



NOTES ON CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP IN THE BLACK ATLANTIC WORLD

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In 1995 and 1996, Verena Stolcke (1995) and Aihwa Ong (1996) were embattled over the legitimacy of the concept of citizenship—a debate that was preceded by those writing about the complexities of Latino/a as well as Caribbean transnational migration (Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Blanc 1994; Sutton and Chaney 1987) and the resultant complexities of hybridity and borderlands (Anzaldúa 1987). The debate that followed in *Current Anthropology* in 1995 propelled the discussion further. It clarified what was at stake in reconceptualizing the classification of national belonging and pushed scholars to contend with power through the ways people resignify meaning and produce new forms of socialities outside of and in relation to the statecraft. This engagement called into question the prevailing literature that presumed an omnipotence of the state; it shifted the gaze to an engagement with other long standing formations—migration from the South to the North, dispossession, refugeism, pan-Africanism and various forms of internationalism—that produced new forms of exclusions as well as innovative possibilities for reimagining the locus of social and political authority. It was about the complexities of power—its circulation and its centrality within and beyond the state. The stakes were high in this debate and the issues were made more difficult by the fledgling globalization literature which had begun to articulate social changes in relation to the demise of the nation state and shifts toward imagining new possibilities (Appadurai 1996; Sassen 1991, 1996, 1998, 2006).

Underlying the disagreements were tensions having to do with the luxuries of postmodernism and its celebration of possibility, while there also existed very real limits of inclusion being experienced daily by immigrants, people of color, the working poor, and the growing prison population. For Stolcke, the realities of new forms of exclusion and racism in Europe and elsewhere were paramount and needed to be addressed explicitly and through the limits of the possible (1995). Despite this, the publication of Ong's *Flexible Citizenship* (1999) served a new purpose. It shifted the popular gaze from anthropology's disenfranchised to its international elite and popularized ways of thinking about agency and belonging well beyond the state. *Flexible Citizenship* focused on the ways that rich and powerful Chinese businessmen accessed membership and eventual citizenship claims to the West and focused on the ease with which this was done. This was a story that needed to be told alongside that literature that attended to the limits of belonging and the force of social exclusion.

Almost a decade later in 2003, Renato Rosaldo edited *Cultural Citizenship in Island and Southeast Asia: Nation and Belonging in the Hinterlands*, a collection of essays that moved the analysis of cultural citizenship from elites in the center to hinterland groups in the periphery, specifically, in the Philippines and Sarawak, East Malaysia. This collection highlighted the ways in which notions of nationhood and citizenship are created through dialogues, negotiations, and interactions between state officials and individuals in local communities. Underscoring the asymmetry in perceptions of belonging and cultural citizenship between the hinterlands and the metropolises, the contributors to the volume challenged the processes of incorporation, assimilation, and exclusion in modern national imaginings that had previously been assumed. This scholarship suggested that despite assumptions of membership and rights in relation to citizenship, the reality is that there are multiple layers of engagement and claim-making and that various other ethnic, cultural, and linguistic differences are at play. These differences produce a range of engagements that go well beyond the state but are always understood in relation to it.

The concept of cultural citizenship has, indeed, sustained a productive focus in anthropological theory and activism since the innovative work of Ong and Rosaldo and beyond (Castle 2008; De Munter and Salman 2009; Feldman 2005; Heyman 2002; Horton 2004; Kanna 2010; Laird 2010; Lele 2008; Leve 2011; Lukose 2005). It has been an important conceptual cornerstone and has been useful in highlighting the flexibility of identity in relation to the way it is both classified and lived. But the conceptual gaps in scholarship in the black Atlantic world are striking. Not only has Ong been less concerned with the relevance of the state and

structural inequalities in black Atlantic social life as it relates to the application of the concept, but black Atlantic scholars have not been significantly involved in the instrumentalization of cultural citizenship as an anthropological concept. The absence of scholarly engagement on the black Atlantic with cultural citizenship as a way of discussing belonging beyond the state seems to suggest something that has remained unaddressed in the literature. In keeping with Stolcke's concerns about the limits of agency, a more explicitly racialized lens for thinking about the flexibility of citizenship might have helped to further trouble the limits of cultural membership, even as select people are able to create migration possibilities for themselves. Time has shown us that the economically salient minority exists alongside the marginalized majority for whom the duality between flexibility and inflexibility is constantly negotiated. In some of the most recent black Atlantic scholarship a related set of questions that deal with limits, possibilities and alternate cartographies of belonging have been emphasized. Among the most profound has been the reimagining of the state by various Pan-Africanist scholars as well as the ways that religion and spirituality have served as critical domains through which to recast the past and the future (this issue).

Where flexible citizenship became the modality for explaining new developments among particular groups, black Atlantic scholars were discussing formations taking shape outside the tyranny of the nation state through the lens of transnational and diasporic mobilizations among other formations. Eventually transnationalism as well the early globalization literature provided that opening. The work that preceded the Ong–Stolcke standoff written by predominantly Caribbeanist scholars such as Nina Glick-Schiller, Connie Sutton, Gloria Anzaldúa, and others used the complexities of borderlands (Anzaldúa), transnational migration (Glick-Schiller), and the gendered political economy of movement (Sutton) to bring these issues to light. With increased attention to these complexities, especially as they relate to structures of inequality and the presence and absence of the state, the articles for this forum are part of a contemporary shift to unpack the complexities of cultural citizenship in the black Atlantic world in relation to the race and transnationalism literature. But they are doing it through a more explicitly biopolitical lens in which questions of self-making are being adumbrated by theorizations of power and new shifts in technology of power that, as Foucault argued, “(exist) at a different level, on a different scale, and [that] has a different bearing . . . and makes use of very different instruments” (1997:242). As he argues, the biopolitical works through various institutions as modalities of control over populations, but these mechanisms are manifest in some of the most subtle and mundane forms.

The essays in this forum examine a number of these modalities—heritage tourism, religious ritual, and the intersection of religious and cultural politics—and take on the relevance of race in understanding the play of politics in negotiating membership and exclusion in the black Atlantic world. And in this regard, the papers locate the spatialization of national belonging as one of the limits of the state project and the core contribution of black Atlantic scholarship.

We know that the black Atlantic is not simply a geographic space. It is a deterritorialized domain of engagement in which meanings of inclusion are negotiated and signified through complex interactions. This work—ranging from Africa to the Americas, Europe and its former colonies—has come to life as a product of modernity and has come into focus through processes of racialization and particular types of labor which set in place the conditions under which various meanings of blackness and Africanness are being vigorously interrogated. Not only are deterritorialized notions of belonging central to the way people are remaking themselves (Clarke 2007; Thomas 2004) through varied signifying practices in time and space (Goldberg 2002; Jackson 2001, 2005), but competing conceptions of racial membership are cross-cutting ways of making sense of group belonging. This includes the way that people have understood citizenship in terms of the nation-state.

This forum is concerned with the politics of “cultural citizenship” and the way that forms of sociality are being differently understood beyond state-based citizenship notions that also shape daily life. The distinction to be made is a distinction between a more formalistic notion of citizenship that is managed by the state and a more culturalist notion of citizenship that invokes a range of factors that span racial, ethnic, linguistic and geographical forms. Over the past two decades, political scientists, sociologists and anthropologists have been differently embattled around these distinctions (Thomas 2004; Anand 2011; Benhabib 2004; Benhabib and Resnik 2009; Castle 2008; Flores and Benmayor 1998; Heyman 2002; Horton 2004; Kanna 2010; Lukose 2005; Ong 1996, 2003, 2006; Rosaldo 2003; Sassken 1991, 1996, 2006; Stolcke 1995, 1995; Sutton and Chaney 1987; Anzaldúa 1987; Glick-Schiller 2005). The essays in this cluster explore the way that race is signified and the way that citizenship is embedded in multiple modalities for producing legitimacy. Each essay here examines how this has and is being played out. And as we have seen, notions of cultural citizenship are deployed in relation to new domains of belonging. In this case it is the heterogeneity of blackness that is at play. But the black cultural citizenship practices described here are not about explicit

forms of racism or attempts to rethink blackness through what whiteness is not. Rather, the subjects of the articles are engaged in the rectification of difference through the realities of biopolitical concerns in which cultural citizenship exists in relation to and outside of the statecraft and its histories. In every example we see the expansion and contraction of the parameters of cultural citizenship, the introduction of new modalities for the making of racial meaning, and related contestations concerning how membership is defined and claimed. Relations of inclusion and exclusion are at the heart of the discussion and span ethnographies dealing with the making of different religious and ritual roles within Cuban *cabildo* formations, the political transformation of Trinidadian *orisha* festivities, and the resignification of slavery through the rubric of the Afro-cosmopolitan good life.

Fadeke Castor's article examines the shifting terrain of black cultural citizenship through the symbolic presence of the Indo-Trinidadian Prime Minister Pandey at the second Annual Orisha Day in 1999. Here we see the workings of a range of historical trajectories in which Trinidad's first Indian prime minister not only co-sponsored an Afro-orisha event, offering resources and pouring libations, but in the following year he passed legislation granting entitlements to orisha practices. By bringing into focus the relationships between black nationalism and Hindu, Indo-Trinidadian, as well as other Latin and South Americans, Castor wants to challenge easy multicultural explanations and pose questions about state accommodation and ethnic patronage in highly contested democratic fields. As she says: "multiculturalism has been about the accommodation of minority groups by a white majority. But black cultural citizenship embraces a diasporic perspective that presumes black difference and that connects to larger transnational communities in the diaspora" (this issue). As we see, black cultural citizenship exists in a domain of friction, through the expansion and contraction of belonging and through attention to the flexibility of citizenship. There are various ways that some are included and others are excluded and rendered nonmembers, thereby highlighting how people jockey for power, including those engaged in the reclassification of democratic belonging.

The essay by Amanda Concha-Holmes provides a Cuban counterpoint to Castor's Trinidadian case. By examining the *cabildo* as a site of cultural production and cultural agency, she looks at historical flexibility of cultivating transnational Yoruba citizenry. Through this lens, we see how rituals, specifically the embodied knowledge and communication systems of music and movement, provide the mechanism for the making of religious belonging and differentiation. She does this

through the *cabildo* as a site of cultural production in which particular *cabildos* can be understood as a core site of political power. As she asserts, “*cabildos* . . . blur the boundaries of religion, economy, society, folklore and politics and destabilize subordinate and dominant social positions.” Like the other articles, the problems posed highlight a non-state mechanism of cultural mobilization but also reflect on the ways that Cuban state discourses are entangled in policies and representations of African-derived religions. Like the Castor article, the realm of the spiritual provides a critical rubric of citizenship through which to make sense of the making of black Atlantic social life.

In the final essay, cultural tourism is taken as an important modality for negotiating the flexibility of citizenship. Bayo Holsey’s essay turns to the African transnational context of President Barack Obama’s visit to Ghana in July 2009, pondering flexible spaces of subject making. Examining the figure of the Cape Coast slave castle as central to the construction of race in postcolonial Africa, she calls for a rethinking of commonsense understandings of diaspora and legacies of slavery. This “common sense” conception involves the particularities of African-American tourism, which has its own ontologies in relation to trans-Atlantic slavery. But for Ghanaians, slavery carries a problematic history. Many avoid discussions about it or resignify belonging in relation to contemporary genealogies. This reclassification practice provides Holsey with a call for rethinking the presence or absence of slavery through the discursive production of social memory. As we see in this essay, cultural imaginaries of the past are deeply related to the contradictions and silences at play in contemporary cultural tourism.

The reality is that the contemporary period has led to new travel opportunities and ways of innovatively making sense of the past: a new possibility for what Jean and John Comaroff (2009) term “Ethnicity Inc.”—the mobilization of capitalist opportunities by minority communities. What is interesting here is that Holsey’s need to disentangle slavery and diaspora does not actually produce an analytic flatness that forecloses the mutual entanglement of the two—conceptually and analytically. It is worth considering whether the power of the two concepts is in their ability to shadow each other. The seeming absence of slavery from diasporic heritage opportunities is also a presence that enables its diasporic force in the first place. It is part of an ontological presence that structures the conditions of its making—even if the empirical reality is far more distant (in the case of Barack Obama). The analytic duplicity provides an elegant beauty that makes this essay especially compelling in making sense of the neoliberal present. Similarly, the provocations of the Castor and Concha-Holmes essays push us to rethink how

religious-spiritual domains have produced and continue to produce a productive force for the embodiment of subjectivity. We see how people use movement and politics in innovative ways to produce particular senses of belonging, new senses of personhood.

These articles are useful for returning us to two central issues with which I would like to end. The first concerns the state and a particular type of expansion of reality that is at play. At the core of the analytic apparatus on which black cultural citizenship gains its force is the reality that there are spaces of cultural production that are not dependent on the regulatory role of the state (though they are constitutive of state effects and exist in dialectical relation to the statecraft). Yet, the state is present and relevant in that its effects have the power to shape and pattern the conditions of possibility and access. In this regard, in relation to the historical absence of black Atlantic engagement with theories of cultural citizenship, it is worth asking how and when the statecraft is relevant or irrelevant. What is operating to legitimize inclusion and exclusion? What imaginaries? What structures of belonging are at play and why? And is there something particular about black cultural formations that are responsive to exclusion or that are impervious or restricted by histories of racialization?

The second concern is connected to the changing nature of sociality in the contemporary period. The reality is that the centrality of blackness in some domains (and in some cases black Americanness) is leading to the hyperproduction of new cultural forms that have become hegemonic within black Atlantic circuits (Clarke and Thomas 2006). In these circuits new political economies are leading to new social configurations that are contributing to the development of new and innovative forms of practices. The diversity of innovation ranges from the development of new tourist opportunities and heritage sites of the black Atlantic world, the increasing relevance of religion in democratic movements, and the increasing appeal and re-Africanization of religious forms discussed here, as well as a range of other formations: new regional bodies, courts, and new internet scams (Piot, forthcoming) are gaining significance in the contemporary present and forcing us to make sense of the politics of black cultural citizenship as it crosses national boundaries and produces new social bodies. These innovations are becoming even more significant with the shifts in the movement of black Atlantic populations and the state and non-state mechanisms that conjoin to provide the conditions of innovative self-making. As the essays suggest, the forms of innovation that are part of black cultural citizenship are more important than ever and call on us to ponder a number of questions with which I end.

For one, how are we to study ethnographically these formations that insist on the relevance of deterritorialized linkages and that require ways of studying cultural processes that are both embodied and disembodied in relation to the state? The late 1980s and 1990s were marked by critical reconsideration of how ethnography's practitioners conducted and constructed ethnography, and how those it takes as its research subjects perceive it. If that moment is now over, how can we characterize the present moment in the practice of ethnographic work? (Hardin and Clarke 2012). How has the ethnographic field changed and what does that mean for how we map transnational racial and cultural linkages that are among the most methodologically challenging?

These articles show us that black Atlantic ethnographic domains are pushing us to make sense of the ethnographically possible. To speak about black cultural citizenship, then, is to discuss relations of inequality, desire, innovation, and contradiction. Today, as anthropologists are still engaged in justifying the centrality of locally detailed ethnography in our discipline, and even in debating the legitimacy of the discipline itself, ethnography's exact definition and its relationship to the history of colonial power and its contemporary permutations remain unresolved. What we are left with is the project of clarifying what is at stake in our attempts to make sense of who, where and what we study and, in answering those questions, to determine why particular optics and frames matter. From these inquiries emerge ethnographic attempts to make sense of highly textured readings of the reclassification of national and racial identity in daily life. Thus, what we see is that the expansiveness of these processes of reclassification is becoming increasingly aligned with new domains of neoliberal power, requiring us to develop innovative approaches for understanding the complexities through which various modalities have been and continue to be negotiated within domains of personhood and power.

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