Revival of the Civic Spirit: Contradictions in Somali-American Citizenship

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I. Introduction

Throughout history, the notion of citizenship has been full of contradictions. Both as a method of inclusion and exclusion, of privilege and second-class status, citizenship is a cornerstone of one's individual, national, and global identity. Some optimistic scholars have noted an entrance into a "post-national" phase of global citizenship; however, this vision cannot be realized while human rights are being violated. To be sure, citizenship has become a much more universal concept since its inception and has been facilitated by ideas of cosmopolitanism. Yet it has not transcended national boundaries into the global sphere. This claim can be supported by almost any national immigration case study. Whether in South Africa, Norway, or France, immigrant refugees fleeing persecution are rarely granted full human rights in terms of citizenship. The United States is in the midst of a third major wave of immigration: from 1990 to 2008 almost one million new arrivals landed here each year. Since the eruption of civil war in Somalia in 1991, many Somalis have sought refuge in the United States—a symbol of political, religious, and social freedom—and have followed chain migration patterns scattered across the country, with one of the largest populations settling in the Twin Cities area. However, the "Somali Capital of the United States" does not provide asylum or immunity from the international contradictions in citizenship and human rights, which will be an underlying theme throughout the essay.

First, I will provide an overview of citizenship and its role within the state, detailing its evolution and shortcomings. The "push-pull" con-

tradictory relationship between human rights and the state is emphasized, paying close attention to the "citizenship gap" that has emerged and created a class of 25 million "stateless" peoples.

Second, I turn to a brief but crucial introduction to the conflicting immigration policies of the United States. I use Erika Lee's framework of the U.S. as a "gate-keeping" nation to establish that there are oftentimes racially motivated exclusions in our immigration history. I then transition from the broader American immigration dialogue to the unique experience of Somali-Americans. As part of the push-pull migration narrative, Somali immigration to America, and the Twin Cities in particular, intensified during the years of civil unrest following the dictatorial rule of Siad Barre.

Next, I acknowledge the present opportunities and obligations that exist for Somali-Americans in the Twin Cities and in larger civic contexts. I closely examine the link between the civic dissipation and the failed Somali state, and determine that "critical adaptation" and "cosmopolitanism" are the best strategies for community integration.

Last, I entertain the theory of Democratic Cosmopolitanism alongside our human interpretation of "identity." The methodology one takes towards identity, whether primordial or constructed, greatly informs one's perception of the assimilation prospects of Somali-Americans.

II. Citizenship

Citizenship is a way of classifying and organizing social and political identity.[1] It gives legal status to individuals in certain sovereign spaces. It is, therefore, unsurprising that the concept of citizenship emerged synchronously with the modern city-state. Citizenship as a concept dates back to the fifth-century B.C., when the Greeks first used it as a tool to establish a sense of community and belonging within Athens. It is innate human nature to want to belong and feel valued within a community, and citizenship was a method for city-states, and later nation-states, to instill a sense of security and pride in their subjects. Sheila Croucher, a scholar of globalization, argues that citizenship is not a means to an end, but an end itself—a way to become fully human.[2] In theory, citizenship has been an open title to be earned, but in practice, it has had many limitations based on factors like class, ethnicity, and religion. Citizenship has always been limited. In Athens it was limited to white male property owners, and since then it has slowly evolved into

a more egalitarian principle and is inclusive of more demographics, yet still, many find themselves excluded from full citizenship rights.

Throughout human history, many have undertaken the same project of collective order: how to best organize society. There is often an intersection of these societal modernization efforts with human rights. The *Magna Carta*, *Declaration of the Rights of Man*, *United States Constitution*, and *Communist Manifesto* are all human rights documents that are intrinsically linked with the modern nation-state. Karl Marx, for example, was especially engrossed by the contradiction between citizenship and human rights. He was drawn to the idea of the collective society over individualism, as he saw individual natural rights to be inherently unequal. Communal entitlement was a more legitimate form of organizing society.[3] To Marx, human rights were the antithesis of citizenship and nationalism was a "false consciousness" because it suppressed man's ability to fulfill his role in a communist society. However, if collective autonomy, or nationalism, is a false consciousness, then people achieve the truest level of identity individually, which is why I believe there has been such a substantial shift toward individual autonomy and human rights in citizenship.

As alluded to previously, human rights were not always inherent within citizenship. Citizenship has not always been free. Under the Greeks it was a mask for a glorified aristocracy in which only a few were privileged enough to participate. Even during Rousseau's lifetime, personhood was tied to property, and was therefore a conditional, not a truly free, liberty. In his anthology on the human rights and citizenship experience in Europe, Yanni Kotsonis observes, "human rights were absolute…but it was…a long time before the boundaries of humanity were expanded to include all people."[4]

In *People Out of Place*, Gershon Shaffir frames citizenship as a push-pull relationship dependent upon the "crucial trade-off between the extension of human rights and their enforcement."[5] The enforcement of human rights stems from international law, which, throughout the history of citizenship, has been transformed from a system that once existed for the benefit of the state to a framework that privileges individual autonomy over state power. Human rights are "thin" because they are a relatively new concept in human history and still in a stage of incubation, working out the kinks of how to be addressed globally. In contrast, citizenship is "robust" because of its longevity of existence as well as its static presence for the last hundred years. Still in a developmental stage, it can be difficult for human rights regimes to

internationalize within the realm of citizenship, because presently the International Bill of Rights and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights cannot guarantee human rights to the degree that the nation-state is able. Though multiculturalism beckons for reform of international social institutions, the state remains the most legitimate enforcer of human rights.

The 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has a right to a nationality and a right to be an expatriot. It also prohibits racial exclusion in citizenship. This has made global identities more fluid, and, in an age of migration and movement, is more functional. Dual citizenship validates the trend toward "post-nationalism" for many scholars of international studies. It is a triumph for the new order of citizenship, a symbol of personal autonomy to choose (to some degree) one's territorial identity. However, for others, it is problematic, as plural citizenship threatens to dilute the meaningfulness of singular citizenship. Peter Spiro cautions: "Plural citizenship is thus identity dilutive…that does lower the threshold for national membership in a way that may render national membership less meaningful."[6] Spiro concludes: "Nationality has been central to individual identity…then, dual citizenship can be framed as a matter of individual autonomy, in other words, as a matter of rights,"[7] which to him is a reassuring indicator of the progress of citizenship, society, and international law.

As Spiro argues, there have been significant gains in the effort to make citizenship and human rights less contradictory; however, a citizenship gap still remains. Globalization continues to propel forward the citizenship gap while at the same time providing innovation to combat it. The rise of neo-liberalism widened the gap between "core" and "peripheral" nations, increasing the dependence of peripheral states on the actions of core states. In theory, globalization expanded citizenship by making more information and opportunities accessible to the peripheral margins of civilization. However, globalization has simultaneously created a demand for migrant workers, contract labor, special economic zones, and other forms of "fragmented citizenship," which, in 2004, Byrsk and Shafir claimed to be numbering nearly 25 million people.

Citizenship is an entity that responds to its surrounding forces and is very much malleable. Hence, the product of 25 million fragmented citizens is a result of our inadequate societal organization. By classifying and stratifying our modes of residency into citizens (natural-

ized and native), Green Card carriers, legal refugees, temporary visa holders, skilled workers, overseas students, contract labor migrants, illegal residents, and dual citizens, a hierarchy emerges and creates space for "statelessness." The obligation to honor human rights and combat fragmented citizenship is a shared global responsibility with little actual enforcement. I turn now to a brief immigration history of the United States and the Somali experience in the Twin Cities as an example of the protection of stateless peoples.

III. United States Immigration

The United States of America was founded by European immigrants. After their arrival, they encouraged many more immigrants to come. They realized that if they did not get more people to farm the land and contribute to society, it was highly likely that the colonial settlements would succumb to starvation and anarchy, and ultimately fail. Consequently, the early settlers opened their colony to the world, and more white Europeans came. After this initial "open door" policy, American immigration policy would not be so magnanimous ever again. For the next 400 years it would be tainted by racism and exclusion.

Before transport became more accessible and affordable, there was little migration of peoples. It was not until the Industrial Revolution that migration first occurred on a mass scale, and even then, it was largely confined to Europe. Since then, religion, resources, and desperation have motivated people to seek new opportunities outside their country of birth. Along with the developing trends in migration, nations created various immigration policies. Some countries, like Canada, established open and liberal immigration polices, whereas others, like France, made citizenship applicants jump through several hoops in order to become French. Erika Lee has described the United State's immigration history as "gate-keeping," using quotas and other mechanisms to exclude certain immigrants. Since 1875, the year of the first immigration law, the United States' Open Door policy began to close, and authority over immigration became a sovereign right of the United States. Immigration became a tool to define what it means to be American.[8] The "pull" factors of immigration to America (those luring people) have always existed. The country has been a safe haven from political and religious persecution, and a land of great opportunity and wealth. However, the "push" factors (causes of departure) have escalated with the increasing civil war and unrest throughout the

world. As mobility became more fluid and immigration increased in the 1990s, policymakers sought to restrict the socioeconomic rights of immigrants in an effort to discourage potential immigrants and therefore decrease the heavy influx.[9]

IV. Somali Immigration to the United States

For Somalis, the biggest push factor is the 1990 eruption of civil war and the following instability, which draws its origins from colonial rule. Many scholars correctly attribute political unrest in Somalia to the consequences of colonialism and its aftermath. The British initially colonized parts of Somalia as a geopolitically strategic colony for sea trade, and in 1910 this motivation was made transparent when they abandoned the interior (the Ogaden) and withdrew their control to just the coastal areas. The interior was partitioned between France, Italy, and Ethiopia until 1960, when two of the territories gained independence. In 1969, a revolutionary coup took place. After 22 years of General Siad Barre's dictatorship, his popularity began to dwindle, and civil unrest began to take shape in the form of militia groups, leading to the 1990 civil war that overthrew and exiled the powerful leader. This led to the further degeneration of the Somali state.[10]

Today, by many accounts, large parts of Somalia remain a land of violent lawlessness with different political groups vying for control and power. It is often cited as a "textbook case" for a failed state and pariah space within international politics. The population is undereducated: less than a fourth are literate (probably even less now that the more privileged have fled the country). Since the civil war, it is estimated that 45 percent of the population has been displaced.[11] The psychological and physical loss and displacement have taken their toll on the fragmented Somali, and now Somali-American, citizens.

The majority of Somali immigrants came to the United States following the civil war. After gaining independence in the 1960s, Somali students began studying in the United States, either by way of government scholarships or reconnecting with family already established in the country. In 1986, the first Somali was admitted as a legal refugee. The U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement reports that between 1983 and 2004, 55,036 Somali refugees resettled in the United States.[12] The U.S. Census Bureau indicates a majority of this migration occurred post-1990. The 1990 Census reports that only 2,070 people in the United States were born in Somalia.[13] Even accounting for the possibility that

this census data is an inaccurate pulse of the actual Somali population, there is a clear correlation between the increase in the number of Somali immigrants and the 1990 onslaught of civil war, thus confirming the civil war as a significant push factor in immigration.

Collectively, Somalis are the largest African refugee group to settle in the United States. They came here as a result of involuntary migration, unlike many other immigrant groups who freely immigrated seeking better opportunities and wages. They were forced from their homeland, and many have spent a number of years in refugee camps in Kenya or Djibouti before gaining entrance into the United States. This combination of push-pull factors brought a small portion of the hundreds of thousands of displaced Somali citizens to the United States. In 2004 alone, 13,000 Somalis entered the country, and the total population ranges anywhere from 60,000 to estimates of over 100,000. The majority have settled in Minnesota, California, Ohio, Georgia, Washington state, and Washington, D.C.[14] Most enter as legal refugees and go through the government resettlement process. This population is likely to continue to grow as long as turmoil in the Horn of Africa (Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti) continues.

Like other immigrant groups before them, Somalis followed a pattern of chain migration (i.e., migrated to already established Somali communities). Minnesota became a favored destination because many well-organized immigrant settlement groups, usually religiously affiliated, advocated for the right to (re)settle. The latest report from the U.S. Census Bureau indicates that about one in three Somali immigrants lives in Minnesota.[15]

V. Challenges: Opportunities and Obligations for New Somali-Americans

The deepest problem among Somali communities in Minnesota might be "the hollowing out of [their] civic spirit,"[16] an ailment that can be attributed to the conditions of origin. Somalis come from a state in which civic structure is loose and often fragmented. Many have experienced (due to colonialism, among other things) a "dissipation of civic belonging," the exhaustion of national institutions, and the lack of legitimate leadership.[17] A direct correlation with the "erosion of civic identity" and the "death of the national state [Somalia]"[18] is present, but it is not without a cure.

Whether or not one classifies Somalia as a failed or pariah state, it lacks the proper state infrastructure to provide a framework for critical adaptation into a new country of residence. Coming from a non-industrialized and undemocratic country, integration into a new country becomes difficult. Without a good example of a balanced relationship between the state and its citizens, the immigrants have no compass to guide them in their transition from "Somali" to "American-Somali."[19] "Critical Adaptation" is the best survival tactic for the incoming Somali immigrants. Learning the language and culture, and avoiding compartmentalization, are crucial steps in strengthening civic ties, and, according to Aristotle, the stronger the civic ties, the "better" the citizen.

As Ahmed Samatar suggests, the ultimate goal of critical adaptation for Somali citizens should be *Cosmopolitanism*: "the long-term future of Somali-Americans depends on how successfully cosmopolitan they become."[20] I borrow my definition of cosmopolitanism from Daniele Archibugi. He contends that in order to address the inequalities of citizenship, democracy must be extended beyond state borders and become a method of global governance.[21] Cosmopolitan democracy therefore becomes the antithesis to the outdated "*Raison d'Etat*" practiced in global politics. However, in a more general sense, the term cosmopolitanism can be understood as the extension of individualism in global governance, which is often attributed to conditions in "global cities," as Saskia Sassen has termed them.

The metropolitan areas have been especially attractive to incoming immigrants, and by 2004, 84 percent of Minnesota's Somali immigrants had settled in the Twin Cities. This concentration of an immigrant population is helpful in community organization and can offer a cosmopolitan world outlook. However, the danger in this pattern of chain migration is that the newcomers often confine themselves to a particular street or neighborhood (in the case of Minneapolis, it is the Cedar Riverside area). If the immigrants are not integrating, it is likely they are isolated. Isolation based on ethnicity, religion, and other shared histories is quite common in human history. However, the most successfully integrated immigrant populations have avoided manufacturing a single identity, thereby creating a niche in the socioeconomic climate, instead of drawing attention to their "otherness."

VI. Identity in Immigration: Primordial or Constructed?

The idea that immigrants, like Somalis in Minneapolis, wish to live in isolation and are in some way unable to integrate into American society is neither a new concept in American immigration policy nor an unfounded scholarly argument. Referenced earlier, American immigration policy has been used as a method to uphold a certain perception of "American," excluding many peoples based on Social Darwinism and the immigrants' presumed inability to assimilate. The first large-scale example of this came with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, and this mechanism became a model to exclude other immigrant groups throughout the twentieth century.

To better understand the concept of assimilation into American culture, I must briefly discuss the malleability of citizenship. Citizenship emerged as a primordialist identity: it was created by the state to control its subjects, but more importantly, it was created to forge a sense of belonging amongst humans. Primordial characteristics—blood, race, language, religion, and custom—all existed before ideas of nationalism and the state, and continue to dominate human identity. Primordialism has shaped modern-day nationalism, which has re-emerged as an identifiable entity by which people define their own citizenship. With globalization and the weakening of state structures, primordialist ties have re-emerged as bonding elements in society, especially in immigrant populations.

Samuel P. Huntington makes the primordialist assumption that groups cannot be assimilated and will instead cling to their own ethnic/religious enclaves. Citing Latinos as an example, he writes:

> The persistent inflow of Hispanic immigrants threatens to divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages. Unlike past immigrant groups, Mexicans and other Latinos have not assimilated into mainstream U.S. culture, forming instead their own political and linguistic enclaves—from Los Angeles to Miami—and rejecting the Anglo-Protestant values that built the American dream.[22]

Huntington's assumption that immigrant cultures inherently reject Anglo-Protestant values—values that, if violated, threaten the American Dream—is part of the problem in categorizing citizenship within a primordialist framework. There is the overwhelming assumption that the "culture" of immigrants remains static. Citizenship, however, is a

constructed identity, which can, and often does, change. Huntington's inability to imagine the construction of a dual identity brings us back to Peter Spiro's idea of thin versus robust citizenship, and whether or not multiple identities do in fact dilute one's loyalty.

The debate over whether or not citizenship is a primordial or constructed identity comes into play in discussing the likelihood of the emergence of a cosmopolitan democracy. If one believes our identity is static and unchanging, then we will forever be tied to our race, place, and time. However, if one perceives citizenship to be a malleable construct, then cosmopolitan democracy is achievable. Martha Nussbaum, on cosmopolitanism in 1994, quixotically muses about "the very old ideal of the cosmopolitan, the person whose primary allegiance is to the community of human beings in the entire world."[23] This statement raises many queries about what cosmopolitanism denies: parents, ancestors, family, race, religion, heritage, history, culture, tradition, nationality? Gertrude Himmelfarb retorts, "These are not 'accidental' attributes of the individual. They are essential attributes. We do not come into the world as free-floating, autonomous individuals. We come into it complete with all the particular, defining characteristics that go into a fully formed human being… . "[24]

This debate sheds light on the fact that the achievement of cosmopolitan democracy is conditional upon the fact that citizenship is a malleable concept, about which scholars hold a variety of opinions. However, if citizenship is unchanging and static, rooted in race and religion, then the entire project of cosmopolitan democracy might be a grand failure. Archibugi is not just another 21st-century idealistic liberal who has a utopian vision of the international institution, which he himself admits: "Cosmopolitan democracy sets no geographic boundaries; it is indeed a planetary fantasy from which no corner of the world can escape."[25] Archibhugi upgrades the standard Wilsonian liberal paradigm for a more thorough and practical solution.

As we currently live in an age of significant migration, the primordialist assertion that ethnic identities are ancient and unchanging[26] has been disproved by the relatively peaceful assimilation of émigré populations across the globe. The smooth integration of many different immigrant groups into American culture is testimony that they are a positive force in society: immigrants have little, if any, negative effect on the host country. It is not an asymmetrical phenomenon, in which the global poor clamor at the gates of the disinterested wealthier nations. Rather, it is a more symbiotic process with multiple beneficia-

ries. As Saskia Sassen reminds us, migration is an "embedded" process that "bridges" immigration and emigration.[27]

VII. Conclusion

The United States is often branded as a nation of immigrants, a great "melting pot," where individualism is honored. However, exclusion by race, religion, and "foreignness" still runs rampant and presently continues to be relevant in discussing one's citizenship. The Somali-American experience is no exception to the contradictions of citizenship, whether it is simultaneous efforts at inclusion and exclusion, or half-hearted democratization efforts abroad, or the swelling of immigrant detention centers at home. Somali-Americans face the same alienation that immigrants before them incurred, as well as other mounting pressures. Their experience of statelessness has fragmented their understanding of civic opportunity and obligation, which has complicated their integration into American society, especially in a hyperbolized post-September 11th culture.

The Somali civil war and U.S. intervention in 1991 led to thousands of displaced Somalis, some of whom ended up in the United States or Europe. Many still remain unaccounted for, and are part of the widening citizenship gap. This study has inspired me to further research the intricate underpinnings of the at-large citizenship gap. I plan to look at what Archibugi calls the "democratic schizophrenia" of hegemonic powers like the U.S. It is the egotistical quest for democratization. I am interested in looking at the contradictions that arise in American and Somali state relations in the context of Archibugi's democratic schizophrenia theory. As the United States increasingly meddles in "democratization" abroad—whether it is in Iraq, Afghanistan, Egypt, Libya, Somalia, or Liberia—it will be fascinating to track the political refugees who seek asylum in the country that, in part, forced their emigration out of their homeland.

Notes

1. Derek Heater, *A Brief History of Citizenship* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 1.

2. Sheila Croucher, *Globalization and Belonging: The Politics of Identity in a Changing World* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004), p. 46.

3. Gershon Shafir, "Citizenship and Human Rights in an Era of Globalization," in *People Out of Place*, edited by Alison Byrsk and Gershon Shafir (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 15.

4. Yanni Kotsonis, "A European Experience: Human Rights and Citizenship in Revolutionary Russia," in *Human Rights and Revolutions*, edited by Jeffrey Wasserstrom et al. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), p. 100.

5. Shafir 2004, p. 21.

6. Peter J. Spiro, "Mandated Membership, Diluted Identity: Citizenship, Globalization, and International Law," in *People Out of Place*, edited by Alison Byrsk and Gershon Shafir (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 103.

7. Ibid., p. 95.

8. Erika Lee and Judy Yung, *Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 6.

9. Philip Martin, "Should Countries Liberalize Immigration Policies? No," in *Controversies in Globalization: Contenting Approaches in International Relations*, edited by Peter Haas, John Hird, and Beth McBratney (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press 2010), accessed online via Moodle (3 February 2010), p. 327.

10. For a more comprehensive history of the degeneration of the Somali state, see Mohamed Adam Hussein, *From Tyranny to Anarchy: The Somali Experience* (Trenton, N.J.: Red Sea Press, 2008).

11. Charles Kemp and Lance Rasbridge, *Refugee and Immigrant Health: A Handbook for Health Professionals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 318.

12. U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement (2004).

13. U.S. Census Bureau (2000).

14. U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement (2004).

15. The U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey found about 25,000 of the 85,700 Somalis in the U.S. live in Minnesota.

16. Ahmed I. Samatar, "Escape from Hell: What Now?," *Somalis in Maine: Crossing Cultural Currents*, edited by Kimberly A. Huisman, Mazie Hough, Kristin M. Langellier, and Carol Nordstrom Toner (Berkeley, Cal.: North Atlantic Books, 2011), p. 287.

17. Ibid., p. 292.

18. Ibid., p. 294.

19. I think it is very important they make the distinction and brand themselves accordingly, because in the past, groups of immigrants who have failed to successfully brand themselves as such (like Asian-Americans) were subjected to harsh discrimination and oftentimes racism. Although Japanese and Chinese immigrants began arriving in the United States in the late 1800s, the terms "Japanese-American" or "Chinese-American" did not surface until the Civil Rights era, and, as mentioned, added to their struggle in assimilation.

20. Samatar 2011, p. 295.

21. For more, see Daniele Archibugi, *The Global Commonwealth of Citizens: Towards Cosmopolitan Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

22. Samuel P. Huntington, "The Hispanic Challenge," *Foreign Policy* (2011).

23. Martha Nussbaum, "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism," *Boston Review* XIX (October/November 1994): 3–6.

24. Gertrude Himmelfarb, "The Illusions of Cosmopolitanism," in *For Love of Country*, edited by Joshua Cohen (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), p. 77.

25. Archibugi 2008, p. 274.

26. Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 11.

27. For more, see Sakia Sassen, "The Repositioning of Citizenship," in *People Out of Place*, edited by Alison Byrsk and Gershon Shafir (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 191–208.

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