DOSSIER

Shifting Frontiers of Citizenship in Latin America

Coordinated by Luis Roniger

Introduction to the dossier

In recent years, Latin American countries have been at the global forefront of remarkable confrontations, debates, and shifts in the understanding of citizenship. The region has undergone profound transformations in the conceptualization of citizenship and of migration and residency. The frontiers of citizenship have ebbed and flowed with crises of political representation and mounting protest; of multiculturalism and demands of recognition; of labor migration and transnationalism; of struggles around gender, ethnic, and racial issues; and new international articulations and public insecurity.

This dossier addresses some of these shifting frontiers of citizenship. It opens with an analysis by Carlos de la Torre on populist citizenship as a political articulation embedded in tensions between its democratizing features and its authoritarian trends. Being an alternative to neoliberal models of citizenship as consumption, and liberal pluralist models of political articulation, populist citizenship promised expansive rights. De la Torre compares how political,

socioeconomic, civil, collective, gender, and GLBT rights were imagined and implemented in

Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador. His analysis points out how, despite the expansion of some of those rights, the discriminatory legalism projected by the populist leaderships tilted the balance from democracy toward authoritarianism as they attempted to regulate and control public spheres and the matrix of civil society.

Focusing on political exiles, Luis Roniger's study draws attention to thousands of individuals who, due to authoritarian repression, were forced to flee abroad, leaving the countries where they had been culturally involved and politically active. While being victims of one of the main forms of institutionalized exclusion that has characterized Latin American modern political systems, many of them retained abroad their will to be masters of their own destiny while far from the homeland. Being displaced and having lost the political entitlements of their citizenship, they were forced to come to grips with past defeats, face present challenges, and reconstruct their future. Roniger analyzes how many retained their agency through years of exile and benefited from the new windows of opportunity to upgrade skills, discover their strength, and develop new relationships and ideas, thus impacting the cultural and political landscape of these societies during democratization.

Meghan Greene's article brings attention to the challenges that democracies face as they confront mass protest, in her case the protest carried out by Chilean students during the presidencies of Michelle Bachelet and Sebastian Piñera. In the past, violence was interpreted as a sign of disarticulation of institutional life, leading to democratic breakdown and the military coup of 1973. Greene's analysis attempted to assess whether such protest in recent years fractured the matrix of citizenship in Chile, or conversely, served as a catalyst for a deeper citizenship bond. By looking at public opinion data, the author finds evidence that the citizen-state relationship has progressively evolved to becoming more responsive and productive, particularly in the process of recognizing and extending social rights. She thus concluded that the Chilean democracy managed to incorporate those waves of protest and address the demands for reform expressed by students as part of an evolving, dynamic definition of citizenship.

David Sheinin's analysis of the La Tablada attack and the erosion of civil rights in Argentina raises the question of institutional accountability. Based on an analysis of a 1997 IACHR report, the author suggests that democratic states should assume responsibility for the human rights violations committed by personnel of the institutions it governs, notably the police and the military. In those terms, the author shows that while addressing past human rights violations in the late 2000s, it takes democratized Argentina many years to follow the normative of institutional accountability, with major questions lingering into the present.

He concludes that the basic rights of citizenship are still under serious threat when police and military abuses are normalized under democracy, and when the judiciary has no sustained means to confront those abuses.

Finally, Tiffany Virgin's study of Southern Californian Latino gangs brings attention to the crystallization of alternative visions of citizenship among sectors marginalized by the mainstream forms of citizen participation. She discusses how the Salvadorans' experience in the United States, the victimization enacted by Mexican gangs, and their negative experiences with El Salvador's practice of citizenship caused them to create the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and modify the 18th Street gangs in Los Angeles. She claims that what others may see as dysfunctional was for them a parallel model of citizenship, combining anarchism with "citizenship as agency" under the gang structure. The author suggests that understanding the views of these, now transnational gangs in terms of citizenship can aid policymakers and Central American governments as they approach these groups, trying to eliminate violence and promote sustainable development.

The articles in this dossier reflect just some of the crucial trends in the development of citizenship, including various tensions and contradictory trends that have emerged between universal representation, cultural citizenship, and material inclusion, of high relevance in many societies and polities across the region. Other, no less important issues were left out, such as an analysis of multicultural and intercultural trends, the balance between individual and communal rights, or the development of transnational identities by subaltern groups. We look forward to receiving contributions on these important issues that should also find expression in the future issues of MARLAS, the *Middle Atlantic Review of Latin American Studies*.