

The Politics of Citizenship

Chair: Aarnoud Rommens

Resisting National Identity: Exploring Alternatives and Possibilities

- Alexander Pershai (Theory and Criticism, UWO)

This paper questions cultural resistance in relation to national identity. Every nation has its own configuration of its national identity based on a nation's history, culture, language, territory, economic welfare, and its citizens' sense of belonging. In some cases national identity is "assigned" to population which may create specific forms of resistance. In Belarus, one of the new independent Eastern European states, national character is often defined by the concept of "localness," by which the people of Belarus identify themselves in relation to other nations and countries. This kind of self-identification sees itself as detached from the ruling political regimes and nations, and offers the Belarusian population a certain degree of social mobility. I argue that it is possible to interpret such kind of geographical "local" identity as a tactic of resistance that undermines the prescribed forms of identification and stratification in Belarus. I argue that such kind of identification enables population to use the political and social system for alternative purposes. I will examine the meaning of localness, as well as the conditions and possibilities offered to people of Belarus by the development of this concept from the late-eighteenth century to the early decades of the twentieth.

Re-thinking Citizenship: Resistance and Hannah Arendt's notion of action

- Deniz Ferhatoglu (Political Science, University of Alberta)

Citizenship and resistance are often imagined to represent opposite ends of political action. While the concept of citizenship, especially following the liberal political thought, has been defined in terms of voting and taxpaying; political resistance, has been viewed, as the marginal form of political action and usually identified with the 60's radical activism. Rejecting this opposition, in this paper I explore the possible ways of reconciling resistance and political action in the citizen subject. In this light, I offer a review of Arendt's notion of action as an ongoing political activity. However, instead of taking for granted Arendt's assumption that action leads necessarily to freedom, I examine the ways of which resistance as a form of action can be made part of the political way of life. Resistance, in that sense, instead of being a temporary act of liberation is the enduring activity of the political space. Through their continuous actions and deliberations, citizens keep the political space vibrant and protect it from oppression and violence. Nevertheless, neither resistance nor citizenship can be fully comprehended without touching upon Arendt's concept of consent which she defines in her essay on *Civil Disobedience* as citizens' "active support and continuing participation in all matters of public interest." For Arendt consent has the twofold character of plurality and power. While consent is practiced in the presence of others, it also facilitates the emergence of

collective power in the public space. Similarly, in this paper I conclude that resistance is achievable only among citizens and through their collective action. Therefore, resistance instead of being a marginal political concept is inherent in the very concept of citizenship and has the potential of revolution only among citizens.

(Mis)Conceptualising Labour Repression in Southeast Asian Societies: Manifesting Labour Agency Through Social Rhythms

- Jean Michel Montsion (Political Science, McMaster University)

The understanding of labour repression and agency in Southeast Asian societies is often limited by Western preconceptions and expectations about what are considered to be proper forms of labour resistance. These proper forms of resistance are understood as being public and organized mobilizations, which do not necessarily apply to the Southeast Asian context. Drawing from Marxian Geography and International Political Economy, the distinctive location of labour issues in Southeast Asian societies must be understood by the dislocation of scales between national projects of development and regionally based productive forces. This dislocation has contributed to the emergence of distinctive Southeast Asian governmental practices that exclude labour from the political process but does not necessarily diminish the presence of innovative forms of labour resistance. Bretchian forms of labour resistance, such as sabotage, are often depicted as secondary and meaningless but they take new meaning in light of Henri Lefebvre's work on social rhythms. Focusing on Rhythmanalysis, this paper will examine how specific working groups such as documented and undocumented female migrants utilize contextual public and private divides to improve on their exploited working and living conditions, notably by a specific use of scales and tradition. Examples drawn from the growth triangle between Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia will enable us to apprehend various forms of labour mobility as both a source of labour repression and of labour resistance that Western preconceptions and expectations about labour agency often dismiss.

"Gendered" vs. "*piropos*": resisting translation and troubling the transnational in Canada-US-Mexico coalition work

- Emily Rosser (Women's Studies, York University)

In recent years, "transnational" has become a popular term. Activists and scholars working on transnational projects have presented useful critiques of compartmentalisation and the drawing of borders, both literal and ideological. But "transnational" has been mainstreamed in such a way that, to borrow from Marxist scholar Robert Miles in the context of racism, it suffers from a case of "conceptual inflation." In this paper, I do not argue against transnational work as a tactic of resistance to globalising capital, but I write against the backdrop of its trendiness, of how

"being transnational" still enables educated white anglophones to sidestep real dynamics of inequality that emerge in their often well-intentioned projects and coalition-work.

My goal is to discuss some actual spaces and people, to think harder about what it takes to make border-crossing theory into anti-oppressive practice that benefits everyone, not just those with the most institutional and social capital. This paper interrogates the relationships between culture, power and "translation," drawing from several experiences at the *Universidad de las Americas* in Puebla, Mexico. The first was an initiative to draft a much-needed sexual harassment policy, and the second a three-week international summer institute on human rights and women. I provide a critical analysis of these productive but conflict-ridden encounters to demonstrate concretely some of the complexities of cross-border work, multilingual spaces and particularly work on gender: What happens when terms and concepts don't translate? How do predominantly white English-speakers come to dominate spaces and projects even when they claim to be highly attuned to the power dynamics within them? What changes for transnational work when more of these issues are taken seriously by all involved? This paper aims to promote discussion on strategies for resisting cultural imperialism in coalition work, and for troubling the borders of the easy, uncritical "transnational."