one's own, my own, community and secondly, to members of other political communities. The latter form of responsibility is shared with other members of my own community and structures collective responsibility which is always already political (Arendt, 2003). It is responsibility for what my government has done in my name.

This theoretical analysis has a personal meaning for me. The country I lived in was broken up in a series of devastating wars; thousands were killed, wounded and raped, millions were displaced. Simone de Beauvoir reminds us that floods, earthquakes or pestilence are, metaphorically speaking, 'the scourge of god' and that, consequently, we suffer differently from the effects of earthquakes than from the consequences of wars, the wars being of our own making (Beauvoir, 1972). Hence, for me, the importance of the issue of responsibility.

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Globalisation is planetary interdependence and the end of immunity (as suggested by 9/11). The West, the main agent in globalisation, is also the *spectator* and *victim*: a somewhat powerless spectator and potential victim of 'global risks' (Beck, 1997,1986; Giddens 1990) such as the nuclear threat, global warming, viral epidemics, environmental disasters and terrorism.

Globalisation is the loss of borders, it is the creation of a world that seems at the same time infinitely *open* due to the disappearance and weakening of borders, and closed, as we are now lacking a clearly distinct and identifiable 'elsewhere' whose resources can be exploited without end and upon whom we can offload the undesirable effects of our own 'unsustainable' development. There is no longer an 'elsewhere' into which Western civilisation – as

has always happened since the beginning of modernity – can expand and prosper.

And – potentially – there is no longer the 'other'. The other lives in our neighbourhood, mixes into the chaos of our metropolises, passes beyond confines, across territories, in frenzied and ungovernable migration. This other is the potential victim, like us, of the dangers that go before every difference and also before every inequality.

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Citizenship is not a static concept. At different historical times and at different moments, even when referring to the same territory, it is perceived as having different meanings and different practices. In my host country, Italy, I was able to recognise diversified modes through which this concept was applied and codified, according to the origin of the person, their national identity, their gender and the amount of time they had spent on the soil of the host country. I took part in the civil struggles of the excluded, of immigrants who were trying and who still try different ways to have their identities recognised and to obtain acceptance of their 'right to the right to citizenship'. I recognise the emergence of the need for some sort of *mobile citizenship*, separate from nationality, due to the increasing circulation of subjects in intercultural environments, whether refugees, ordinary migrants, 'extracomunitari' (overseas or non-EU citizens), displaced persons... A diversified space with a plurality of identities around us becomes more and more the normal context of our existence. Within this framework, reflective thought on citizenship and on the meanings that the concept implies in contemporary modern and post-modern times includes and emphasises the significance of dignity for each and every one of us.

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A pivotal constraint, and therefore a target for feminist citizenship praxis, is the domestic division of labour that

gives men a collective advantage over women in the public space. 'Time is a resource for citizenship, generally skewed in favour of men. Citizenship politics is therefore in part about the politics of time' (Lister, 2003: 200). Agreeing with Lister, I find the main problem at stake is that the activity of caring, whether it is public or private, is given only minor recognition. Both the ones in need of care and the ones giving care are defined as dependants in a society that values independent beings over dependent ones. This means low payment and consequently low status, not only for the receivers but also for the givers of care. Care obligations result in men filling the most valued and best-paid jobs in society, while relegating women to low paid, often part-time jobs.

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In order to be recognised and included as a full citizen in European and global politics it is important to overcome the problem of time constraints. To do that it is important not only to develop but also to integrate an alternative definition and understanding of care. I suggest that we recognise care as the existential condition of life. In this conception care is beyond the constraints of one right way to respond, one right way to live, as there is no age or colour or sex that is the right one (Skærbæk, 2001). This perspective means that every human being from the very beginning of life is inserted as subject, as a citizen with a responsibility to care for other subjects.

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