

Session 15

What constitutes Indigenous citizenship

Conveners:

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RATIONALE

The purpose of this session is to discuss the tensions between two contending accounts of how Indigenous Australians have been affected by 'citizenship'. In the winter of 2007 the contention between the two citizenship stories was brought sharply into focus by two events: the commemoration of the 1967 referendum and the Australian Parliament's response to the 'Little Children are Sacred' report. Prominent in much of the May-June commemoration of the 1967 referendum was a 'progressive' narrative of Australian history, in which the belated extension of citizenship to Indigenous Australians (widely but erroneously attributed to the 1967 referendum) is understood as a step away from colonial tyranny towards an emancipated post-colonial condition. The alternative to this liberal-progressive story is that the extension of citizenship has had some unintended ill effects on Indigenous Australians because it took too little account of the ways that Indigenous people are different. In particular, so the argument goes, universal entitlement to welfare payments has encouraged much self-destructive behaviour. In this influential counter-narrative, the moment of 'citizenship' was destructive of certain hitherto viable adjustments that Aborigines in remote Australia had made to their colonised condition. 'Citizenship' is usually celebrated as a status of universal and unconditional entitlement, but some have argued against universalism, insisting that for historical and cultural reasons Indigenous peoples are implicated differently in the 'citizenship' of the nation-states in which they live. In the second half of 2007, the argument that certain Indigenous citizens should not share unconditionally in hitherto universal entitlements seemed to have won support not only in the Howard government but also in the ALP. This session will ask: should Indigenous citizenship be different? If so, in what respects?

Session comprises three presentations:

1. Particularity and universality in Indigenous citizenship

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ABSTRACT

Will explore how the exceptionality of the *Indigenous* citizen provides both a basis for supplementary rights and a pretext for the suspension of rights. It suggests that the addition of the word Indigenous to the notion of citizenship creates an ambiguous and unstable category caught between particularity and universality.

2. Contingent entitlement: an Aboriginal tradition?

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Will compare two Indigenous Australian intellectuals' evocations of citizenship: William Cooper (1861-1941) and Noel Pearson (1965-). Indigenous citizenship entitlement is conditional, in their views, on Indigenous achievement. They thus contrast with the less conditional declaration of Indigenous entitlement that has been dominant since the 'assimilation' era.

3. Recent policy applications of 'Indigenous difference'

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Will compare the Federal government's August 2007 amendments to welfare laws in the Northern Territory and in Cape York. Both embraced 'Indigenous difference', but used contrasting approaches to consultation. The Cape York Institute has attempted to represent that region's Indigenous peoples' concerns, but can the Institute's notions of conditional entitlement be universalised?'