Reviews / Comptes rendus

Recasting the Social in Citizenship

Edited by Engin F. Isin
(Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008, 331 pages)

Citizenship *is* social . . . or is it? According to editor Engin Isin and his colleagues, citizenship is social because "it involves the art of being with others, negotiating different situations and identities, and articulating ourselves as distinct yet similar to others. . ." (p.7). So, when we mobilize for change, "we develop a sense of rights as others' obligations and others' rights as our [own] obligations" (p. 7); here, self and other are one. Indeed, citizenship is social. In essence, *Recasting the Social in Citizenship* responds to the question of what it means to be a citizen in a democratic context. For me, it reiterates the profound relationship between the individual and the public, the self and the other.

    Recasting the Social in Citizenship's chapters explore citizenship in the realm of the collective (Janine Brodie), social care (Paul Kershaw), multiculturalism (Danielle Juteau), gender (Serma Bilge), immigration (Davia Stasiulis), and childhood (Xiaobei Chen). It explores citizenship in the context of the military (Deborah Cowen), the relationship between citizenship and the state (Kim Rygiel), social aspects of citizenship and the environment (Alex Latta), and it explores the city as the location and place for the social (Isin). Isin concludes that citizenship, before it is political or civil, is social because "social relations stretch across scales . . . destabilizing the relationships between rights and responsibilities" (p.286).

    Founded on the deeply interdisciplinary nature of citizenship, what emerges throughout the book is what Isin and his colleagues present as a framework of social citizenship rights (p. 7). Some assumptions upon which this framework seems founded are that groups are socially constructed, social processes of inclusion and exclusion are associated with varying types of rights, unequal social relations are centrally located, and equality does not equal sameness (p. 11).

    At the core of the book's wide exploration of citizenship as social appears to be the question of justice and equality. Three examples exemplify this well. First, Paul Kershaw discusses the scores of injustices associated with the provision of care in Canada, such as the social consequences of providing personal care. Caregiving provided to an older parent by a daughter who works full time and also cares for her own children is a common story for "the sandwich generation." Canada's labour force still falters when it comes to the use of equality to support this generation. A social citizenship perspective views care giving as an opportunity for individuals

to develop identity within their family and their community: "caregiving is an activity that facilitates individuals . . . explor[ing] their place in a family and community lineage as well as the values and life pursuits that this social location affirms" (p. 51). And, "when we build identity in the home. . . we build community" (p.49).

Second, Alex Latta argues that the environmental injustices associated with toxic waste dumps, incinerators, and petrochemical plants, for example, that have stirred a reaction from so many individuals and groups, can be viewed through a social citizenship lens. Inherent in this lens is the principle of participation, where participation in a protest against the building of a new incinerator, for example, is viewed as a major contributor to both individual and group identity. And it is through such participation that political action is sparked, uniting the ecological and the social, bringing something new into focus. Latta describes this new entity like this: "Because [environmental justice] links up the social and the ecological in articulating citizen identity, [it] has given birth to a new kind of political space, or to a new way of embodying and performing citizenship" (p. 257).

And third, Janine Brodie, in her chapter "The Social in Social Citizenship," reviews the injustices latent within Canada's social system regarding poverty, homelessness, cuts in social programs, and so many other issues that impact those who are socially marginalized. Social citizenship offers the view that a shift from a rights-based approach to a collective model allows disadvantaged groups to be "collectively individualized" (p. 42), helping to "prioritize the development of human and social capital, individual entrepreneurism, labour force attachment, and fiscalized redistributive strategies, such as tax deductions and credits, which purportedly enhance individual choice and efficiencies in meeting their social reproductive needs" (p.42).

Recasting the Social in Citizenship has inspired me to fundamentally shift my understanding of citizenship. I used to believe that the uniting of individuals to achieve a common goal had a collective impact but was still just that, a collection of individuals. But now, I see that the individual and the collective are hardly separate; the individual and the collective are one and the same because, "when we build identity in the home, we build community and when we build community, we strengthen the power of the whole" (p. 48). Social citizenship, as a concept and a theoretical stance, demonstrates an evolution in our current understanding of citizenship. This book evolves knowledge. I agree with the authors that a shift in our understanding of citizenship is relevant at this time in history because the very essence of what it means to be a citizen in a democratic place has become entangled in confusion. As I understand Isin and his colleagues, the "social in citizenship" reinforces our absolute interdependency and our core oneness as a humanity—not just in an idealistic, "nice-thought" kind of way but in the very real practice of day-to-day living that touches our individual, family, community, political, and social selves. Indeed, citizenship *is* social.

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