Introduction: Reconfiguring Canadian Citizenship

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In a ‘Fact Sheet’ on ‘Citizenship’, the Canadian government department charged with immigration and citizenship matters asks the question, ‘What does it mean to be a Canadian citizen?’ In its response, Citizenship and Immigration states that Canada, and thus Canadian citizenship, are defined in terms of the following characteristics: free and democratic; multicultural; two official languages; and equal treatment to all its citizens. While the contributors to this special issue on ‘reconfiguring Canadian citizenship’ might agree with the formal accuracy of some aspects of this official discourse on Canada and Canadian citizenship, most would probably wish to contest, qualify, or indeed reject such terms as ‘democratic’ and ‘equal treatment’ when measured against the experience of many groups. Some would also look critically at what is at stake, which interests are represented and which identities and realities are suppressed, in the characterization of Canadian citizenship as ‘multicultural’ and ‘bilingual’. The robust rediscovery of citizenship as an organizing frame for studies on relations among individuals, rights, states, territories, communities, and markets in Canadian and international scholarship is now as likely to focus on citizenship as inequality and exclusion, rather than citizenship as forms of equal and inclusionary membership. One irony of the dramatic reawakening of scholarly interest in citizenship over the past two decades is that much of its focus has been on the exhaustion and discrediting of nation-state forms of citizenship without a clear sense of the contours and substance of new forms of citizenship, such as post-national, global, cosmopolitan or urban, that might replace the old.

The unsettling of nation-state citizenship is inextricably linked to the economic, political, technological, and cultural transformations associated with globalization that have profoundly altered relationships between state, territory and persons. The erosion of nation-state citizenship is also the product of changes that have accompanied corporate globalization, including the weakened capacities of individual states, the decline in social rights, and the hegemony of neo-liberal governance. In his celebrated analysis, written during the expansion of social programs after the Second World War, T.H. Marshall (1992 [1950]) saw the defining features of twentieth century citizenship as consisting of the expansion of social citizenship rights, their distribution to previously marginal-
ized groups, and the emergence of a shared sense of national community capable of cross-cutting social divisions such as class. Social programs, as ‘instruments of statecraft that can be harnessed to nation-building objectives’ have been regarded as particularly important in Canada, a multi-nation, multicultural society (or set of societies) which has lacked powerful overriding national symbols, and narratives invoking shared collective memory or common destiny (Banting, 1999, p. 125; and Brodie, this issue). Students of turn-of-the-twenty-first century citizenship in Canada, while generally agreed on the progressive erosion of social entitlements and social policies that might in the past have provided for social integration, are more apt to arrive at a more variegated understanding of the contemporary character and possible bases for future citizenship.

Two themes about citizenship emerge particularly strongly in this issue on the reconfiguration of citizenship in Canada. The first is that citizenship is most fruitfully conceptualized as process, rather than as a static framework of rights and obligations (Turner, 1997). Citizenship both constructs and reflects a ‘dynamic, active and continually negotiated complexity of relationships’ (Stasiulis and Bakan, 1997, p. 117), that is not confined to the relationship between individuals and the nation-state, but also encompasses the market and employment relations, neighborhoods, communities and households (Siltanen, this issue) or refers to a complex web of reciprocal obligations among ‘families, clans and confederacies’ (Henderson, this issue).

The process-oriented and contested character of citizenship is apparent in the evolving construction of the links between social citizenship guarantees by Canadian governments and the development of a sense of ‘Canadianness’ examined by Janine Brodie. Viewed through a different lens (policy outcomes and results, rather than official discourse), Janet Siltanen argues that multiple projects and logics, not all of which have enhanced equality or secured social citizenship, were involved in the development of social policies in post-war Canada. Citizenship as a contested process is apparent in the contrast between ‘federal citizenship’, defined by Canadian (settler) state officials, and indigenous-authored and negotiated-sui generis treaty citizenship drawn by Sakej Henderson; and the shifting historical emphases placed on church, state, language, ethnicity, and culture within Québécois citizenship identified by Danielle Juteau. The fact that evolving forms of national citizenship intersect with global processes in ways that may exacerbate the exclusionary aspects of identity-building within multicultural citizenship is discussed by Yasmeen Abu-Laban. Abu-Laban critiques the insidious essentialism of ‘clash of civilizations’ discourses and practices of ‘racial profiling’, provoked by events associated with the September 11, 2001 destruction of the US World Trade Center and Pentagon. The notion of citizenship as a process subject to contestation is also evident in Brenda Cossmán’s exploration of the alternatively ‘transgressive’ and ‘normalizing’ implications for sexual citizenship of two significant Supreme Court decisions on gay and lesbian rights, and in Daiva Stasiulis’s reading of the challenges presented by the simultaneous recognition of children’s protection and participation rights, as taken up in Canadian state policies, and by the children’s movement.
A second and related feature of citizenship, underscored by individual authors, and conveyed in the collection of articles for this issue, is the multiplicity of citizenships that currently exist in the geo-political territory of Canada. Like so many tectonic plates, the different citizenships sometimes move horizontally past each other, sometimes diverge, sometimes converge, and when they collide, may throw up new material (ideas, discourses, conflicts, forms of exclusion) for citizenship. A sense of the multiple and indeterminate possible trajectories for citizenship in Canada, the jostling for position and influence of diverse and competing paradigms or imaginaries of citizenship, is powerfully conveyed by the authors in this special issue. Each analysis is cognizant of the material, institutional, socio-legal and/or discursive burdens of the past and constraints of the current juncture that delimit possibilities for the reconfiguration of citizenship in Canada. Several of the contributions to this issue are informed by an understanding of the harsh reality of the inequality and the disempowering aspects of the current arrangements of power inscribed in contemporary Canadian citizenship—for communities such as First Nations, migrants, gays and lesbians, and children—yet several are also animated by a heady and impassioned sense of new boundary-challenging options and opportunities, under changed social conditions, deriving especially from the rich legacies of communities, and the creativity and culture-setting agendas of contemporary social movements (Aboriginal, Québécois, diasporic, queer, children).

The articles for this issue are broadly grouped to address three important themes in Canadian and international debates on citizenship: social citizenship (Brodie, Siltanen), differentiated citizenship associated with the ethno-national diversity of peoples (Henderson, Juteau, Abu-Laban), and emergent citizenship identities and projects (Cossman, Stasiulis).

The Fate of Social Citizenship and National Solidarity

In their respective articles on social citizenship in Canada, Janine Brodie and Janet Siltanen each explore the implications of deteriorating Canadian social policies and social entitlements that have aggravated poverty, economic insecurity and social exclusion, especially among marginalized groups with tenuous links to the wage economy. In Brodie’s analysis, the focus is on the implications of the rise and fall of social citizenship for national Canadian citizenship and social solidarity. Brodie draws on the legacy of T.H. Marshall’s sociology of social citizenship and Polanyi’s *The Great Transformation*, to examine the active shaping of national identity and national cohesion in a class-divided society through the creation of a post-Second World War social citizenship regime in Canada. Drawing upon Speeches from the Throne of the Federal Parliament, she reveals how in the 1920s–1940s, the rationale for the introduction of several important pieces of social security legislation, and a strongly interventionist role for the federal government, was often couched in terms of the need to respond to the ‘grave defects and worst abuses’ of the capitalist system.

The Canadian welfare state paled in comparison with European counterparts, its programs often falling short of the principle of universality, as well as being gendered and exclusionary towards those at the margins of the paid work force.
Nonetheless, Brodie points out that the making of the ‘social Canadian’ was accomplished through the ‘language of universalism rather than of selectivity and the targeting of sub-groups in need’. The links between the development of social citizenship and nation-building became more explicit and numerous in the 1940s–1960s, a period that produced a flurry of federal initiatives dedicated to building the cultural and symbolic infrastructure of a pan-Canadian nationalism, and creating the ‘social Canadian’ as distinct from the earlier subject of the British Empire. Brodie argues that the federal narrative of the Social Canadian did not merely ignore the marginalization of First Nations and intensification of separate nationalist loyalties of Québécois, but that it deliberately and strategically offered the promise of a pan-Canadian social citizenship as a remedy for these and other challenges to national unity. Given the declining capacity of the federal state to regulate the national economy, and the unraveling of the post-war social fabric, Brodie asks what are the implications of these developments for building pan-Canadian loyalties and collective national identities? Her analyses of the Speeches from the Throne during the 1990s, that de-legitimized social programs as the right of Canadian citizens, and signaled the shift from the social to the neo-liberal state, reveal the thread-bare premises that remain for the federal government to orchestrate national and social solidarity among Canadian citizens. Brodie points to the thinness of Canadian citizenship once the social glue of social citizenship has been dissolved. Efforts to rebuild and reinvent ‘Canadian values’ through neo-liberal formulations such as the ‘entrepreneurial citizen’, the ‘market citizen player in the global economy’, and the ‘Canadian (third) Way’, enjoy little popular purchase and have been met with a high degree of cynicism among Canadians.

In her exploration of social citizenship in Canada, Janet Siltanen asks how might our thinking about social citizenship affect our ability to construct progressive, equality-enhancing alternatives to the current rendition of neo-liberal citizenship? While acknowledging that cuts in social services, in conjunction with the growing instability of the wage economy, have had devastating impacts on large segments of the Canadian population, Siltanen argues that social scientists and policy analysts have been too ready to regard these social policy changes in terms of a fundamental paradigm shift—from Keynesian social welfare to neo-liberal and market-led.

Siltanen argues that while the idea of a paradigmatic fault-line between social and market citizenship exerts a fierce hold in contemporary political thought, many detailed analyses of the genesis and particular features of Canadian social policy lead to more skeptical conclusions regarding whether a ‘golden era’ of a Keynesian welfare state ever existed in Canada. In addition, the conflation of ‘social programs’ with ‘social citizenship’ encourages us to forget how punitive and adverse to equality outcomes many social policies have been, especially for individuals and groups who depart from hegemonic images of the ideal (male, white, middle class, etc.) citizen.

The compelling evidence, summarized by Siltanen, that Canada’s post-war welfare state was based upon a considerably more hybrid and expedient approach (technocratic rather than social Keynesian, more liberal than social democratic, etc.) rather than a commitment to social citizenship rights per se,
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suggests the need to view more recent changes in the welfare state, and in citizenship, rather differently. Siltanen proposes that if the Canadian welfare effort is re-conceptualized in terms of continuities (from ‘mean and lean’ to ‘mean and leaner’) rather than ruptures, the idea of social citizenship is more amenable to recuperation for progressive, equality-seeking purposes. Currently, our ideas are being ‘colonized by impositional claims of neo-liberalism’ which means that we are too resigned to regard ‘the market’ as a sphere of life separate from ‘the social’. This has bracketed ‘the market’ outside the range of equality-seeking strategies that have historically been pursued, even during the putative golden era of social citizenship. Yet evidence presented by Siltanen from the wage structure of a huge segment of the population in Canada’s capital region of Ottawa indicates that the market-determination of the quality of many people’s lives is extremely impoverished, failing to realize some of the minimal conditions for the exercise of adult citizenship such as financial autonomy. A progressive, recuperative project would contest the neo-liberal claim that the market is the arbiter of the quality of life, extend social citizenship to within the market itself, not just outside it, and pay more attention to the link between the purposes of equality and the quality of life.

Differentiated Citizenship of Diverse Peoples, Diverse Histories

Sakej Youngblood Henderson’s paper on ‘Sui Generis and Treaty Citizenship’ is also a call to re-imagine citizenship, but from an Aboriginal perspective that questions the fundamental assumptions of Canadian federal citizenship, whose underpinnings are colonial and Eurocentric. One of the key colonial foundational myths concerning Canadian citizenship—that the Crown delegated authority to First Nations—inverts historical reality. In fact, it was the First Nations who gave the British Crown delegated authority via the treaties, and the treaties that legitimized the British presence. Moreover, as confirmed by some Supreme Court decisions, sui generis Aboriginal orders or constitutional orders of Aboriginal peoples pre-existed imperial power, treaties and the subsequent sovereign delegation of political power. From these constitutional foundations, it follows that ‘Aboriginal peoples do not have to join Canada and become citizens’. Rather, it is Canada and its citizens that need to acknowledge their Aboriginal foundations.

Henderson’s analysis is a sharp reminder that for Aboriginal peoples, there was never a golden era of citizenship in their post-contact history with Europeans. He argues that the seemingly more inclusionary discourses of contemporary Canadian citizenship that emphasize its democratic and multicultural features, continue to position Aboriginal peoples as the ‘Other’, in a substantially similar manner to the earlier impositions of Christianity, ‘civilization’, assimilation, and the Indian Act that until approximately 50 years ago, denied that ‘Indians’ were ‘persons’. The collective amnesia among non-Aboriginal Canadians induced by a narrative of federal citizenship that denies the centrality of Aboriginal nations to Canadian sovereignty compels Henderson to reject ‘the gentle invitation to a fuzzy federal citizenship’. Henderson’s analysis is an indictment of the undemocratic underbelly of Cana-
dian democracy that offered one-person-one-vote to Aboriginal persons in turn for the repudiation of their treaty and Aboriginal rights. The emptiness of ‘majoritarian’ democracy for Aboriginal peoples was recently exemplified in the British Columbian Liberal government’s biased referendum on the land rights of the Nisga’a Nation that was designed to undermine the careful negotiations of generations of Aboriginal persons, as well as judicial rulings that upheld unextinguished Aboriginal rights.

Henderson’s paper offers more than a trenchant critique of the deficits of Canadian citizenship for Aboriginal peoples. Through his careful elaboration of concepts such as *sui generis* Aboriginal orders, constitutional supremacy, treaty federalism and treaty citizenship, he also spells out some of the principal tenets of *sui generis* citizenship. Henderson points out that a strong sense of ecological belonging and terrestrial consciousness is intrinsic to *sui generis* citizenship, thus reinforcing John Borrows’ insistence that the ‘loyalties, allegiance, and affection [of Aboriginal peoples] are related to the land’ despite the alarming rate of disenfranchisement of Aboriginal peoples ‘from the land, water, animals, and trees’ (Borrows, 1999, pp. 72–3). Henderson also credits the post-colonial writings of an Aboriginal ‘renaissance’ with opening up new ways of thinking that may challenge and displace ‘fossilized’ categories of Eurocentric political thought, including the idea of the sovereign Canadian state, and nation-state citizenship. Further, the significant relationships embodied in *sui generis* citizenship are not the individuated liberal forms that link individual to nation or state, but a complex web of reciprocal relationships that permit the sharing of values and identity among an extended family and ‘within a vast fabric of families, clans, and confederacies’. Within this rich and intricate imaginary of ‘kanata’, informed by ancient Aboriginal teachings as well as post-colonial indigenous thought, distinct forms of responsibility to land, kin, animals, and other peoples of the planet substitute for the abstract notion of rights in liberal political theory and Canadian statutory citizenship.

In contrast to this formulation of Aboriginal citizenship, Danielle Juteau’s article reveals that for the Québécois, the development of a sense of collective identity associated with citizenship is inextricably tied to the nation-state, i.e. the Quebec state, for which interestingly, ‘statehood is a goal and not a fact’. Beginning in the ‘Quiet Revolution’ of the early 1960s that witnessed the rapid modernization and secularization of Quebec society, the Quebec state has carved out the highest degree of autonomy of all provincial states in matters such as: immigration regulations and the integration of immigrants; language laws; representation on the international scene; and the construction of a distinct Quebec Charter of Human Rights.

Juteau’s methodology is similar to that of Brodie’s, in focusing on the discursive (as distinct from policy outcome) aspects of the articulation of a citoyenneté québécoise through an examination of key governmental texts. She identifies three distinct periods in the establishment of Québécois identity that also correspond to different strategies adopted by the Quebec state: first, the early 1960s to the defeat of the first referendum on sovereignty in 1980; second, 1980–95, when the second referendum was narrowly defeated; and third, 1995 up to the present. In each period, collective boundaries and identities have
evolved in Quebec as a result of their ever-changing relationship to church, state, culture, ancestry, language, and territory.

Juteau’s analysis of the discourses employed by the Quebec state and society in the process of enacting collective identities offers an interesting contrast to Brodie’s investigation of the federal project of social citizenship as it played out in English-speaking Canada. In contrast to the civic and state-centered ‘thin citizenship’ of English-speaking Canadians in which Canada is seen as an ensemble of citizens sharing institutions and valued social entitlements within a common territory, Québécois are more likely to perform ‘thick citizenship’ in their evocation of a collective people, nation, ancestry and destiny.

Juteau arrives at a conclusion about the trajectory of Québécois citizenship that runs directly opposite to much of the literature that argues that contemporary trends in governance and identities preview highly differentiated, post-national or cosmopolitan types of citizenship. On the contrary, Juteau argues that the Quebec state, led by a party dedicated to Quebec sovereignty, is retreating from its previous efforts to define the ‘intercultural’ character of Quebec society that had followed unprecedented non-French (and non-English) immigration to Quebec (efforts had attempted to distance Quebec’s social integration project from that of the federal government’s multiculturality policy). Instead, Juteau argues that since 1995, ‘[w]hat we are witnessing is an attempt by the Quebec state to define a universal national identity that would subordinate all others. The national model of citizenship is preferred over the post-national, the republican over the pluralist, the undifferentiated over the differentiated’. Within this citizenship project, the French language is valued for more than its instrumental value; it is constructed as part of a commons that must be protected by all residents, even non-French Canadian residents. As Juteau elegantly argues, this state citizenship and sovereignist project is part of a ‘de-ethnicizing’ strategy and avoids hardening to a more ethnically homogeneous past. Yet insofar as language is the bearer of culture, it remains to be seen whether this new strategy will have resonance for non-French Canadians, whose support for the Quebec sovereignist project has thus far remained elusive.

Ethnocultural diversity, as Yasmeen Abu-Laban demonstrates, continues to be constructed as a problem for liberal politics and ethics outside as well as within Quebec. The increasingly multi-ethnic, multi-racial and multi-religious character of the Canadian population presents a continuing challenge for the construction of collective citizenship identities and forms of belonging. The focus of Abu-Laban’s article is the recent and disquieting challenge to Canadian multiculturalism and to equality safeguards within Canadian liberal democracy posed by state security policies of ‘racial profiling’ of potential terrorists following the events of September 11, 2001 in New York and Washington.

The problematic nature of multiculturalism is striking in a country whose multiculturalism policies have been widely celebrated over the past 30 years in much of the rest of the world (and as pointed out at the outset of this Introduction, in Canadian official discourse itself). In addition, while some Canadian liberal thinkers (such as Katherine Frielbeck) tenaciously hold to a ‘difference-blind’, individualist approach to equality, others (such as Charles Taylor and Will Kymlicka) have done much to seek an epistemic
reconciliation between liberalism and group-differentiated cultural citizenship rights.

For Abu-Laban, it is not multiculturalism or the cultural diversity that it seeks to represent that is a problem for Canadian liberalism and liberal democracy. Rather, it is essentialist thinking, the external fixing of ‘cultural groups’ with a unique and unchanging essence that poses danger to Canadian liberal democracy and fundamental values of equality and freedom. Abu-Laban illustrates that multicultural and anti-discriminatory beliefs in fact informed some of the Canadian political and policy responses to ‘September 11’, such as the cross-party denunciation of hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims, and the support given by Prime Minister Chrétien and parliamentarians for the opening of a national museum’s art exhibit by Arab-Canadians when it was threatened with postponement by the museum’s officials. However, essentialist thinking that draws upon Huntington’s ‘clash of civilizations’ imagery, pitting Muslims and Arabs against liberal, Christian norms emerged in partisan debates and in other policies. As detailed by Abu-Laban these included the Manichean ‘good vs. evil’ simplifications in analyses of terrorism offered by some parliamentarians (especially notable within the right-wing Canadian Alliance). Essentialist thinking was also evident in the policy area of immigration, with some Alliance politicians calling for a ‘security perimeter’ that conforms to the de-nationalizing logic of the North American Free Trade Agreement by harmonizing Canadian immigration policy with US security standards, and in anti-terrorist legislation and ‘racial profiling’ practices introduced at Canadian ports of entry. According to Abu-Laban, the passage of anti-terrorist legislation, rushed through during a period of moral hysteria, poses particular dangers to liberal democratic citizenship: racialized processes criminalize whole groups such as Muslims and Arabs, and people of color more generally. Dissent is delegitimized, especially as it is directed against US and Western imperialist practices that have facilitated ‘violent and destructive military repercussions in Afghanistan, in Israel/Palestine, possibly Iraq and other countries’. Against the essentialist and racist logics reflected in these policy outcomes, Abu-Laban suggests a re-thinking of multiculturalism that is more attentive to multiplicity, hybridity and shifting identities, and the complex articulation of secularism and religiosity, that are characteristic of post-modern subjectivity of Canadian citizens, migrants, and diasporic populations. Particularly intriguing in her analysis is the sense that one of the barriers to de-essentializing multiculturalism in liberal democratic countries such as Canada lies in the continued hold of essentialist (and indeed ‘clash of civilization’) thinking in the writings of Canadian liberal philosophers such as Charles Taylor.

Emergent Citizenship Identities

Much of the traditional focus in investigations of Canadian citizenship, especially in Canadian political science, has been on the French–English cleavage. How First Nations fit into Canada (and not as Henderson suggests, how Canada fits into the First Nations) and belatedly, the challenge presented to social integration and cohesion by ethno-cultural and racial diversity resulting from
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post-war immigration, have also been widely researched and theorized. Yet, as Abu-Labab suggests, the hybrid and shifting forms of identity that shape people’s existence and quests for belonging and recognition are not confined to race and ethnicity, or explicitly located within the nation-state, but can encompass other forms of affiliation, and other notions of social and political space. The last two papers in this issue, by Brenda Cossman and Daiva Stasiulis, explore emergent forms of citizenship defined by sexuality and childhood, respectively.

Brenda Cossman examines the impact of recent gay and lesbian legal–political struggles on reconstituting sexual citizenship in Canada. Citizenship, as a set of practices defining membership in the nation state, has long been associated with heterosexuality, with sexuality safely contained within the private realm of family and conjugality. Yet the past decade in particular has seen significant gains in civil, political, and social citizenship rights. These have included civil rights such as the right to non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation; political rights such as the election of openly gay politicians at the federal, provincial and municipal levels; and social rights such as same-sex partner recognition in the allocation of state benefits and obligations (M. v. H.). By removing heterosexuality as a necessary criterion for access to these different types of rights, sexual citizenship in Canada has been dramatically transformed; yet, as Cossman argues, the victories of inclusion within sexual citizenship have not occurred without particular costs—such as the repudiation of sex in sexual citizenship—precisely what Cossman asserts defines the cultural differences of gay and lesbian ‘sexual outlaws’.

Using two mass-media narratives about sexual citizenship, the US television series Queer as Folk, and the US feature film Kissing Jessica Stein, Cossman analyzes the stories of sexual citizenship in two recent Canadian Supreme Court decisions, M. v. H., and Little Sisters Bookshop. Her argument is that success in the struggle for citizenship recognition of gays and lesbians has been predicated on their willingness to fold themselves into a broader matrix of ‘familialized heteronormativity’. For sexual outlaws, inclusion in citizenship arrives at the expense of transgression and the repression of their sexual–cultural differences. The dominant modalities of citizenship are defined in the neo-liberal state as privatized, market- and consumer-based, privileging self-reliance, and self-governance. Struggles for equality rights of gays and lesbians have succeeded to the extent that sexual citizens ‘have been prepared to reconstitute themselves as privatized, depoliticized and de-eroticized subjects’. By contrast, those struggles that challenge the broader matrix of sexual citizenship, making claims of sexual freedom and sexual self-determination, have failed.

Cossman’s readings of both the cultural texts and court cases defining the parameters of sexual citizenship complicate analytical dichotomies such as ‘normalizing’ and ‘transgressive’, ‘sameness’ and ‘difference’. Thus, while M. v. H., a case involving spousal support for same-sex couples, might seem to be predominantly ‘normalizing’ in its implications, while Little Sisters, a case that sought the right to access sexually explicit materials, is in its very sexual explicitness ‘transgressive’, Cossman argues that both cases contain both normalizing and transgressive aspects. Thus, for instance, even the highly and publicly
sexualized sexual subjects, such as the gay male ‘bodies saturated with sex’ of *Queer as Folk*, remain marketized and privatized neo-liberal subjects. While Cossman argues that sexual citizenship must be transformed to embrace the erotic and pleasurable, and the ‘citizen-perverts’ whose sex is public and political, redesigning citizens as sexually desiring bodies is an insufficient basis for citizenship membership of gays and lesbians. Thus, many gays and lesbians are encumbered with familial responsibilities and would like those encumbrances to be recognized and indeed embraced. While the outlines of Cossman’s alternative model of sexual citizenship are suggestive and notional rather than highly delineated, the elements of her imaginary of sexual citizenship challenge us to rethink the categories of public and private, assimilation and subversion, hetero and homo. Perhaps most of all, Cossman exhorts us to rethink the relationship of sexual ethics to citizenship.

Like the sexual citizen, the active child citizen is being constituted within a political framework of neo-liberalism, and economic liberalization of the world economy, and thus is equally fraught with ambiguity. As Stasiulis argues, on the one hand, the recognition of children’s agency is being used to ‘responsibilize’ children, and deny them access to special protections afforded weaker, more vulnerable members of society. On the other hand, the expression of human agency in children’s movements reveals children to be actively contesting and making their own social and political spaces in order to ameliorate the harshest conditions for the world’s children.

Stasiulis examines the manner in which the model of active citizenry for children has been acted upon by Canadian public policy, Canadian courts and children’s politics in Canada. In including clauses that outlined novel principles of participation in governance, the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child contested the dominant Western notions of childhood that fetishize innocence and attribute passivity and incompetence to children. As a signatory to this Convention, the Canadian government has developed several child-focused social policies, whose ‘targeted’ nature is consistent with the de-universalization of social policy. As importantly, such social policies equate ‘deservingness’ with the image of the helpless, passive child victim, thus emptying children of agency, and their parents and other adults of deservingness.

The conceptualization of childhood as devoid of volition is also notable within judicial and quasi-judicial rulings on child refugee cases where separated child asylum seekers have been constructed as non-children when they are assumed to have taken up adult responsibilities such as employment. That decisions taken by courts render foreign (Chinese), poor children as ineligible for the privilege of access to Canadian citizenship, is significant as such subjects possess few of the criteria of the well-resourced market citizen celebrated in neo-liberalism, and are also subject to the racializing discourses identified by Abu-Laban. But the implications of such rulings for participation rights of children run through other areas of Canadian law and policy—namely that protection and volition are incompatible in a child. The precise balance to achieve between protection of children and childhood, and empowerment of children, in line with their age and maturity, is admittedly fraught with difficulties. In order to envision an alternative form of children’s citizenship, Stasiulis examines the lessons in active
citizenship to be learned from *Free the Children*, an international youth organization that campaigns against child labor and for children’s rights in the South. She argues that in contrast to the relative failure of adult political and social agents to implement the participation rights of children, this contemporary children’s movement advances a view of children as empowered, knowledgeable, compassionate and global citizens, who are nonetheless, like other marginalized groups, in need of special, group-differentiated protections.

Notes

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References


