



Making social worlds

An academic perspective on citizenship

My name's Sophie Watson. I'm Professor of Sociology at The Open University. My interest in this course was around the question of citizenship and we did quite a lot of filming around citizenship so that's what I'm going to talk about. Citizenship is associated with rights that people have and responsibilities on the one hand; on the other hand it's instituted as a practice which aims to forge a sense of belonging of people to the place in which they live, or the community in which they live, or the nation in which they reside. Citizenship works as a process of inclusion of certain people, and exclusion of others, in the same way as we were talking about passports and the ways in which passports work to make certain kinds of social worlds, so also the process of citizenship makes a certain kind of social world where a particular kind of person, if you like, is encouraged to become a citizen, who ascribes to the national values of the place in which they live, and other people who perhaps don't subscribe to those values will be excluded and not allowed to belong, in other words not allowed to become citizens. Usually the kinds of definitions of citizenship in legal terms will be how long somebody's resided, for example, in the country, whether they have work, whether they have perhaps parents who live in that country, or family connections, I mean there's a whole set of legal kinds of definitions of citizenship which allow some people to become citizens and others not. At a sociological level though what is interesting is how that concept of citizenship can be expanded or restricted, depending on what a particular nation state wants at a particular time. So, for example if you look at Australia and the history of citizenship in Australia, which we see in some of the clips that we have, at certain points the Australian nation state was very keen to encourage British people to come and live in the country, they were very keen to have white people make up their country under the White Australia Policy which finished in 1968. It was very difficult to become a citizen of Australia if you weren't white or if you weren't from Northern Europe. This then was extended to the Southern Europeans and gradually over time to people from other parts of the world as well, like the Middle East and further afield than that, but citizenship was very much a process in Australia which constructed a white Australia rather than a multi-racial Australia. This then changed in the 1970s and, as you see from the clips, for the thirty years following then once the doors had opened up it became a very multicultural society, and therefore citizenship was a much more multi-coloured form of citizenship. So it's something that varies historically and has a very strong kind of social context, it's not one thing, it's something that varies over time, depending on the way in which a nation state constitutes itself. Citizenship can for many individuals represent a very important source of belonging. I mean obviously getting a passport is an important part of being a citizen, it allows you to come and go freely, but at a more symbolic level citizenship is about feeling part of a country, feeling that you're entitled to certain rights, you're entitled to vote, you're entitled to participate in the political sphere, and so on. Now in Britain David Blunkett was very keen to forge a greater sense of belonging in relation to citizenship, prior to 2002 was a rather kind of bland bureaucratic process, there was a whole kind of fear post 9/11 that there might be people who are living in the country who didn't subscribe to British national values, who didn't feel part of the country, who may be, were a threat to the state, and also people who perhaps didn't even speak English becoming citizens, at that point they introduced a citizenship ceremony, thinking that it was a very important aspect of citizenship that you felt that you belonged, that you cared about the place that you lived, that you weren't simply just getting a piece of paper, but you were going through an emotional process almost, a process where your belonging was forged through going to an emotional occasion, and this was part of becoming a citizen. For many people becoming a citizen, particularly for people who come from countries perhaps war-torn countries where they might have been refugees, and you see that again in Australia and in England in the clips, the council officials who are welcoming people who may have had a very, very troubled time before they came to Australia or England. These countries are providing a sense of security and belonging that they didn't have before, so it's a very emotional and important moment. It's different things for different people obviously, but for

many people I think the ceremony has achieved that sense of being accepted somewhere. Citizenship isn't a neutral process, it's a process of mediation where some individuals are deemed to be eligible to become citizens while others are not, so in that sense it's a process through which some people are included and some people are not. So, in terms of the kinds of values that people have to subscribe to or adopt, there are a whole bunch of those either implicitly or explicitly inculcated, if you like, into the process. The most basic of these is language, and Bernard Crick on the clip talks about this. One of the reasons for encouraging citizenship and ratcheting up the whole process, which we've done since the early 2000s, is to encourage people to learn the language; also people have to go through a citizenship test. Now this citizenship test has been very contested, some people think that it's very much about British values which are incredibly important, that you ought to know, for example slang, you ought to have, you know, understand about pub culture, and so on, but this is very much a version of citizenship which others would say is a kind of English, white version of citizenship and being British, which is excluding of people who come from other continents, who have totally different values, so it's a very contested area, the whole question of citizenship, and it's something we're still working out, I think, you know what does it mean to be British, or what does it mean to be Australian? These are identities that are constructed, they're socially constructed, and they're to debate and they're open to contestation, and they're highly politicised. What I'm sort of trying to suggest is that meanings of Britishness, or meanings of Australianness, as we see in these clips, are constructed and they're mediated through a variety of processes and practices, and citizenship in a sense is one significant example of this, in other words social worlds are made up of citizens who are constructed in particular ways at particular times. An important aspect of taking on citizenship is that there's also the question of responsibilities, running alongside the question of having a right to a benefit or a pension, or to live somewhere, or a welfare state, or a national health service, part of that is also being a responsible person, so there's the view that if you take on those rights you also have to be responsible, that means you're not going to cause harm to other people, you would be expected perhaps to vote, there's all sorts of expectations that are associated with being a citizen of a country. The expectation is that you adopt particular values and allegiance in a sense to a normative version of a particular national identity. Now in Britain, and I think lesser in Australia, and that comes across in the clips, I mean Australia's very much for the last thirty years been a very multicultural society, so the notion of what it means to be Australia has been fast changing, we have our Chinese speaker who's embracing multiculturalism totally at the same time as feeling himself to be British, that's a sort of possible way of inhabiting Australian citizenship. The process of citizenship in Britain has changed over the last century and has been different things at different times. Currently we're in a climate where, particularly with the introduction of the citizenship test, the language requirement, and the ceremony, it's entering a different phase, and post 9/11 there's a consistent concern expressed by government that we need to find ways of integrating people into the society who maybe feel excluded, who maybe feel they've been not well treated, and this is a process which I think is going to be continually debated, but it's on the agenda at the moment as a central part of citizenship. The point is citizens are made, they're not given, so individuals aren't in and of themselves citizens, they are made citizens through a set of processes and practices. In other words, citizenship is a mediated process, something that is given by particular nation states to certain individuals on certain conditions.