

**Metropolis Presents:
“Transnationalism and the Meaning of Citizenship in the 21st Century”
Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, December 10, 2007**

Summary

Increasing levels of globalization and migration are likely to be accompanied by increased transnationalism – defined as sustained activity that connects a group of people in one country with their counterparts in another. Transnational practices – including dual citizenship – are not only inevitable, but can also have positive impacts for immigrants, as well as for the societies that send and receive them. These were the key messages from a panel of experts – national and international – that spoke at this event, organized by the Metropolis Project in partnership with the Citizenship Branch and International and Intergovernmental Relations Branch of Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

Transnational practices are often understood to be expressions of cultural identity and economic interests. But they also include economic strategies to maintain family well-being and to advance the education of children, according to Audrey Kobayashi of Queen’s University. Kobayashi cited her research on Hong Kong migrants, who are possibly Canada’s largest group of transnationals. Included in this group are an estimated 250,000 Canadian citizens who live in Hong Kong, many of whom were born and/or educated in Canada, but left because they could not find good jobs here. “Their commitment to Canada is strong,” said Kobayashi. “But this is a huge loss of human capital.”

Transnationalism matters when it comes to the integration of immigrants, according to evidence from the United States. And contrary to what some might think, immigrants’ ties with their home country do not impede their participation in American civic and political institutions. Building on this theme, Nancy Foner of the City University of New York cited research proving that Latin American and West Indian immigrants who are politically active in their home country are equally engaged in the US, leading her to conclude that “Integration and transnationalism can and often do, go hand in hand.”

Dual citizenship is the most important form of political transnationalism, according to Christian Joppke of the American University of Paris. Focusing on Europe where official attitudes to dual citizenship are highly diverse, Joppke asserted that the current ways in which citizenship can be acquired – by birth in a nation, or by birth to a parent of a particular nationality – combined with increasing international migration, result in the inevitability of dual citizenship. Further, Joppke argued that the value sometimes placed on undivided loyalty (for example, to one nation) is antithetical to life in a complex society, where individuals play multiple roles. “In a liberal society,” said Joppke, “undivided loyalties are more worrisome than divided loyalties.”

That many Canadians choose to exercise their rights as dual citizens is a mere reflection of the nature of Canada’s immigration policies – which aim to cherry-pick the best and the brightest from around the world. “There is instrumentality all around,” said Daniel Weinstock of Université de Montréal, who argued, nevertheless, that such an approach is far better than nations that recruit citizens on the basis of ethnicity. He put forth the conception of citizenship as

“stakeholding” – in which transnational citizens are not day-traders, but investors for the long haul.

“Canada’s approach to citizenship serves us well, and reinforces our immigration policy,” said Karen Mosher, Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy and Programs, Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Rather than the end-point, citizenship is now being viewed as part of the immigration-integration continuum. A broader view of citizenship – one that transcends legal status to encompass civic identity and civic practice – is now being taken by policy makers.

Encouraging active citizenship and building a sense of attachment and belonging to Canada is an important task – and this is an objective that Canadian Heritage is working towards, according to Pablo Sobrino, Director General of Strategic Policy, Planning and Research. Sobrino described a number of activities that Canadian Heritage undertakes to foster social inclusion, especially among immigrants and minorities. Sobrino said, “We recognize that some newcomers are having difficulties in integrating, both economically and socially. These are not new problems, but we are recognizing the issues more clearly, and the many challenges that we face in resolving them.”

(A publication containing articles based on the presentations at this event is planned for Fall 2008.)