

The Political Process of Citizenship: Deconstructing the Privileged Category of Highly Skilled Immigration to Canada

Current academic debates push to view citizenship (and its associated rights and entitlements, including access to stay, work, and welfare) as a process rather than status, thereby creating room for negotiation (Stasiulis and Bakan 2003; Bloemraad 2006). Pathways to permanence towards landed status and eventually citizenship distinguishes different streams of migration in several traditional immigration-receiving countries. Restrictive or the categorical denial of pathways blocks access to important rights and entitlements noted above, making select groups vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, and denial of entry/deportation. Viewing citizenship as a process opens intellectual and political spaces to better understand immigration, refugee, and citizenship policies as the products of a political process that is inextricably linked with notions of national sovereignty, economic growth, and nation building.

In this paper, I explain and nuance this political process in the Canadian context; in particular Canada's bifurcated system for admitting (im)migrants on the basis of perceived skill level and type. The objectives of this paper are two-fold: 1) to discuss the particularities of Canada's human capital approach to its federal citizenship and immigration portfolio by comparing its tendency to privilege those as highly skilled, often represented as homogenous, while simultaneously relying heavily on rotational/seasonal migrant labour to fill its labour market needs; and 2) challenge the homogenous representation of highly skilled immigrants by highlighting differential rights and entitlements under the contemporary iteration of the Federal Skilled Worker (FSW) programs. Overall, this paper reiterates Canada's reliance on (im)migrant labour to fill its labour market needs by adjusting policy to turn the proverbial immigration tap on and off while concurrently including and excluding different groups and persons on the basis of their utility to the state and/or social status.