E Pluribus Unum: 21st-Century Citizenship and the Somali-American Experience

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I. Introduction: Citizenship in the 21st Century

This moment in American history represents a confluence of major national and international events almost unparalleled in modern history. The United States faces two major wars, a massive and seemingly intractable recession that has robbed many of its citizens of their livelihoods and savings, and a sclerotic system of American government that seems to have lost its ability to take on and overcome big challenges for the good of the American people. Internationally, the "Arab Spring" in the Middle East has led to the toppling of feckless dictators and a move toward democracy in Egypt. However, it has also led to the deaths of thousands of civilians, further political repression in certain parts of the region, and a civil war in Libya, which also features military action by NATO and the United States and its Arab and Western allies. This chaotic and troubling time presents numerous challenges for the United States and the world.

In this tumultuous time, many American citizens have looked to national leaders to help make sense of the challenges facing their country. In particular, many have looked to President Obama for solace, recalling that he campaigned on a theme of hope, change, and renewal. At a mourning gathering for the victims of the tragedy in Tucson, Arizona, President Obama said this about Christina Green, a third grader who was killed in the attack:

> Imagine—imagine for a moment, here was a young girl who was just becoming aware of our democracy; just beginning to understand the

> obligations of citizenship; just starting to glimpse the fact that some day she, too, might play a part in shaping her nation's future. She had been elected to her student council. She saw public service as something exciting and hopeful. She was off to meet her congresswoman, someone she was sure was good and important and might be a role model. She saw all this through the eyes of a child, undimmed by the cynicism or vitriol that we adults all too often just take for granted.

Eschewing for a moment that President Obama was talking about a child, in many ways, he could have been describing new immigrants and new citizens as they integrate into contemporary America. The President touched upon the theme of the obligations of citizenship as well as the rights that go along with it.

Immigrants obviously face a great many obstacles when coming to the United States. Often they are forced to leave their homes and lives behind due to war and political instability. Language acquisition and cultural differences provide huge stumbling blocks as immigrants try and make a new home in a foreign place. Somali-Americans are just the newest in a long history of immigrants to face the challenges of integrating into American society without losing their unique culture. While Somalis are certainly not the first immigrants to come to the U.S., as a group they face challenges that few other immigrant cohorts had to face. Indeed, Somalis are confronted with a unique set of challenges presented by the moment in time in which they have been forced to join the great American family.

As a community, Somalis are engaging with American citizenship at a time when the concept of citizenship as a whole is changing and evolving in ways that question the underlying assumptions about nations, states, citizens, and individuals. In particular, the European Union (EU) is experimenting with concepts of "nested citizenships" and citizenship beyond national boundaries while the United States in some ways struggles to fulfill its obligations to its own citizens. In the following pages, I will outline the various changes to the concept of citizenship, both in the United States and around the world. I will then briefly examine the nature of citizenship in the United States through the lens of the assimilationist "Out of Many, One" model, which was the unofficial motto of the United States from 1782 to 1956. Finally, I will focus on the Somali-American community in Minnesota in order to illustrate how the changing nature of citizenship affects newly arrived immigrants. In particular, I will focus on the obligations

owed to Somalis by fellow citizens and the U.S. government as well as the opportunities available to Somalis as members of the American family.

I will begin my discussion with a critical analysis of the two main branches of thinking on citizenship in order to provide a background through which to discuss the larger questions of this essay. Understanding the fundamentals of citizenship is vital for comprehending the nuances discussed later in the essay.

II. Citizenship and its Multiplicity of Meanings

Citizenship denotes several things by its very nature. First, citizenship has generally been reserved for members of a bounded geographical space who are part of a political community, often based on ethnic or national/civic identification.[1] While theories discussed later in the essay seek to disrupt or reinterpret this method of understanding and assigning citizenship, it is crucial to understand that this is the fundamental paradigm of citizenship utilized by many countries around the world. From this understanding of how citizens are identified, two main conceptions of citizenship are derived. These historical conceptions, Liberal Citizenship and Civic Republican Citizenship, have shaped modern understandings of the entire citizenship debate. Before these two concepts can be explored in detail, however, it is necessary to provide a brief explanation of the essential rights of citizenship as posited by scholars from both veins of scholarship on citizenship.

Rights can be framed in two ways: either negative rights (i.e., citizens are *protected from* something) or positive rights (i.e., citizens are *entitled to* something). The great British historian and philosopher T. H. Marshall provides a usable understanding of different types of rights. To briefly summarize his lengthy work, there are three main types of rights: civil, political, and social.[2] Civil rights provide individual freedoms, including the freedom to own property and the freedom of religion, expression, assembly, and speech. Civil rights are *negative* rights in the sense that they protect citizens from discrimination by the state or by other citizens. Political rights entail the right to participate in the governing process, typically through an agreed upon system of representative voting. In the United States, political rights are exercised when citizens vote in federal, state, and local elections, as well as run for and hold elected political office. Finally, social rights are "made up of a right to the prevailing standard of life and the social heritage of the

society. These rights are significantly realized through the educational system."[3] Other scholars have introduced various other types of rights, including environmental rights, although these are often derived from one of the first three categories of rights. I will only engage with these three types of rights in order to focus specifically on the differing conceptions of citizenship offered by various scholars.

Derek Heater provides an excellent avenue into understanding the two dominant branches of citizenship philosophy in his aptly titled book, *What is Citizenship?* Heater begins by discussing the Liberal tradition of citizenship, which has been the dominant understanding for much of the last 200 years. The Liberal tradition focuses almost exclusively on the negative rights of citizens, especially the right to own property. In this way, Liberal citizenship is heavily associated with capitalism. Liberals, and more recently neo-liberals in the United States, have focused with laser-like intensity on protecting the negative rights of citizenship. Consequently, taxes and other commonplace government activities—like the provision of social welfare benefits—are demonized by neo-liberals as undermining the property rights of citizens. Libertarians represent a particularly virulent strain of Liberal citizenship thinking. Rainer Bauböck says that, "for libertarians, any state interference beyond the protection of physical security and the enforcement of property rights and valid contracts is by definition unjust."[4] Here we see the first of many contradictions inherent in the system of citizenship under which we currently operate. It can be argued that civil rights (i.e., property rights) are potentially violated in order to provide for social rights (i.e., social welfare). Further conflicts and contradictions will be evident throughout this article.

The Civic Republican tradition of citizenship is not as influential today as Liberal citizenship, but traces its lineage back to Aristotle. Heater summarizes the difference between the Civic Republican style of citizenship well, conveying that, "the republican style of political thinking places great emphasis above all on the necessity for the state and its citizens to be a community, an organic society, not merely a collection of individuals."[5] This sense of community through citizenship is achieved by citizens exercising what Heater calls *civic virtue*, though it is often referred to as obligations or duties of citizenship. There is no specific set of duties that corresponds to the rights of citizens, besides the obvious duty not to interfere with the rights of other citizens. Duties, instead, are established through the community and evolve over time. However, one unwavering tenet is selfless civic ser-

vice. Citizens must be willing to serve the needs of their country, often in the form of military service, but also through jury duty and paying taxes. These duties, when fulfilled, allow individuals to be model citizens.[6] I will return to the notion of duties later.

Now that a basic understanding of the nature of citizenship has been achieved, it is possible to explore the differing types and scales of citizenship and their impact on our understanding of citizenship as a whole. I will outline five different types of citizenship and reflect briefly on their impact on the overall understanding of citizenship that this essay seeks to impart. The types of citizenship considered below are called single, dual/multiple, nested, transnational, and global. These five types do not cover every theoretical conception of citizenship, but they do cover the major areas in the literature on citizenship.

Single citizenship is the type of citizenship that most individuals have and understand. A nation-state to which an individual belongs typically grants citizenship in one of two ways: either through the principle of *jus soli* (a person born in the territory of the state is a citizen) or *jus sanguinis* (a person is a citizen if one of their parents is a citizen). While the effects of *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis* are interesting and important, they contribute less to the nuances of the differing types of citizenship and therefore will not be addressed further. Single national citizenship is the most common form of citizenship in the current geopolitical system. It serves to undergird and sustain the Westphalian nation-state model by dividing individuals into citizens who are connected to a particular bounded geographic space. Single citizenship is discussed here to provide a baseline against which other types of citizenship may be understood, contextualized, and analyzed.

Dual citizenship, intuitively, is when an individual holds citizenship status in two separate nation-states. Stanley Renshon provides a more detailed definition:

> Dual or multiple citizenship involves the simultaneous holding of more than one citizenship or nationality. That is, a person can have each, or many, of the rights and responsibilities that adhere to a citizen in all of the several countries in which he or she is a citizen, regardless of the length of time or actual residence in a country, geographical proximity, or the nature of his or her economic, cultural or political ties.[7]

Almost ninety countries, including the United States, have no policies restricting their citizens from possessing citizenship in other

nation-states, although many do restrict the ways in which their citizens can exercise citizenship rights in the other country where they claim citizenship. When considering dual citizenship, Renshon poses several questions that are pertinent to the overall discussion of citizenship. He asks, "Is it possible to be a fully engaged and knowledgeable citizen of several countries? Is it possible to follow two or more very different cultural traditions? Is it possible to have two, possibly conflicting, core identifications and attachments?" These are fundamental questions when considering multiple citizenships in the abstract, and are especially pertinent to the question of Somalis in the United States.

The Somali case will be discussed below, but here I wish to draw attention to the effect of the Liberal and Civic Republican understandings of citizenship in relation to dual and multiple citizenship. Those subscribing to the Liberal tradition of citizenship would say that it is entirely possible to hold multiple citizenships because citizenship simply secures the negative rights of citizens. Indeed, the more citizenships possessed by an individual would only increase that individual's liberty.

The Civic Republican tradition is less comfortable with multiple citizenships because it leads to the possibility that the duties demanded by one nation-state could conflict with the duties required by another nation-state. This could place the holders of dual citizenships in the precarious position of being unable to fulfill their civic duty to both of their states. Indeed, a dual citizen of the United States and Canada, for instance, would face a difficult choice were the U.S. and Canada to fight a war. These conundrums highlight the way in which the Civic Republican tradition of citizenship demands more of its citizens than does the Liberal understanding. This does not necessarily mean that the Civic Republican tradition is incompatible with multiple citizenships. Instead, it simply means that citizens must confront the multiple identities and countervailing loyalties and duties inherent in the Civic Republican tradition of citizenship.

III. The European Experiment

Dual and multiple citizenship is increasingly common as individuals and families continue to pursue economic opportunities outside their homelands. Less common is the European experiment with nested citizenship. Following the creation of the European Union (EU), member states have gradually transferred many of the rights of citizenship

away from the national level, looking to "right-size" the methods by which certain rights are guaranteed. The signing of the 1992 Maastricht Treaty greatly accelerated this process. Now, passports are "European" and all citizens of EU member states are allowed to travel, work, and live anywhere within the Union. This is the most advanced example of the movement away from the dominance of the nation-state in affairs related to citizenship.

Building from this example, many scholars have suggested ways in which citizenship rights and responsibilities could be transnationalized or globalized. Most broadly, the deterritorialization of citizenship would allow for the free movement of peoples across national boundaries and would provide a great deal more flexibility in how individuals connect to their homelands. Changes of this nature would have a dramatic impact on nation-states and the duties of those nation-states toward their citizens.

The concept of global or transnational citizenship is intriguing and has rightfully occupied the minds and pens of various academics. Yet it remains in the purview of intellectuals and scholars and not something that is at the forefront of national or international discussion. While we may indeed be witnessing small changes that will eventually come to define the nature of citizenship at some point in the future, at present there are numerous problems facing citizens and their governments that are more pressing than the structure of citizenship. Leaving the prospects for global citizenship to other scholars, the remainder of this essay will engage one of those questions, namely, how can Somalis integrate into the current system of American citizenship?

IV. *E Pluribus Unum* and American Citizenship

The peculiarities of American citizenship are derived from its unique history. The United States, as is often said, is a nation of immigrants and because of this, the U.S. has developed a system of citizenship that is very accommodating of immigrants and refugees in terms of access to citizenship and nominal equality once citizenship is granted. The story of America is one written by immigrants who have struggled and succeeded, suffered and bled and persevered. The challenge for America and an American concept of citizenship is to make this process easier, not harder, for new immigrants and new citizens to become part of the American family. Charting a path between forced assimila-

tion and self-segregation is essential for preserving the vitality of the United States in the 21st century.

Relating to the integration and acceptance of immigrants, U.S. history is obviously fraught with examples of racism, discrimination, and violence, and the United States should not hide from that past. But those instances very often stem from interactions on a human level (such as violence by a "native" against an immigrant, or vice versa), but not a structural problem of citizenship. That certainly does not excuse the injustices of the past, but those injustices should not obscure the fact that the United States actually has a relatively progressive stance on citizenship, at least in theory.

The United States operates under both the *jus soli* and *jus sangunuis* principles for granting citizenship, thereby maximizing the number of individuals who are able to obtain citizenship. There has been vociferous debate, both currently and in the 1990s, related to amending the U.S. Constitution to remove "birthright" citizenship. This would move the U.S. to the more restrictive *jus sanguinis* principle of citizenship and would be detrimental to the overall well-being of immigrants and refugees in America.

Forging unity out of the multitudes of different individuals in the United States is a Sisyphean task, yet the motto of the United States for much of its history was *E Pluribus Unum*. While the United States certainly does not have a unitary and monolithic culture, the effects of the *E Pluribus Unum* model are evident. Below I will detail the ways in which the values of both the Liberal and Civic Republican traditions of citizenship are present and how they affect Somalis, the state, and Americans as a community. Both strands of citizenship contribute to the uniquely American practices that are seen today.

V. Out of Many: The Rights of Citizens and the Duties of the State

American citizenship provides fundamental protections ensuring that citizens can protect their cultural and religious traditions through specific guarantees of freedom of speech, expression, and religion. Citizenship rights have been called by H. R. G. Greaves "the duties of the state to its members," and it is in these negative rights that the Liberal tradition of citizenship is seen most clearly.[8] These rights impact the Somali community in numerous ways, but two specific ways are particularly important. One is economic and the other religious.

The state has the obligation to provide basic protections for Somalis, especially economically. Yet the poverty rate among Somali-Americans is unacceptably high. A recent study done by Minnesota Public Radio found that approximately 82 percent of Somalis in Minnesota live near or below the poverty line, while 68 percent of Somalis in Minnesota age 25 and older do not have a high school diploma, as compared to 8.4 percent of non-Somali Minnesotans.[9] The inability or unwillingness of the state to provide for the civil and social rights of Somali-Americans is tantamount to outright discrimination.

It is important to acknowledge that Somalis are part of a long line of immigrants who have been denied their rights by the state. However, immigration and the development and advancement of democratic citizenship rights have gone hand in hand. J. M. Barbalet notes the differing impacts of immigration on the historical course of citizenship. Specifically, he indicates that lower-class immigrants have historically motivated the expansion of citizenship rights, especially civil rights, by expanding the proletariat base.[10] By continuing to fuel class struggle in the United States, immigrants have forced the bourgeoisie to expand the rights of citizenship, through labor organization in particular. To quote J. M. Barbalet, "rights are much more significant for those without social and political power than they are for the powerful" because they can be a means for gaining and maintaining political and economic power.[11]

Additionally, because immigrants often bring very different cultural practices and beliefs with them, civil rights exercised by immigrant citizens continue to force the issues of freedom of religion and freedom of expression. This is especially true in the Somali case because the vast majority of Somali-Americans are also Muslims.

The unique geopolitical moment—in which the United States is engaged in wars in Islamic countries, after having been attacked on September 11, 2001, by terrorists who were Muslims—makes being a Muslim in America particularly difficult. The need for the state to protect the religious rights of all citizens, including and especially Muslims, was thrown into sharp relief when the Homeland Security Committee in the House of Representatives held a hearing in March of 2011 on the topic of "Muslim Radicalization." This hearing recalled earlier disgraceful moments in American history, specifically the behavior of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), which sought to uncover plots of Communist subversion in America. These committee hearings led to persecution of American citizens. Such actions must be

strenuously avoided in the current moment. If the state fails to protect Somalis' right to freely practice their religion, it has abdicated its primary responsibility as a government.

Somalis have the right to demand that their social and political rights are upheld and that Somalis are not singled out for undue suspicion. These rights allow for the United States to maintain the cultural and social diversity that are crucial to its economic success. The geopolitical moment confronting the United States is perilous, but the fundamental freedoms on which America was built should not be abandoned in a time of crisis. The activities of HUAC are remembered as a stain on American history and it is incumbent on all American citizens, Somali and non-Somali, to make sure that the hysteria is not repeated (with Islam supplanting communism as the paradigm being investigated). Failure to protect Muslims in America will undermine the fundamental Liberal right of the freedom to practice religion.

It is the duty of the state to provide economic security and freedom to practice religion of any kind for all of its citizens, regardless of the geopolitical forces at play in the current historical moment. Furthermore, it is in the interest of the United States that Somalis have access to economic benefits and protection from discrimination because this can help to prevent the radicalization of young Muslims. The state of Minnesota and the federal government must take concrete steps to improve the lives of Somali-American citizens because they are citizens, but also because it is good for the security of the United States. In particular, failure to protect the right of religious freedom will signal a fundamental shift in the priorities of America. A commitment to diversity and religious pluralism, through the negative rights afforded by American citizenship, has made the United States a beacon of hope for immigrants and refugees since its founding. While there are many steps that the state must take to help integrate Somalis into the promise of American citizenship, Somali-Americans too have an important role to play in shaping their future and the future of the United States.

VI. Becoming One: The Obligations of New Citizens

The phrase "Out of Many, One" seems inherently assimilationist. Assimilation should not be the goal or outcome of citizenship, but the Civic Republican tradition of citizenship does demand the performance of certain duties by citizens in order to build a civic community. One of the duties for new citizens is to constructively participate in

American civic life. It is especially incumbent on Somali-Americans to reject cultural isolationism and "turning inward" because of the misperceptions of many Americans relating to Somalia and Somalis. Hollywood images of the "Black Hawk Down" incident and the painful memories of the eighteen dead U.S. military personnel killed in Mogadishu created intensely negative stereotypes about Somalia. That, combined with the rise of Islamophobia following September 11, puts Somali-Americans in a difficult position vis-à-vis their fellow citizens.

To counteract this phenomenon, Somali-Americans must seize what John Western has called "the Power of Definition" for their community. By engaging with the American public more broadly, Somalis can (and must) take an active role in crafting their position in American civic life. If Somalis fail to do so, they will cede the power of definition to those who seek to characterize any Muslim as an enemy of the United States.

It is especially important that Somali youth lead the way in this community endeavor. They need to reject radicalism and isolation within their own communities to fully embrace American citizenship and the duties demanded by it. Somali youth are particularly important because as the future leaders of their communities, they have the power to shape that future in a way that their elders do not. What is most needed in meeting the duty of active engagement in civic life among Somalis is leadership. There is already evidence of young Somali-Americans taking control of their own futures and the future of their communities.

In Minnesota, numerous groups, including The Beat, Students Against Violence (SAV), the Somali Youth Network Council, and the United Somali Movement, have all formed to address problems within their communities. As the newspaper *Mshale* noted, "These young Somalis concentrate on addressing critical issues while also empowering their peers, restoring hope in the elders, and creating a more harmonious community for all."[12] This promising first step should be followed by outreach beyond the Somali-American community to their fellow citizens of non-Somali descent. In so doing, Somalis will fulfill their Civic Republican duty to create a community beyond the individual without sacrificing the value of their own culture and history. By providing an alternative definition of what it means to be a Somali-American, Somali-American youths can craft a place for themselves and their community in the broader framework of American civic life. By charting a path between assimilation and isolation, Somali-Ameri-

cans can balance the tensions between Civic Republican and Liberal citizenship, to the benefit of all Americans.

VII. Conclusion

The historical development of citizenship in the United States and globally has been shaped by the dominance of the nation-state, immigration, integration, and social struggle, and that is unlikely to change at any point in the near future. National citizenship still stands as the primary means of cultural identification for the vast majority of the global population, but new trends, including nested citizenship and global citizenship, are beginning to reshape how individuals form community attachments. These trends perhaps indicate the beginning of a massive transformation in the organization of cultures, states, and citizens. Or perhaps they are momentary experiments that will fizzle out and be lost to the history books; it is far too early to make that judgment at this moment in time.

The flaws in American citizenship have been recounted numerous times by a wide variety of authors and intellectuals, but at its core, American citizenship seeks to constantly provide space for both individuality and community. Somalis are just the most recent additions to a country forged by and of immigrants. Their struggle mirrors the difficulties faced by almost every other cohort of immigrants since the founding of the United States. However, the current geopolitical moment presents many challenges for Somalis. A massive global depression combined with the toxic "War on Terror" makes being an immigrant from a Muslim country a particularly difficult experience. But that will make success even more rewarding and even more necessary. Only Somali-Americans can shape the future of their community, but it should be one that steers between the Scylla of assimilation and the Charybdis of cultural isolationism. It is the responsibility of every American to help them chart that course.

Notes

1. J. M. Barbalet, *Citizenship: Rights, Struggle, and Class Inequality*, 1988, p. 1.
2. Derek B. Heater, *A Brief History of Citizenship*, 2004.
3. Barbalet 1998, p. 6.
4. Rainer Bauböck, *Transnational Citizenship: Membership and Rights in International Migration*, 1995, p. 9.
5. Heater 2004, p. 55.

6. Ibid., p. 60.

7. Stanley A. Renshon, *Dual Citizens in America: An Issue of Vast Proportions and Broad Significance*, 2000, p. 2.

8. Heater 2004 p. 33.

9. Laura Yuen, "Civil War Kids," *Minnesota Public Radio*, 2010.

10. Barbalet 1988, p. 42.

11. Ibid., p. 8.

12. Ramla Bile, "Deciding the Future of the Somali Community," *Mshale: The African Community Newspaper* (4 March 2009).

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