

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

Margaret R. Somers, *Genealogies of Citizenship: Markets, Statelessness, and the Right to Have Rights*. Cambridge Cultural Social Studies. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 360 pp. \$US 34.99 paper (978-0-521-79394-0), \$US 90.00 hardcover (978-0-521-79061-1)

Margaret Somers starts her comprehensive interrogation of Anglo-American citizenship theory with a visit to New Orleans to draw attention to the Afro-American and poor “citizens” abandoned after hurricane Katrina struck in 2005. In doing so she breaks the traditional link between constitutionalist discourse and the formalities of citizenship, and demonstrates the diversity of circumstances in which citizenship fails.

This book is an exhaustive history of Anglo-American citizenship theory. It should be stressed that this is very much a theory work. Alongside the more traditional sources of political philosophy she interweaves the work of Karl Polanyi, Hannah Arendt, and T.H. Marshall to provide an genealogical history of the diverse forms of citizenship theory.

Her account of citizenship theory is organized around the triangulation of “state,” “market,” and “civil society.” Politically her critique is directed against the market fundamentalism which came to dominate the field in the United States, where benefits and entitlements are linked to employment so as to exclude from citizenship rights the unemployed and immigrants. It is perhaps significant that she devotes only passing attention to the most extensive system of exclusion stemming from marketization in the grounding of the American healthcare system in private insurance, since this goes well beyond the exclusion of the unemployed, and also excludes significant sections of the employed.

Market fundamentalism significantly displaced or distorted the tradition of citizenship practices that had been grounded in the expansionary logic of the state. Somers displays enthusiasm for T.H. Marshall’s account of evolution of state sponsored rights. Of particular importance was his insistence on the scope and range of “social rights” that extended beyond the political and economic rights secured during the struggles of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Somers goes to great lengths to explore the complex lineages of the variants of “the public sphere” and “political culture” stretching from

John Locke to Talcott Parsons and Jürgen Habermas, whose “public sphere” never succeeded in acquiring sufficiently political content. After it faded with the rise of 1960s radicalism, a much more cultural expression of the public sphere emerged and was taken up by the new social movements that Somers views as the most positive manifestation of late 20th century radicalism. Somers clearly sees great potential in the vibrant civil society projects (such as Solidarity in Poland) that emerged with the destabilization and collapse of “actually existing socialism” in Eastern Europe. Because her concern is with theoretical expressions of these developments, she does not examine the political fate of this flowering of civil society. But she is obviously conscious of the all too rapid demise of these projects into bureaucratic and bourgeois nationalism, and in many cases into ethnic chauvinism. The fate of the apparently radicalized conception of civil society is undoubtedly a considerable disappointment to her; she captures one important moment of its afterlife when it finds expression in a culture of antistatism which is unable to generate a viable theorization of citizenship.

Somers seeks to articulate her radical democratic political convictions through a commitment to “the right to have rights.” This concept, borrowed from Hannah Arendt, stipulates the codependence on both *de jure* and *de facto* rights to membership in a community. Somers refines this to require that membership in a political community involves both the right to inclusion in civil society and the right to recognition by others as a moral equal. Those abandoned after hurricane Katrina may have nation-state citizenship; such rights are necessary but not sufficient to secure “the rights to have rights” since they were not recognized as moral equals of other citizens, and were thus internally stateless, superfluous persons possessing only Agamben’s “bare life.”

Since *de jure* rights are not sufficient, an inclusive civil society is required; it is only through social inclusions in civil society that the right to have rights can be sustained. This is where the lacuna in Somers’ argument becomes apparent. Since *de jure* state citizenship rights are not sufficient, it requires the existence of a right to belong to “some kind of organized community” (p. 123) that is sufficient to supplement formal citizenship rights. It is far from clear what might constitute such an “organized community” or organized political entity which must be able to both claim and give effect to rights. Somers herself seems to have doubts at this point about whether a civil society distinct from a state can provide a means of securing the right to have rights. The requirement would seem to be a civil society sufficiently vibrant and effective to impose itself upon the state. She does not provide us with any concrete instances where this has come close to realization. However, in the period immedi-

ately after 1989 there was optimism that the civil societies emerging in the space vacated by expiring socialist states could impose on the successor states the obligation to protect, promote, and guarantee the right to have rights. It now seems clear that the civil societies in Russia and Poland were not the only ones unable to create states adequate to this task. Even in Czechoslovakia, the most promising case of a more mature civil society, the optimism lasted only until ethnic separatism weakened and undermined the democratic rights project.

When the next hurricane strikes a disadvantaged community in the United States we can reasonably assume that market fundamentalism is — for the time at least — in retreat and a more responsive Obama-led state will do a better job. But we still have cause to doubt that a vigorous civil society will provide for the democratic inclusion of all. Somers clearly wants to be an optimist, but I will reserve my judgment about the strength of civil society in the USA.

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