MOBILITIES AND CITIZENSHIP

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Introduction

Citizenship has commonly been conceptualized as the rights and responsibilities of people organized in and through a single, territorially bound nation state (Purcell 2003). Within this framework, citizenship refers to a person’s individual legal status and their social identification with a state’s specific cultural narrative. Citizens are imagined as political actors who agree to a ‘social contract’ with the state. They revoke elements of their autonomy, and they consent to being ruled by the state in exchange for access to certain privileges, protections and mobilities.

British sociologist T.H. Marshall’s 1950 definition of citizenship, which remains influential to this day, conceptualizes citizenship as ‘a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed’ (28–29). In Marshall’s view, the realization of the state and its citizens’ ‘social contract’ hinges on whether members have full, unprejudiced access to civil, political and social rights conferred by the state. When imagined this way, citizenship and belonging are predicated on individuals’ collective association with a sense of shared national past and unilateral cultural history. A citizen’s primary political community and loyalty must lie at the scale of the nation state, even if they might be members of, and active participants in, other subordinated or subaltern political communities (Purcell 2003).

While these traditional understandings of what constitutes citizenship have been hugely impactful and enduring in many cases, important critical scholarship began to emerge in the 1970s to challenge liberal theorists’ narrow comprehension of citizenship as a universally equitable and inclusive vehicle of social ordering. Feminist and critical geographers were among the first radical scholars to push for alternative conceptions of citizenship that were less contingent on authoritative discourses of nationalism and state-centrism. As a result, there has been increasingly thoughtful and robust engagement with the social and geographic unevenness of citizenship, particularly in terms of how gender and race-based power hierarchies operate in contradiction to the mainstream discourse of universal equality.

Actively interrogating the societal strategies designed to systematically exclude women and marginalized communities from full citizenship, this pivotal turn in citizenship and mobilities
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studies challenged the assumed homogeneity and universality within the normative conception of citizenship. This scholarship charted a new course for the field by attending to the politics of identity, place and scale among diverse gendered, racialized, sexualized and classed actors’ enactments of citizenship more deliberately and meaningfully (see Bell 1995; Fenster 2005; Mahtani 2002a).

Central to this intellectual paradigm shift was the move away from methodological nationalism; the idea that social life logically and automatically takes place within the nation state framework (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). Post-colonial scholars such as Stuart Hall (1990), Paul Gilroy (1993) and Homi Bhabha (1994) offered important critiques of methodological nationalism’s racist and exclusionary notion of a so-called ‘pure’ national identity. Their scholarship importantly troubled methodological nationalism’s claims to be apolitical by drawing attention to how the theory was centrally hinged on historic inaccuracies and over-simplifications. Methodological nationalism’s assertion that people live their lives in one place, according to a single set of national and cultural norms bounded by impermeable territorial borders, not only ignores historic routes and global flows of goods, ideas and people (e.g. the Silk Road and the transatlantic slave trade) but also more recent circulations that were catalyzed by decolonizing movements in the former Third World, transnational migration of post-colonial racialized communities and the explosive rise in urbanization globally. Hall, Gilroy and Bhabha’s work considered the myriad techniques that diverse groups of people have used to make claims to multiple forms of citizenship and belonging across space and time.

Attending to these new geographies, feminist scholars and critical race theorists have increasingly studied how citizenship shapes everyday life and the ways individuals constitute their membership to local, national and transnational publics. Building on anti-essentialist critiques, their studies of citizenship have continued to shift away from state-centred perspectives towards more careful examinations of individuals’ and groups’ claims to, and enactments of, citizenship. In particular, careful attention has been paid to individuals and groups who belong to socio-political spaces in more than one nation state simultaneously (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994). They are commonly referred to as ‘transnational migrants’ or ‘transmigrants’. With growing numbers in large urban centres generally, and global cities especially, migrants with undocumented, ‘illegal’ or irregular status have been the focus of numerous scholarly articles and international policy reports (Holston and Appadurai 1999).

In conjunction with these advancements in citizenship theory, several incipient socio-spatial processes began to redefine the meaning of citizenship in the twenty-first century, including but not limited to: a) economic globalization in late-stage capitalism; b) rising rates of transnational labour migration; c) the global expansion of information and communication technologies (ICTs); and d) the burgeoning influence of multinational corporations and NGOs. Primarily, these interrelated forces of change have amplified the number of transnational communities that are based on economic interests, cultural exchanges, social relations and political affiliations that operate at scales beyond a single city or nation state (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994). Additionally, these processes have complicated social actors’ experiences of time-space compression and uneven power geometries, as multiple axes of difference, such as race, class and gender, have enhanced the physical and social mobility of some at the expense of others (Massey 1994).

Citizenship is a socially and spatially negotiated, emotionally saturated and boundary-breaking process. As diverse populations – including transmigrants, ethnic minorities and other historically marginalized subjects – continue to migrate to cities around the world, enactments of citizenship occur not only at border crossings but in everyday spaces like private homes, public schools and neighbourhood recreation centres. In this chapter, case studies of urban
diasporic community-building in several global cities are presented to provide contemporary examples of the current tensions and alternative futures in citizenship and mobility studies.

**Citizenship and mobility studies in the twenty-first century global city**

Since the mid- to late-twentieth century, global cities have emerged as a new kind of ‘command and control’ centre from which the world economy is managed and serviced (Sassen 1991). Global cities – such as Hong Kong, Mumbai, London and New York – have increasingly relied on labour migrants to fulfil precarious service sector jobs. Narratives that emphasize global cities’ culturally progressive image, ample economic opportunities and ethnic social networks have enticed a growing number of migrants, despite the intense race, class and gender-based discrimination that they are met with.

Feminist geographers have used qualitative research methodologies – including interviews, participant observations and content analysis – to explore the contested negotiation processes in which migrants in global cities engage to advocate for their often-denied human and legal rights. This research has inspired other critical geographers and migration scholars to investigate the politics of identity and scale. Specifically, the resulting body of literature has collectively worked to unsettle spatial entrapment theses, paying greater attention to the politics of representation, identity formation and multiple human territorial strategies across geographic scales (Fenster 2005, 218).

Considering new geographies of citizenship within and beyond the nation state, these studies have examined the interplay between mobility and confinement in diverse urban contexts more thoroughly. They have notably rejected historic narratives of static marginality, which insisted that there are always clear winners and clear losers in socio-spatial negotiations. Exploring the possibility of ‘in-betweeness’, these much-needed conceptual developments have contributed a more nuanced understanding of human agency and place-making practices. This has, in turn, highlighted the more transformative potentials for citizenship and belonging in global cities.

Turning to an example from the East and Southeast Asian context, recent studies on the socio-political organizing and place-making practices of female migrant domestic workers in East and Southeast Asian global cities have investigated transnational geographies of agency and knowledge production with a greater degree of intricacy (Lyons and Yee 2009). In Singapore, female migrant domestic workers’ occupation of state and private-interest controlled spaces – including Singapore’s Botanic Gardens, the Lucky Plaza shopping centre and places of worship – on their weekly rest day (mandated by Singaporean law since January 2013) have provided robust evidence of the ways in which domestic workers’ place-making practices empower their individual and collective agency (Lyons and Yee 2009; Rahman 2005; Yeoh and Annadhurai 2008). In Hong Kong and Taipei, migrant women have politically organized around a wide range of topics, including human rights abuses, low wages and poor working conditions (Constable 2007). Non-governmental groups such as the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) have made important legal claims to space for domestic workers and created spaces for women to advocate for change on their own terms (Constable 2009).

This literature on migrant domestic workers’ place-making processes has advanced discourse on the relationship between cities and citizenship (‘urban citizenship’) in numerous ways. Principally, it has demanded that greater attention be paid to the gendered, cultural, ethnic and racial contours and local specificities of place-making practices. Further, feminist geographers and sociologists in this topical field have concurrently detailed the need for a greater distinction between citizenship in the formal, legal sense (in this case, citizenship as a legal status that binds individuals to a nation state by conferring them with certain rights) and citizenship in
an informal or substantive sense (meaning a more complex and expressive sense of citizenship, primarily defined by both material and symbolic belonging to one or more political communities) (Staeheli 2003).

**Citizenship, migration, and the ‘right to the city’**

Activists and scholars who have explored the links between citizenship, migration and cities have drawn considerable insight from French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre’s conceptualization of the ‘right to the city’. Lefebvre challenged traditional notions of the ‘citizen’ by offering a definition of citizenship that centres more on abstract imaginations of belonging rather than on formal political and/ or legal status (Lefebvre [1968] 1996). Lefebvre did not define citizenship as membership of a nation state, but instead contended that anyone who inhabits the city is eligible for citizenship and the right to the city, thereby entitling all urban dwellers to a role in the decision-making processes within the city that they inhabit (Purcell 2003). This more inclusive idea of citizenship includes individuals’ rights to ‘full and complete usage’ and participation in the social, cultural, political and economic spaces they create in the city over the course of their everyday lives (Lefebvre 1996/1968). Lefebvre’s radical retheorization of political community and citizenship beyond the state is particularly relevant to migrant workers, who have traditionally been denied nationalist forms of belonging in the global city era – usually due to their precarious legal status.

David Harvey, who expanded on Lefebvre’s ‘right to the city’ framework (Harvey 2008), has further illustrated how cities are dynamic places for gendered, racialized and classed actors to mobilize (Harvey 2012). Citizens have the right to use urban environments not solely in service of producing economic growth but also as spaces of vibrant geographic imaginations and realizations of social and political justice (Harvey 2012). The urbanization of collective action in contemporary cities – especially global cities – has rendered the city a central arena for citizenship claim-making and identity formation (Holston and Appadurai 1999). As Isin (2002) notes, the modern city has become ‘the battleground through which groups define their identities, stake their claims, wage their battles, and articulate citizenship rights and obligations … the city as a difference machine relentlessly provokes, differentiates, positions, mobilizes, immobilizes, oppresses, liberates’ (50). The city is no longer a passive, contained arena within the state polity status quo.

In this view, citizenship is actively produced through relational, cultural and spatial acts that enable subjects to constitute themselves as citizens. There is a range of tactics and strategies that migrant groups and other marginalized groups have used to challenge inherited, normative conceptions of liberal democracies and public urban space. Using strategic sites throughout the city, these citizens have carved out spaces to express themselves, make demands and call on the state for more protective regulations.

Literature from the queer geographies subfield, in particular, has explored gender and sexuality’s evolving influence on the politics of citizenship and belonging in urban spaces today. Positioning queernesses’ refusal to be ‘located’ within a singular spatial, temporal or material reality, queer geographies have engaged human agency by moving between and beyond urban, global and transnational scales (Duff 2010). Destabilizing the notion that sexualized social actors are static space-occupiers of hetero-/homo-normative cityscapes, the evolution of queer geographies has motioned new analytical demands that push Lefebvre and Harvey’s ‘right to the city’ discussion even further.

As the global city discourse has gained momentum, contested struggles for the ‘right to the city’ have catalyzed queer geography researchers to develop new methodological techniques.
Shifting away from a Cartesian planar analysis, place-based case study models quickly became the emblematic method of the subdiscipline (Binnie and Valentine 1999; Brown 2014). Beginning with particularly public health-focused agendas (following the proliferation of HIV/AIDS and problematic substance use in the 1980s), cities such as New York, Miami Beach and London became important sites for local, regional, and increasingly international comparisons (Gandy 2012; Kanai and Kenttamaa-Squires 2015). Informed by the relational geographies’ turn, more-embodied and ethnographic approaches were gradually adopted to further ground multiple ‘city-making’ beyond the ‘ghetto of community studies’ (Binnie and Valentine 1999, 181). Survey, interview and participant-as-observer methods have frequently been employed to explore the real and imagined peripatetic urban im/mobilities of sexualized citizens (Binnie and Valentine 1999).

Queer geographies’ contributions to the ‘right to the city’ literature has not only challenged the notion that homosexual territority is confined to homonormative spaces but has gone a step further to argue that it is, in fact, through contested spatial transgressions, infiltrations and connections that multiple sexualized human and nonhuman agents relate to and perform ‘queer’ (see Hubbard 2008; Kanai and Kenttamaa-Squires 2015). Now situated as politically, socially and economically pervasive – rather than spatially bound or marginal – the field of queer geographies has importantly expanded the kinds of sites that geographers look to when investigating gender’s and sexualities’ influence on contemporary forms of citizenship and belonging in urban spaces (Binnie and Valentine 1999).

Citizenship, migration and (trans)national identities in the global city: case studies from Toronto, Canada

For Isin (2002), urban space is a condition for becoming and being political (43–45). Individuals and groups explore their identities both in and through public spaces. The city is a site in which: a) the lives of people are organized, assembled together and rendered meaningful; b) there is socialization into various identities; and c) individuals develop both their unique sense of self and their sense of belonging to broader community formations beyond themselves (266).

For transnational migrants in particular, citizenship in the contemporary global city involves a variety of complex processes. This includes having to navigate multiple negotiations between conflicting national identities as they make human and legal rights claims. Isin and Simiatycki’s work (2002) on the struggles of recent Muslim migrants to build mosques in Toronto, Canada, concludes that ‘citizenship is about making a place and about identifying with boundaries, markers, and identities of place’ (208). Their research uncovered notable insights into the racialized structure of nationality and citizenship in contemporary Canada. In particular, Isin and Simiatycki’s (2002) findings assert that these intercultural struggles over place-making were about more than just establishing houses of worship where newcomers could practise their religious freedoms and faith. These contestations also involved Muslims actively seeking a material articulation that could represent their presence in the Western cosmopolis of Toronto, both symbolically and spatially.

Louisa Veronis’ study (2007) of Barrio Latino – a Latino ethnic neighbourhood in Toronto – demonstrates that ethnic urban spaces often serve a complex duality in the contemporary global city. On the one hand, ethnic urban spaces reinforce racialized logics of neoliberal multiculturalism. These neighbourhoods are often formed on the basis of shared experience of ‘othering’ and exclusion and, as a result, they are characteristically both fixed and flexible. This was true of the Barrio Latino community centre, ‘Casa’, that Veronis (2007) investigated. On the other hand, ethnic urban spaces also operate as critical sites for resisting race, class and
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gender-based discrimination. They can create vital opportunities for political mobilization and participation in the city, especially for recent migrants. These spaces not only amplify individual voices from the community but simultaneously support the re/production of a shared local identity. In this way, community spaces in ethnic neighbourhoods play an integral role in minoritized groups’ individual and collective urban identity formation. Consequently, residents and stakeholders develop a sense of community that is territorialized yet not necessarily tokenistic or essentialized.

Public spaces in the contemporary global city – such as the street and the square – are essential sites for social groups to make visible their demands and constitute themselves as ‘public’ citizens (Mitchell 2003, 129). Urban public spaces have tremendous social value, in that they provide considerable opportunities for interpersonal exchange. They are crucial to the formation of a healthy civic culture (Amin 2008; Young 1990) and an inclusive public sphere (Kohn 2004). In addition to creating new ethnic spaces, recent migrants’ temporary appropriations of urban public space for transnational public events – such as patriotic demonstrations, national cultural festivals and religious rituals – have had transformative impacts on city life. This has become a central focus of recent literature (see Arviv 2017; Ashutosh 2013; Cohen 2011; Oosterbaan 2014; Veronis 2006).

For example, in her study on the ‘Canadian Hispanic Day Parade’ (CHDP) in Toronto, Veronis (2006) argues that Latin Americans and other minoritized groups use transnational public events to assert their membership of the Canadian polity and lay claim to full and equal citizenship rights. Importantly, Veronis (2006) notes that the organizers’ choice to host CHDP in Toronto’s Jane and Finch neighbourhood was highly deliberate. Jane Street – which features numerous privatized spaces that were purposefully designed to preclude spontaneous social encounters – is creatively refashioned into a democratic public space for meaningful representation and participation in city life through CHDP’s place-making process.

Other feminist and critical race theory (CRT) geographers have added to these conversations by launching in-depth inquiries into the role that gendered and racialized power hierarchies play in urban citizens’ encounters and participation in public space. Scholars like Ruddick (1996) have found that cities often function as localities where people begin to understand themselves and their sense of place through other people’s points of view (Ruddick 1996). In urban public space, as Isin (2002) explains, racialized groups tactfully decide whether to emphasize solidarity or differentiation with other social groups. These choices are negotiated differently, depending on whether the intention is to emphasize solidarity or distinctiveness. This has meant that individuals and social groups have had to learn how to nuance their performances of race, class, gender and sexuality strategically in ways that complicate – and in some cases directly challenge – established power hierarchies (Mahtani 2002b).

Ashutosh (2013), for example, explores the concurrent protests led by the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in Toronto, London and Oslo, Norway that arose in response to the escalation of violence in Sri Lanka between 2008 and 2009. Ashutosh (2013) argues that these protests represent transnational acts of citizenship. These acts were positioned as being both against the limits of national membership in Sri Lanka and as being in search for new forms of belonging in the Tamil diaspora. Notably, the protests reject the narrow categorization of ‘citizens’ and ‘outsiders’. This choice was a direct refusal of binaristic nationalism and, instead, reflected a commitment to placing citizenship in a larger, transnational context.

Ashutosh (2013) concludes that immigrants’ protests are acts against the limits of political membership and (un)belonging that underwrite citizenship. These protests represent grounded and concrete acts of citizenship through which transmigrant groups can ‘re-imagine belonging beyond the territories of the nation state’ (Ashutosh 2013, 198). They allow for assertions and
performances of multiple political memberships and expressions of belonging that move in counter-rhythm to dominant narratives of race and nation.

Arviv (2017) conceptualizes pro-Israeli public events in Toronto as racialized spatial acts of citizenship in which Jewish-Israeli activists imagine, perform and negotiate their multiple political memberships and loyalties – to Canada, Israel, to the local Jewish community and to ‘the West’. By temporarily aligning themselves with Canadian-born Jews (i.e. strategically suspending intra-Jewish cultural, political, racial and sexual differences), these migrants perform their belonging to the idea of a unified White, Western and Zionist Jewish collective. By carrying Israeli and Canadian flags, they express their political loyalties to both Israel and Canada.

These Jewish-Israeli activists’ actions represent racialized spatial performances of ‘Western citizenship’. While their imaginations and representations of citizenship subvert the conventional conceptions of citizenship (as an identification with a single and territorially defined nation state), they nevertheless confirm the emotional and racialized rhetoric of citizenship and nationhood in the sending state (Israel), the receiving state (Canada) and across the West (Pain and Smith 2008). As the Jewish-Israeli activists perform the role of defenders of Israel and ‘Western civilization’, they aim not only to critique local and transnational pro-Palestinian groups, who they claim are anti-Western and anti-Semitic radical Islam, but also to demonstrate their alliances with non-Jewish Whites in Canada.

Beyond celebration

Studies by feminist geographers, grounded in ethnographic methods, have provided evidence of urban transnational and diasporic communities’ multiple allegiances and solidarities and, in turn, challenged the presumed sameness of citizenship. Notably, these findings have illuminated alternative ways of conceptualizing local, national and global forms of belonging, while also cautioning uncritical celebrations of these non-national forms of citizenship as universally progressive and inclusive. This is especially significant, given contemporary global city contexts where movements for cultural protectionism, nativism and popularism have proliferated amid new types of neoliberal and geopolitical alliances. As migrants and religious minorities have increasingly been positioned as cultural others within national communities, even if those nation states are considered officially multicultural (Hopkins 2016; Razack 2007), the urban scale has gained considerable relevance to critical scholarship.

While the powerful new forces of twenty-first century globalization and transnationalism have somewhat decoupled citizenship, identity and political loyalty from the space of the nation state, they have not diminished the nation state’s power. The proliferation of new transnational and supranational institutions has allowed some nation states to maintain power and expand their bordering practices. Borders, in this era of globalization, have become progressively more porous for financial goods and transnational business elites while barring refugee claimants and low-waged service workers. For example, in global cities like Hong Kong expatriate migrants from countries such as the UK, the US, Australia and Canada can enjoy citizenship rights and participate fully in political practices (such as voting in federal elections) in more than one nation state, while there are no pathways for formal citizenship for migrant domestic workers or construction workers from countries like Bangladesh and the Philippines. Ong (1999) conceptualizes this ease of mobility for some as ‘flexible citizenship’.

Moreover, sending states are still playing an important role in transmigrants’ lives. Michael Peter Smith (2003) points to the paradox whereby the growth in flexible transnational connections has, in fact, entrenched the links between nation states and their citizens in other parts of the world. In the last few decades, many sending states have transnationalized citizenship
and nationhood in an attempt to ‘recapture’ the investments, remittances and loyalties of their citizens living abroad. This political formation has been called the ‘detrerritorialized’ nation state (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994).

The deterritorialization process includes creating formal channels for communication across national borders. For example, since the 1990s, the Israeli state has launched a large number of outreach programmes and provided new services in several emigrant destinations through ‘the Israeli house’ project (Cohen 2007). These initiatives were designed to encourage its Jewish–Israeli citizens living abroad to return ‘home’, or at the very least to reassert control over their citizens’ political identifications, attachments and participations (Cohen 2007). As a consequence of deterritorialization, transmigrants have increasingly had to counterbalance their affiliations in multiple, often competing, communities (Guarnizo and Smith 1998).

Finally, recent empirical studies in geography that highlight transmigrants’ personal perspectives on their lived experiences demonstrate that the polyvalence of political identities, allegiances and practices does not erase national-territorial identifications and meaning systems. Migrants are often involved in complex negotiations between multiple and sometimes conflicting national identities, loyalties and commitments. They express a desire to become formal national citizens in their new country of residence while maintaining their ‘old’ citizenship status – thereby participating in more than one national community. Interestingly, national identity and commitment to the sending state figure prominently, even as migrants plan for a future in their host country (Arviv 2017; Cohen 2011; Leitner and Ehrkamp 2006).

Key readings


References


