

## **Making citizenship public: identities, practices, and rights at Woodsquat**

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The common conception of citizenship is that of belonging to a political community, with the ensuing rights and responsibilities of membership. This community tends to be naturalized as the nation-state. However, this location of citizenship needs to be decentred in order to investigate current modes of democratic participation. This paper investigates current sites and practices of citizenship through reflection on a tactical housing squat of an empty department store staged by an urban social movement in Vancouver in 2002, known as 'Woodsquat'. It uses a social movement perspective to look at citizenship, emphasizing the identities, practices, and locations of democratic engagement over the collective question of how we will live together in these places. From this point of view Woodsquat shows current limits of national citizenship, conceptually and practically, and suggests alternative possibilities for future citizenship practices located in multiple identifications with (political) communities. Moving from this analysis of political participation at Woodsquat attention is brought to the importance of spaces of democratic communication for possibilities of citizenship, where there seems to be a reinforcing relationship between public spheres, social movements, and democracy. Ultimately, then, actions at Woodsquat are argued to be a form of citizenship that emerged within a democratic public.

**Keywords:** citizenship; social movements; public spheres; democratic communication; Woodsquat

### **Introduction**

The label 'citizenship' is a powerful term within democratic societies that legitimates particular political and social identities and practices. To be a citizen means to be recognized as an actor, performing (or refraining from practising) particular acts, within specified locations. It simultaneously demarcates who, what, and where is excluded from such an identity and status (Bosniak 2000). Further, citizenship is coupled with conceptions of the political. That which is called 'citizenship' is automatically assigned the status of being political, as opposed to being merely social, economic, or private in character. Definitions of citizenship, therefore, are highly political and subject to contestation.

The common conception of citizenship is that of membership within a political community, particularly that of the nation-state, from where certain rights and responsibilities flow. These most often include civil, political, and social rights and responsibilities like paying taxes, abiding bylaws, and carrying appropriate identification when required. While few would deny that citizenship has faced many changes and challenges in recent decades,

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placing the nation-state as its centre continues to be pervasive. Most commonly, the state is left as an unoperationalized fact of citizenship, where it is taken for granted that discussions will take the form of citizenship in Canada, Irish citizenship, and so on. This approach is premised on the state being the context that allows for the possibility of citizenship, even where issues like pluralism, multinationalism, and multiculturalism are being considered (Kymlicka 1996, Janoski 1998, Cairns 1999). The naturalization of the state–citizenship relationship also arises in critiques of the exclusivity of citizenship, which seek to fulfil its promise of universalism (Marshall 1992 [1950]). Again, the state is the starting point of an analysis of citizenship. While critical work into the injustices caused through citizenship is necessary and important, any research that assumes practices, identities, and statuses that reside in the state as the unquestioned modality of citizenship necessarily repeats a narrative of politics that is contained within officially sanctioned spaces of the state. As a consequence, political practices outside its established institutions and conceptions of citizenship are denied the legitimacy attached to this label and marginalized within its boundaries. However, it is these very other spaces in which new citizenship practices and identities are emerging that challenge more traditional definitions of political solidarity and belonging.

An alternative approach is required to see these alternative practices of citizenship – one that starts with the creative acts of people in sites they deem necessary. Recent debates within studies of citizenship move in this direction. Many argue that the dominant liberal conception is only one perspective that (at its most benign) obscures current shifts within citizenship practices and statuses (Isin and Wood 1999, Bosniak 2000, Brodie 2000, Stasiulus 2002, Purcell 2003). Work in this area on the other hand defines citizenship as a process that produces multiple practices and identities, in addition to rights and responsibilities afforded to formal membership within a political community (Mouffe 1992, Turner 1997, Bosniak 2000, Brodie 2000, 2002, Siltanen 2002, Stasiulus 2002). In particular, it has been argued that citizenship is a relationship between the status and the practice of citizenship (Isin and Wood 1999). Within such a perspective teasing apart the practices (/identities) and statuses (/rights) of citizenship is crucial to understanding the limits and possibilities of political participation within democratic societies. It requires an analysis of citizenship to be unfixed from membership within the nation-state in order to determine if, when, where and how citizenship may exist above, below, or beyond this particular political community.

In this paper I propose to take up this theoretical debate of conceptualizing citizenship through an analysis of an urban social housing movement.<sup>1</sup> In 2002 a housing squat of the vacant Woodward's building in Vancouver, BC, known as 'Woodsquat', was used to publicize homelessness and poverty within the inner-city neighbourhood of the Downtown Eastside (DTES) and to pressure the government to develop social housing.<sup>2</sup> The squatters were also protesting more generally the decline of social rights within the neo-liberal policies of the (then) recently elected Liberal provincial government. Concurrent with the massive cuts in social spending, the city of Vancouver and the Province of British Columbia were bidding to host the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. Such a state policy of transforming Vancouver into a global city<sup>3</sup> signalled the revitalization (or gentrification, depending on one's position) of this downtown neighbour. In such a heated context, the pending conversion of the Woodward's department store took on particular significance.

Woodward's sat empty for a decade waiting to be redeveloped into mixed social housing and commercial storefronts; however, the Liberals put a freeze on the project.<sup>4</sup> Beyond such obvious political implications, Woodward's as an iconic building represents for those in the area the contested history of a largely working-class and ethnically rich neighbourhood. Its development stood as an indication of whose memories and desires would direct the future of the community (Sommers and Blomley 2002). The squat

at Woodward's was a claim by poor, homeless, and socially marginalized inhabitants of the neighbourhood to the right to participate in decision-making processes that impact their everyday lives in the present and for the future. While these are rights claims, they could not be satisfied solely by membership within the Canadian nation-state. Rather, they were located in a sense of belonging and loyalty to the Downtown Eastside, and to some extent to the city of Vancouver and the Province of British Columbia. Reflection on Woodsquat, then, moves belonging to other or multiple (political) communities to the fore of conceptions of citizenship.<sup>5</sup>

Woodsquat provides an alternative conception of citizenship. It points to current limits of national citizenship, substituting this singular membership with a pluralized one. Furthermore, these other forms of identification produce different political practices, reflecting alternative conceptions of citizenship – one found in direct action arising from the needs of a community. However, this locality of identities and practices is seen only when a 'statist' perspective of citizenship is replaced with one constituted by social movements (Magnusson 1996).<sup>6</sup> This perspective emphasizes the active, historical, and contested dimensions of democracy, where questions of inclusion have the potential to open spaces for radically altering political identities and practices (Mouffe 1992, Angus 2001a). Further, this analytical vantage point draws attention to access to spaces of communication and means of publicity available for social movements. Connecting issues of identification within (political) communities with those of democratic communication places a fundamental importance on public spheres to the discussion of citizenship. Here it becomes apparent that claims of citizenship require the discursive space of public spheres for the possible emergence of democratic identities, actions, and relations (Angus 2001a). Such a conceptual shift, which privileges identification and practices of social actors in multiple locations over participation in predetermined government institutions, enables a redefinition of citizenship that denaturalizes the state as the necessary basis of citizenship and rather looks at the plurality of its manifestations. Thus, when analysed through a social movement perspective it is argued that the practices of citizenship at Woodsquat were created, sustained, and dispersed through democratic publics.

The framework of the paper is as follows: first, I outline how Woodsquat points to the conceptual limits of national citizenship based upon a changing context of citizenship rights, particularly social rights, within Canada. Next, I turn to the theoretical literature to elaborate citizenship as a relationship between practice and status; where practices are rooted in identification as a member within particular (and multiple) communities. Lastly, I link the concepts of democracy, social movements, and public spheres to argue that Woodsquat was an example of a counter-public sphere, and, as such, a site of emergent democratic citizenship. In such a formation (democracy-social movements-public spheres), citizenship is recognized as an active form of participation within a plurality of relevant communities, where the question of belonging and exclusion are at the fore of political contestation.

### **Limits of national citizenship**

This movement is a positive rebellion. The acts of destruction waged upon the poor must be met with equal force. We have tried these tactics of peaceful demonstration. We have tried the participatory act of voting and asking for change. We have tried all idealistic forms of resistance but to no avail. This monster of capitalist imperialism must be stopped now . . . We must fight the battle in the streets for real justice and eventual peace. (Nathan 2003–04, p. 34)

This part of a speech made at a demonstration during Woodsquat is worth considering for a moment as it presents many of the issues publicized during the squat.<sup>7</sup> First, it identifies the squat as a movement that is not only reactive, but also a positive action toward justice and peace. Second, it situates the squat within the context of a transforming global economy where governments appear as accomplices to ‘capitalist imperialism’, as opposed to protectors of national populations and state boundaries. Lastly, in referencing attempts to use sanctioned political avenues to voice and defend their way of life, such as peaceful demonstrations and voting, it argues that the street is where the struggles for justice and peace for the poor are to be waged. Practices of state-based citizenship, as a means to engage the government, were limited and ineffective for the issues of these would-be squatters. The right of social housing was unacknowledged by parliament and the courts.<sup>8</sup> However, on the streets squatters gained publicity and recognition of homelessness as a political issue, while simultaneously connecting it with the priorities of attracting global capital to the city. At the squat, liveability for the inhabitants within the DTES emerged into the public.

The six demands of the Coalition of Woodward's Squatters and Supporters

1. Develop Woodward's as social housing immediately. (There must be an allotment of housing in the building for aboriginal people equal to or greater than the percentage of aboriginal people in the Downtown Eastside.)
2. Reverse the cuts to social housing and all social services.
3. Draft a civic anti-vacancy bylaw to seize and convert empty, abandoned buildings into social housing.
4. Full disclosure of all information regarding the proposed sale and development of the building.
5. The Federal government must fund and support the development of aboriginal business in the proposed commercial storefronts on the ground floor of Woodward's. These storefronts must also include an urban native self-governing office with drop-in/support services and culturally sensitive native liaison workers from the community.
6. Decent and dignified immediate shelter for all homeless squatters forced from Woodward's and asked to leave the sidewalk in front of the building (Krebs 2003–04, pp. 42–43).

Issues emerging from the squat at Woodward's included the right to affordable social housing and questions of responsibility. In asserting the right to social housing, the squatters appealed to the state (in its federal, provincial and municipal guises) to protect its citizens' welfare from the forces of the market. Such a claim is based on a conception of citizenship as a set of rights entitled to members within the nation-state that at times requires the active participation of the citizens to vocalize unjust exclusions and then work toward their recognition and resolution within the polity. This claim to the right of social housing, along with other forms of welfare, tied the squatters' practice of citizenship to the Canadian state, and more specifically, to its image as a social welfare state. The Canadian welfare state had for a time attempted to provide universal social rights (like access to healthcare, education, social welfare, and so on) to its citizens. These entitlements served as a site of identification and solidarity within the Canadian nation-state (Angus 1997, 2001b, Brodie 2002).<sup>9</sup> The unintelligibility of claims to social rights within the province/state suggests a reconfiguration of citizenship rights within the nation-state. The provincial government was stepping back from a redistributive and protective role within the administration of social services and programmes. They made housing a private problem, offloading social responsibility to the municipality, neighbourhood, and individual. Such a restructuring of social rights not only points to shifting grounds of

entitlement as members within the nation-state, but also to a destabilization of sites of identification within the political community for national citizens. Thus Woodsquat presents a disjunction between citizenship as an identity and right as constituted in the state and as claimed in this social movement.

The fight for social housing is also a fight for social justice. The squat in the Woodwards building is only one example of actions that will be taken to ensure and restore the integrity of public services like social housing BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY. (Learn 2003–04, p. 38, punctuation as in the original)

Woodsquat is one among many protests against the reorganization of the welfare state within Canada. The squatters' attempts to restore (if not extend) social rights to housing, welfare, and social services administered through a public infrastructure were ideologically grounded in the legacy of the 'postwar consensus', where the economic, political and social were negotiated together through the state. While this has always been a source of contention and struggle, the nation-state was expected to manage the national economy in order to stabilize the financial environment, redistribute wealth, and ensure a universal safety net for citizens (Angus 2001b, Brodie 2000, 2002, Siltanen 2002). This state formation, based on a Fordist mode of industrial production (Turner 1997), is accompanied by values of (unmitigated) technological progress (Angus 2001b) and depends on a separate sphere of unpaid labour (Young 1989). An increasing unsustainability of modern industrialism parallels declining privileges of belonging to a social welfare state. Both are in recession.

The social welfare state has been weakened by domestic, international, global, and ideological pressures. Internally, nation-states in, though not limited to, North America are responding to changing national demographic and work patterns. These include a decrease in the number of well-paying manufacturing jobs, an increase of women in the paid work force, and a growing need for dual-income earning families to support the rising costs of living. Nation-states are also reacting to international challenges posed by increases in immigration and imminent environmental crises. More significantly, perhaps, is the gaining trend towards a global political economy that strains the state's ability to secure and contain the boundaries of its nation(s). As such, the political power of the state is being dispersed, moving 'up to the transnational, out to the private sector and down to the local' (Brodie 2000, p. 110; also see Jensen 1997). This restructuring of power is reinforced by advanced neo-liberal modes of governance, which prioritize privatization and the shrinking of the welfare state in order to become 'meaner and leaner' (Siltanen 2002, p. 405; also see Brodie 2002, Stasiulis 2002). Taken together, the current ability and will of the nation-state to be modelled on principles of universal social welfare have been critically undermined. Within such an environment, the language of social rights has been disconnected from entitlements afforded to the status of citizenship within the nation-state.

An inherent problem of national citizenship is the primacy given to state sovereignty. National sovereignty, upon which modern citizenship has been premised, is grounded on the notion that the state can (and does) contain the political within its territorial and ideological boundaries (Magnusson 1996, 1999). Further, political participation is fixed to the space and time of state institutions, where a majority of identities and issues are relegated outside of this realm to be characterized as social, cultural, or economic in nature, and subordinate as such (Magnusson 1999, p. 62). In this limited notion of political participation, citizenship practices are reduced to approving (or not) the decisions made within state bureaucracies, where citizens, in effect, become clients to the services of the state (Angus 2001b). Such a framework flattens and empties the possibilities for political identities.

However, more insidious within the sovereignty notion of national political identity is the passivity assigned to citizenship. Citizens are expected to pay taxes, vote, participate in political parties, donate time and energy to charitable organizations, and perhaps write letters to MPs and MLAs. In other words, the list of citizenship activities is predetermined by and contained in the institutions of the state. In approaching citizenship through the expectations set by the state, the state is assumed to be the centre of politics which obscures political practices, identities, and loyalties that occur above, below, and outside it (Young 1989, Magnusson 1996, Bosniak 2000, Purcell 2003). This top-down perspective naturalizes the rise and fall of citizenship rights as the prerogative of a (hopefully benevolent) state and uncouples them from the actions of citizens. As such, citizenship practices emerging from within alternative political communities are rendered incoherent and judged as illegitimate. This, in effect, strips the label of citizenship from such practices, and at its worst, from people with such identities and from such communities.

Alternatively, by starting analysis from the activities of social actors, a perspective from social movements emphasizes citizenship as dynamic and particular. Entitlements to membership, which is to say the rights of citizenship, are produced through, and are a result of, practices by those involved in specific struggles to define, alter, and expand the meaning of belonging within a political community. This highlights that many democratic institutions are the legacy of previous social movement actions, like the vote for women, minimum wages, equal access to healthcare, and so forth (Angus 2001a). It also stresses that continued engagement by citizens is required for communities to resemble the political ideals of its inhabitants. In the case of social movements, then, democratic forms of identification and participation often occur in sites above, below, and beyond the radar of the state. Such a perspective points to the practical and conceptual limits of national citizenship.

By investigating Woodsquat with a social movement perspective it is apparent that the fight for social housing is equally a struggle for citizenship. Woodsquat is connected with the history of ongoing political battles to not only extend the privilege of rights but also to recover losses that have already occurred. The squatters questioned the current meaning of membership within the British Columbian/Canadian polity (where poor people are marginalized if not excluded), as well as challenged the transforming environment of social rights and state responsibilities. Acting politically, the squatters publicized their issues and identities through makeshift housing and demonstrations of support within the community. In effect, they practised citizenship by vocalizing their opposition to the policies of the government and by offering an alternative vision of a political community (one centred on a neighbourhood), with a different conception of democratic participation (direct action). When approaching this sort of social movement activity as a vital part of a functioning democracy it becomes evident that Woodsquat presents a relationship between citizenship as a practice and identity and citizenship as a status with contestable rights and responsibilities, where one cannot be reduced to the other.

### **Debating belongings of citizenship: from states to social movements**

The rich in this society don't want to see the poverty they create. They don't want to face the consequences of their privilege. They don't want to see the clear cuts through old-growth forests that make their furniture and their mansions. They don't want to see the people

starving, while their grocer throws unsaleable food in the trash. They don't want squeegee kids washing the windows on their SUVs. They want to ignore their problems. The time when they could get away with their ignorance with impunity is over. The class war is just beginning, and poor people will fight back. We will rub our poverty in their faces and on their windows, we will not let them get away with this brutality any longer. The retreat is over. (Forsythe 2003–04, p. 145)

This is your neighbourhood. Be Bold or Move to Suburbia. (Rennie Marketing System, <http://www.woodwardsdistrict.com>)<sup>10</sup>

The redevelopment of Woodward's was highly contested within the community of the Downtown Eastside, the city of Vancouver, and to some extent, in the province of BC. The future of the site, felt many, would indicate the direction that the neighbourhood would take. It revealed larger commitments to the economy, politics, history, and culture of the neighbourhood. There were the proponents of 'revitalization' and the opponents of 'gentrification' (Smith and Derksen 2002, Blomley 2004). Beyond the specific politics of the squat and the issue of social housing, the fate of the Woodward's building pointed to a struggle amongst local residents, business owners, governments, and prospective buyers over the possible influx of a different class to the area. As such, many groups were voicing their reasonings and desires for the future shape of Woodward's, both within and outside democratic channels. The squatters, in particular, were concerned about the displacement of poor people, who were long-time inhabitants of the community. Engaged in multiple political tactics to make audible these marginalized voices, Woodsquat was everywhere – in the courts, in meetings of the municipal government, and in the streets. They sought out any place where that they could effectively participate as democratic citizens.

To invoke 'democratic citizenship' is to emphasize an individual's participation and identification within a community. As a form of identification, citizenship is intimately connected with issues of belonging to a particular group (Mouffe 1992), along with the rights and responsibilities of membership (Marshall 1992 [1950], Turner 1997). It reflects a particular conception of the political, where the practice of (some) identities and actions are deemed legitimate and others not (Bosniak 2000). Within a democracy, then, citizenship serves as a primary marker of political inclusion and exclusion (Mouffe 2000). Yet, the placement of this boundary depends on the identities and practices of citizens themselves as they push and pull at the limits of what is held as political. This suggests that there are overlapping and competing definitions of citizenship, even within a political community, where there exists privileged and marginalized citizenship(s).

The standard liberal definition of citizenship, resting on a legal-political framework of inclusion, is premised on equality under the law and universal citizenship within the institutions of the state. However, as already suggested, applying these predetermined set of rules, practices, and identities to an analysis of citizenship comes at the cost of seeing how it is changing along with, and irrespective of, the transformation of the nation-state and the global political economy. An alternative approach is to 'denationalize' citizenship in order to add location to the standard questions of substance and subject (Bosniak 2000). This approach asks what is citizenship, who is practising it, where is it happening, and how. When the nation-state is decentred as the necessary ground of political participation, citizenship can be seen as a movement between scales and locations (Purcell 2003). From these varied sites multiple identities are produced and performed and actions taken. These many places and forms of belonging do not necessarily exclude one another, though they compete for recognition. As a result, democratic societies are constantly changing with the plurality of citizenship practices (Mouffe 2000). Therefore, central to an analysis of citizenship is describing the reciprocal process of engaging and contesting the delimitation

and boundary of the political, and the transformation of identity positions into claims for citizenship (Young 1989, Holston 1998, Isin and Wood 1999).

Social movements are significant sites for the politicization of identities in both their progressive and conservative manifestations. Because of their constitutive character, movements push and pull at the limits of citizenship and at the same time these practices transform statuses and rights of membership. In this regard, statuses and rights of membership can be thought of as the institutionally recognized forms of citizenship, which include the achievement of rights (civil, political, social) and responsibilities (voting, protesting, paying taxes), while practices of citizenship are always subject to variable recognition based in part on the legitimacy from where they emerge. Citizenship, thus conceived, is a relationship between statuses (as recognized within institutions) and practices (that seek recognition) (Isin and Wood 1999), within a plurality of relevant communities (Magnusson 2005). In other words, citizenship is an identity claim for inclusion within a political community in addition to the right to define what this belonging will entitle. This broad conception approached with a social movement perspective encourages a description of citizenship in its historical, dynamic, and relational dimensions, where it is seen to arise in struggles like the one over the fate of Woodward's and the neighbourhood of the Downtown Eastside. It can be argued then that citizenship is not only granted (by the state), it is also claimed (by the people).

An active and relational concept of citizenship emphasizes its multiplicity. If citizenship is an oscillation between practice (as its possibilities) and status (as its limits), then at any given moment we are members of many different groups to which we have duties and rights. We are also always involved (actively or passively) in shaping the meaning of membership by the directing of our energies and through our participation (or lack thereof). These different sites of identity and belonging interact with other such fields and zones, at times complementing one another and at other times clashing and contradicting (Stasiulis 2002). This, of course, happens both at the level of individuals within communities and between and amongst communities as the question of how we will live together in these places are addressed. As such, citizenship's multiplicity manifests as intersectional and layered, where political identities are produced and reproduced in relationships between people and groups similarly and differently identified.

In trying to capture the radical and emergent aspects of citizenship, in both its multiple and process-based forms, Holston (1998) suggests the term 'insurgent'. Insurgent citizenship is an analytical concept that directs attention to people's practices in, and use of, space. It emphasizes people's everyday practices of creating liveable places. As such, citizens are not bound to reproduce the 'statist' quo. Rather, in rejecting 'the state as the only legitimate source of citizenship rights, meanings, and practices', insurgent citizenship 'refer[s] to new and other sources and to their assertion of legitimacy' (Holston 1998, p. 39). This conceptualization aligns with a social movement perspective by privileging the actions of people within their various communities as the location of citizenship. It recognizes a plurality of sources and sites of citizenship. It undermines the state as sole or ultimate location, judge, and grantor of citizenship. Alternatively, political power is dispersed within the many sites from which citizenship emerges and from where it seeks legitimacy and authority.

Insurgent citizenship is therefore constituted through claim-making and contestation. Holston explains,

Citizenship changes as new members emerge to advance their claims, expanding its realm, and as new forms of segregation and violence counter these advances, eroding it. The sites of insurgent citizenship are found at the intersection of these processes of expansion and erosion. (1998, p. 48)

By locating citizenship in these spaces where people live and interact, one is able to analyse political, social, cultural, and economic participation as it happens. As a 'denationalized' approach, insurgent citizenship, then, directs analysis to spaces of contestation to see who, where, and how political authority is claimed and legitimated. Here the activities of participants themselves are seen as ultimately being the source of the political and citizenship.

Woodsquat is a space of insurgent citizenship. The interests of both the elite and subaltern were contesting the redevelopment of Woodward's in an attempt to define the direction of the Downtown Eastside. This struggle amongst the citizens of and beyond the area caused the politicization of different identities and communities through various acts of claiming rights to be heard in the decision-making processes over the future of the neighbourhood. Focusing on the side of the squat, the legitimacy of its politics resided in public opinion and community solidarity. In building a movement to challenge the activities of the government, being acknowledged and supported within the neighbourhood was as important to the success of the squat as being incorporated within the policies of the state. Consequently, the squatters used the spaces of the city as a field in which to stake their citizenship claims. According to their words and actions, meaningful citizenship in the DTES of Vancouver, BC, Canada, meant a right to housing and the ability to participate in the development of their community – a belief they declared and defended on the streets. Citizenship, at Woodsquat, was an assertion of rights (ex. housing and participation) based on identities (ex. homeless/squatter) rooted in a sense of belonging within a community (DTES). It was further a demand for recognition of the state's responsibility in creating, and particularly, alleviating poverty, as well as an act to address homelessness with the resources at their disposal within their own neighbourhood.

In exposing issues of poverty and homeless people's exclusion from decision-making processes within their political communities, Woodsquat raises the problem of limited access to meaningful democratic participation in the DTES through the institutions provided by the state. The silencing of their claims and demands in official channels required those in the squat to use different strategies in order to be heard, thus the squat raised its collective voice in the streets. The case of marginalized citizenship at Woodsquat begs the question of the relationship between democracy and communication. Democracies, to be considered responsive to the people and equitably representative, at the very least require spaces for emergent citizenship claims. Especially for those social movements that are advancing more radical or less recognizable forms of citizenship, the ability to address relevant communities regarding their issues demands access to the social means of democratic communication. These means are found in public spheres.<sup>11</sup> It is here that social movements can create discourses and tactics for their distribution within other publics. That is, they are spaces of publicity. While public spheres do not guarantee an equality of exchange, they do provide an analytical and political focus on where and how such equality can be gained. Democracy, social movements, and practices of citizenship are therefore bound to the communicative possibilities of emergent public spheres.

### **The emergence of public citizenship**

We left city hall chanting SAFE SITE NOW! leaving everyone present knowing that the struggle that has been brewing for a long time was surfacing to new levels. During all the publicity we and the police were getting, the real communication was happening between organizations working in the DTES. (Cunningham 2003–04, p. 232)<sup>12</sup>

The plurality of possible identifications to political communities requires spaces of democratic communication in order that boundaries of belonging, and thus citizenship, can be debated, contested, and negotiated among those for whom these issues matter. Such a requirement ties democratic citizenship to public spheres. Being a discursive space not directly bound to the demands of states, the markets, or families, public spheres are sites where people can form public identities, define political issues, and pursue political projects through debating issues of collective concern with others (Habermas 1989 [1962], Fraser 1990, Angus 2001a). While the public sphere was first articulated as an ideal form of public reason and deliberation (Habermas 1989 [1962]), in practice, there are many such spheres (Fraser 1990, Warner 2002). Often these emerge as counter-public spheres that oppose the dominance of an overarching public sphere. As such, they serve both as a site of retreat where members develop a collective identity and invent common understandings of the world, as well as a space from which to circulate counter-discourses and project alternative practices into larger political communities (Fraser 1990). These diverse public spheres differ in scale, scope, organizational structure, forms of membership, identities invoked, audiences reached, modes of participation, projects pursued, places of importance, and spaces of activity. This list should seem familiar. It overlaps with the citizenship of social movements. Public spheres are where citizens appear, becoming both visible and audible in their discursive and performative acts as citizens and in their articulated commitment to particular group identities and ideals. Further, a public sphere is a site of publicity where citizens communicate with other citizens in order to consider, develop, and pursue collective projects. This suggests that public spheres and citizenship are intimately connected: citizenship is practised within public spheres, and public spheres emerge and transform with the practices of citizens. Simply put, public spheres form around citizens. This is necessarily so in democracies, where people are collectively responsible to communicate about and decide upon how to live together.

Woodsquat was a counter-public sphere in which the squatters practised citizenship. Following Fraser's concept of counter-publics as an internalizing space for a group to retreat and reflect, and also as an externalizing space to launch alternative discourse into a wider public (1990, p. 68), Woodsquat can be read as serving these dual purposes, which reinforced and perpetuated each other. Squatters acted against Liberal social service cuts by publicizing the lack of social housing. In doing so, they created a space to develop politicized social identities, as well as a shared and collective sense of rights, where poverty was not a reason for exclusion from politics or housing and where one should not be displaced from a neighbourhood because of economic 'revitalization'. Working together within this community provided both a means to meet the necessities of life and a space to reinforce a political ideal of how to live together through acts of solidarity. These practices cycled back into an identity, as active community member, that was similarly projected as a political claim for inclusion in democratic institutions. These claims were joined with critiques of larger social inequalities and injustices. Through this process of public engagement, the forming of identities and claiming of rights were continuously communicated, and subject to further negotiation, contestation, and transformation within and by other publics. The counter-public at Woodsquat, then, politicized social identities and sought their wider publicity. Through the means of practising citizenship there emerged spaces of democratic communication. Through these practices of democratic communication, citizens emerged.

As a counter-public, Woodsquat points to the limits of the dominant liberal public sphere and also the possibilities of a radicalized public. The liberal public sphere in many ways represents the commonly held values and expectations in our contemporary political

field; that is, rational deliberation within a defined set of procedures and institutions. The squat, if anything, demonstrates the exclusion of many forms of speech, actions, values, reasonings, and appearances (in a very literal sense) from the liberal public sphere. In conventional sites of political and social action, such as legislatures, courts, and mainstream media (not to mention corporate boardrooms), the squatters were not seen, heard, or recognized as legitimate actors. Evidently private residency enables electoral access and wealth adds weight to legal representation. Neither was readily available to those at the squat, particularly on the ground that they chose to address the issue of social justice. The squatters' demand for social rights did not hold sway with the ideological orientation of the government's social agenda, even when it captured aspects of the popular social imaginary and public opinion. The views of the squatters were unrepresented, if not unrepresentable, within neo-liberalized culture.

The squatters radicalized the public sphere. The squat brought the seemingly private (or taken for granted) issues of housing and the provision of the necessities of life into the public. There they refused to allow the issues of housing to be solely an individual problem or homelessness to be seen as a 'lifestyle' choice.<sup>13</sup> They defined a lack of social housing as a public issue that needed to be openly addressed, debated and solved. Through their actions new actors appeared in the public sphere (squatters), and equally important, the community became an actor in the politics of Woodward's redevelopment. Because they presented a less recognizable political claim, Woodsquat also utilized alternative modes of publicity based on informal and affective communication that included non-textual and graphic representations, as well as demonstrations and dialogues outside of officially sanctioned 'political' spaces. And further, it made primary the active belonging, participation, and responsibility of the individual within, and to, the community. In creating space for radicalized identities within alternative communicative practices, the squatters publicized possibilities of democratic citizenship as a right to be actively taken up. Thus, we see at Woodsquat 'statist' politics countered in a radical public.

### **Conclusion: citizenship is a public matter**

As a people's action the Woodsquat goes down in history on its own. It was not the electoral politics, the PR, but the people who were living it. . . . Whatever happens, the struggle goes on. The struggle is about our land. It is not about a particular building or a particular way to live. It is about the changing nature of capitalism and poverty, so that people have a happy life and that everybody is well fed. We've got to make life more fun and be creative enough to not only survive but prosper and not get taken down in their power games. (Gongola 2003–04, p. 207)

There are a few general theoretical themes that this paper intended to outline. These are: (1) citizenship is defined as belonging to political communities, where there exists an ongoing relationship between practices (/identities) and statuses (/rights); (2) state-based conceptions of citizenship obscure the multiplicity of current practices that are visible in the actions of social movements; and (3) an active conception of democratic citizenship requires public spheres where political identities, discourses, and practices can be developed, communicated, disseminated, and contested. This theoretical sketch was grounded in a reflection on Woodsquat, where citizenship was practised in order to shape the identities, rights, and meaning of membership in the political community of the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, BC, Canada.

While the squat at Woodward's illustrates a struggle by a particular community for social rights within a national context, the squatters also challenged the limits

of legitimated political practices as they acted to expand the meaning of inclusion within the processes of citizenship. In this regard, practices of citizenship at Woodsquat contested the reorganization of Canada's social welfare system under globalization and the decline of social rights in BC under neo-liberal policies. However, it also pointed to the limits of the nation-state to contain or represent the plural identities and loyalties of its citizens. Further, the struggle of the squatters added strength to the conception of citizenship as belonging to political communities, where it is seen as multiple, relational, and active. Woodsquat represented a movement between possibilities and limits of citizenship – an oscillation between citizenship as institutionalized and the practices that seek to challenge, alter, and transform the status quo. It was a space of insurgent citizenship, where the street was used to claim new political identities and to expand the concept of rights to a liveable city. And even further, in connecting the issues of identification with possibilities for democratic communication, Woodsquat demonstrated a counter-public sphere that provided a space for the appearance of citizens. It served as a site for squatters to form identities as political actors, from where they fought for housing and inclusion within the processes of citizenship. It also pointed to the possibilities and potential for a radicalized public space in which democratic citizenship is practised and alternatives are imagined for the contemporary moment and beyond. At Woodsquat, then, citizenship was a matter for the public.

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### Notes

1. The source of the reading of citizenship at Woodsquat is taken from the *West Coast line* edition of *Woodsquat*, edited by A. Vidaver (2003–04). This publication collected over 60 pieces written by participant in the squat during and after its mobilization. While the internal dynamic of the squat could be analysed, I focus on the external appearance of its common messages and political actions. Consequently, I present a cohesive picture of Woodsquat within the context of citizenship, where the squat is the unit of analysis, not the individuals within it. Further, I approach this event as a discursive site from the perspective of the squatters, highlighting the ways in which the actions of the squat and the identity of the squatters are discussed and elaborated upon within the written texts of the Woodsquat. In total, these writings make it clear that the political actions provided the squatters with an identity as members within the Downtown Eastside, for which they were willing to stake claims and demand rights of belonging. While there were not many explicit references to 'citizenship' in the text, I argue that applying this label to their practices helps to contextual how these sorts of mobilizations impact identities within communities and contribute to a redefinition of (political) belonging.
2. The squat lasted 92 days (14 September–14 December). Once evicted from inside the building by the police, the majority of the squat occurred in tents on the sidewalks surrounding Woodward's.
3. For a thorough discussion of citizenship and the global city, see Isin (2000).
4. The 'official' history of the conversion of the building can be found on the City of Vancouver's webpage, 'The story of Woodward's' (<http://vancouver.ca/corpsvcs/realestate/woodwards/story.htm>). In terms of social housing, the NDP provincial government, previous to the 2001 election of the Liberals, had slated the building for redeveloped; however, they were unable to secure private partnerships to share in the cost. In 2003, the city of Vancouver purchased Woodward's from the Province in order to fulfil the promise to develop mixed housing. More generally, the building opened as a department store in 1903, closed in 1993, and gained heritage status in 1996. Most recently (2008) the majority of the building has been demolished and the site is currently under construction.

5. I put 'political' in brackets to draw attention to the fact that the constitution of the political is central to the contested terrain of defining, and legitimating, citizenship practices.
6. While I start an analysis of citizenship from the perspective of social movements I do not intend to provide an analysis of social movements *per se* or engage with its theories that discuss either resource mobilization or the construction of identity. Thus, I am using the modality of social movements to understand citizenship practices, not using citizenship as a way to analyse social movements.
7. Quotes of the squatters are presented as block quotes to invoke a more dialogical relationship between writings in *Woodsquat* and my own analysis of citizenship. While these quotes are the ground for my claims, I hope such a style allows their voice to stand alongside mine and not be subsumed in my argumentative prose.
8. Though beyond the scope of this paper, there was a concurrent attempt in court by the PIVOT Legal Society to enforce social housing as right (see Quastel 2003–04).
9. Solidarity to the Canadian social welfare state is argued to be particularly relevant for those in English Canada (see Angus 1997, Brodie 2002).
10. These are two advertising slogans for the marketing of Woodward's condos, by Rennie Marketing Systems (<http://www.woodwardsdistrict.com>). The first appears on the homepage of its website, while 'Be bold or move to the suburbia' was on signs on the building prior to the sale of the condos. Two other slogans have been: 'Intellectual property' which appears on both the website and the building and 'Community' which was only on the building for a limited period of time.
11. While mainstream media is a central concern for social movements and key to distance communication within public spheres, this dimension is beyond the analytical scope of this paper.
12. While this quote is directly describing work towards opening a safe injection site in the Downtown Eastside this issue was present and part of the Woodward's squat.
13. Thanks to Rachel Gurstein for pointing to a rhetoric of homelessness as a lifestyle choice.

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