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Models: Towards a Transcultural and  
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# Cultural Citizenship and Partnership Models: Towards a Transcultural and Cosmopolitan Identity

*Deborah Saidero*

With its emphasis on discourses of empowerment, participatory agency, and the recognition of differences and pluralism, the notion of cultural citizenship as theorized by Gerard Delanty<sup>1</sup> and others is central not only to reconsidering issues of identity and belonging both in Europe and elsewhere, but also to spurring a broader transformation of social, cultural and political relations. In particular, Delanty's insistence on the need to oppose growing racist and xenophobic attitudes by educating individuals to a more active and responsible citizenship calls for a "learning of the self and of the relationship of the self and other"<sup>2</sup>, which is akin to the reformulations of identity and cultural politics put forward by many critical discourses, from post-colonialism and post-structuralism to feminism and cultural studies. The rethinking of citizenship beyond its merely socio-political and juridical dimension can thus be considered as part of a broader cultural turn, which aims at subverting many of the ideological pillars on which western culture has been based, including the very concepts of identity, nationhood and culture.

Particularly interesting and influential in promoting a muted perception of culture have been, among others, the studies of American feminist scholar Riane Eisler, whose new theory of cultural evolution, the so-called "Cultural Transformation Theory"<sup>3</sup>, has emphasized the need to retrieve a partnership model of society as opposed to current "dominator" models. In her groundbreaking work *The Chalice and the Blade*, Eisler incorporates North American feminist theories and archeological testimonies from many world civilizations to call forth the adoption of a "feminine ethos"<sup>4</sup> based on respect and caring, which she believes can counter power-over mentalities and celebrate diversity through the principle of linking, rather than that of ranking difference into inferiority/superiority dichotomies. Like Delanty, she insists on the centrality of learning

<sup>1</sup> See Delanty, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Delanty, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Eisler, 1987: xvii.

<sup>4</sup> Eisler, 1987: 196.

processes and educating individuals: in order to be powerfully revolutionary in affecting all our personal, social, political, and economic relations, partnership, like cultural citizenship, involves learning to perceive the self as an active social agent continually shaped by relations with others<sup>5</sup>. It thus implies a radical change in identity politics, which points to re-conceiving identity as non-fixated, nor static, but as dynamically relational and fluid, always in flux in the ever-changing network of mutually enriching relations between the self and others, which are alternate selves.

Since partnership models aim at breaking down the biased hierarchical ordering of patriarchal/power-over dominator societies and at teaching mutual exchange and respect for diversity – be it of gender, race, ethnicity, class, religion, nationality, sexual orientation etc. – they are particularly useful in readjusting power dynamics among majority and minority groups even in contemporary multicultural societies, where the lack of an adequately egalitarian recognition of ethno-cultural diversity more often than not generates feelings of non-belonging and/or of tacit assimilation to the mainstream. In the North American context, for instance, the multicultural societies of Canada and the United States, although historically very dissimilar in their approaches to multiculturalism, face similar challenges in spurring genuine and peaceful dialogue among their many immigrant communities. As many have argued, the politically enshrined segregation of ethno-cultural diversity into the separate tesserae of a mosaic-like structure in Canada has relegated ethnic groups into invisible and self-contained ghettos, which have often upheld nostalgic nationalist sentiments towards the country of origin and impeded true integration and participation in the Canadian homeland. In the US, instead, the strive to accommodate the demands for recognition of the growing Hispanic and non-white communities have led to theorizations of a post-ethnic identity, as suggested by Werner Sollors<sup>6</sup> for instance,

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Eisler's discussion of how to change our relationships with ourselves, our partners, nature, our employers and co-workers, our national community and the international community in *The Power of Partnership*, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Sollors' discussion of American multiculturalism, which has become a new paradigm for emphasizing cultural and ethnic diversity in the US, does not substantially undermine the American obsession with creating a unifying national mythos. As a matter of fact, his theorizations of ethnicity tend to squeeze difference into the binary opposition between people of colour on one hand and the white monolith on the other, thereby confining it into very narrow borders which exclude true appreciation of ethnic diversity. Ultimately, his reformulation of ethnic identity aims at admitting the ex-centric presence of the others (i.e., the African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians and Native Americans) so as to create a post-ethnic condition, where subjects of all 'ethnic' groups construct "new forms of symbolic kinship among people who are not blood relatives" in order to allow their "socialization into the codes of Americanness" (1986: 7). For a critique of Sollors' post-ethnic model, see Keefer, 1995: 84; 90-93.

which re-instate the assimilatory premises of the melting-pot. Even Renato Rosaldo's<sup>7</sup> call for cultural citizenship does not seem to have so far succeeded in adjusting the still widespread discriminatory relations between first- and second-class citizens and in alleviating ethno-racial conflicts in American neighbourhoods, where adhesion to mainstream socio-cultural and economic values is a basic requirement for acceptance.

In Europe, likewise, the ideal of 'unity in diversity' often remains caught up in global/local dialectics, which generate tensions between feelings of national and supranational belonging and fail to suppress ethnocentric attitudes that foster prejudice against otherness. Thus, instead of superseding self/other dichotomies, European multicultural models often mix seemingly tolerant co-habitation with demands for assimilation to the dominant culture, especially in the case of non-European immigrants. As a sort of 'mosaic of nations', Europe re-instates more or less invisible boundaries among its ethnic communities, both in the single nation-states and in the supranational community, thereby favouring the formation of self-contained ghettos among its citizens and a majority/minority, superior/inferior vertical alignment.

The basic question we could ask, then, is how do we teach and achieve cultural citizenship? How do we move beyond multicultural social models that re-instate boundaries rather than favour integration? By viewing cultural citizenship in light of Eisler's partnership models, this paper argues that partnership can be a viable means to promote a truly genuine, non-biased and non-hierarchical transcultural dialogue, or rather polylogue, among people from different cultures. Since it aims at radically transforming the values of masculine-dominator societies, it can bring about the development of a cosmopolitan identity and citizenship, which hinges on an acceptance of diversity and plurality as core elements in the construction of the self. In order to show how transculturalism and cosmopolitanism can be achieved through partnership models, I shall focus on a selection of texts written by contemporary Canadian female authors of European descent, who manage to come to terms with their split identities and divided national loyalties by re-appropriating their multiple cultural backgrounds and placing them in ongoing dialogue among each other and with other world cultures. The transnational and transcultural paradigms these texts posit make them influential in spurring a change towards an acceptance of plural identities on equal terms. They are thus valuable didactic tools, which can and should be adopted as models in educating contemporary societies towards partnership and new constructions of self and collective identities, both in North America and Europe.

<sup>7</sup> Rosaldo, 1994: 57-63.

Since the official adoption of multicultural policy in the 1970s many Canadian writers of immigrant origins have given voice to the dilemmas of having a split, hybrid identity and the feeling of displacement and rootlessness they experience both in the Canadian multicultural mosaic and in their troubled relationships with the old country. Owing to their migrant status they occupy a precarious and ambivalent position in terms of both citizenship and belonging, since, as Anh Hua points out, diasporic subjects are often economically and socially-politically marginalized within both the old and new nation-state and considered “inauthentic citizens, non-citizens, or denizens”<sup>8</sup>. As “gendered migratory subjects”, however, “whose lives are governed by dislocation and displacement”, they reformulate the concept of citizenship via their “cultural acts or performances”, which become “ways to challenge socio-cultural exclusion within the nation-state [...] and reclaim belonging in the place of settlement”<sup>9</sup>. In the process they “stake claims to their multiple identities, multiple homes and affiliations”, so as to “imagine multiple modes of belonging within and beyond the coherence of national boundaries”<sup>10</sup>.

Hua’s envisioning of “citizenship as performance”<sup>11</sup> rests on a rethinking of culture as a site for non-violent political contestation, which implies that active agency which is at the basis of Eisler’s politics of partnership. As a privileged site of resistance and creative survival, the multicultural writing of Canada’s diasporic authors performs cultural citizenship in a number of interesting ways, which aim not only at re-inscribing their presence in the nation and imagining transnational forms of citizenship, but also at rewriting culture and socially-constructed cultural concepts within a dialogic partnership model. Being “translated” subjects caught between at least two cultures, to borrow Salman Rushdie’s definition<sup>12</sup>, these authors are, in fact, continually involved in a transcultural process of translation, or “bearing across”<sup>13</sup>, wherein cultures transcend boundaries by generating ever-new connections with one another. Their texts are thus discursive sites wherein interesting forms of cross-cultural hybridization transform culture into a fluid, deterritorialized, translocal space that defies the binds of nationality<sup>14</sup>. The intermingling of a plurality of cultural and linguistic elements

<sup>8</sup> Hua, 2011: 46; 48-49.

<sup>9</sup> Hua, 2011: 45. The term “gendered” is used to include women, ethnic minorities, non-heterosexuals and people of colour who share similar feelings of unbelonging to the nation-state due to marginalization.

<sup>10</sup> Hua, 2011: 46.

<sup>11</sup> Hua, 2011: 53.

<sup>12</sup> Rushdie, 1991: 16.

<sup>13</sup> Rushdie, 1991: 16.

<sup>14</sup> The notion of a deterritorialized translocal space, or “scape” is theorized by Appadurai (1990) who argues that modern cultural hybridization can be described in terms of the relationship

from Italian, Canadian and regional heritages in the works of poets like Gianna Patriarca and Dôre Michelut<sup>15</sup> shatters, for instance, expressionistic views of culture as a bounded object enshrined in a single community. Instead, by placing their cultures and languages in polylogue, both poets re-appropriate the various selves of their polymorphic identities and accept their place in a cross-cultural and transnational society, where being an in-between woman is an enriching rather than crippling experience. Indeed, the possibility to allow cultures to meet and “speak or listen to each other” within the self, as Michelut states<sup>16</sup>, paves the way to what Roger Bromley calls “a post-national model of belonging”<sup>17</sup>, wherein individuals can “simultaneously, mentally, psychologically and experientially”<sup>18</sup> belong to a diversity of cultures within and beyond the nation-state(s).

In many diasporic narratives, the process of cultural re-appropriation, which ensures the active performance of citizenship, often hinges on an endeavour to dialectically write back to the European homeland and confront dual here/there, Canadian/European alliances. This entails overcoming feelings of nostalgia and non-belonging by challenging fixed notions of ethnicity, nationality, identity, and gender, which have imprisoning and hyphenating effects in dominator-based societies. The redefinition of ethnic identity not merely as symbolic or hyphenated, but as inter-relational and transnationally dynamic is, for example, often undertaken by resorting to what Ukrainian-Polish-Canadian writer Janice Kulyk Keefer has termed “historiographic ethno-fiction”<sup>19</sup>, that is, the retrieval and re-appropriation of one’s personal and collective ethnic past. This is achieved through a necessary, albeit painful, coming to terms with neglected histories of dispossession and dominance which often start in Europe, such as the deportation of the Ukrainians in Keefer’s 1996 novel *The Green Library*, or the colonial subjugation and forced immigration of the Irish in Jane Urquhart’s fictional saga *Away* (1993). In both cases, the process of re-appropriating the translocal memoryscapes of diasporic migration involves a deconstruction of oppressor/oppressed dichotomies and highlights patterns of similarity among peoples

between the five dimensions of global cultural flow, namely ‘ethnoscapes’ (the landscape of human migration and diasporas), ‘mediascapes’ (the flux of symbols), ‘technoscapes’ (the movement of technology), ‘financescapes’ (the movement of capital) and ‘ideoscapes’ (the flux of ideas). Each ‘scape’ is a fluid and multiple “imagined world” wherein individuals can construct their identities.

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, Patriarca’s collection *My Etruscan Face* (2007) and Michelut’s *Loyalty to the Hunt* (1986), where the poets enrich their transcultural project by incorporating linguistic elements from the Roman *ciociaro* and Friulian dialects.

<sup>16</sup> Michelut, 1994: 170.

<sup>17</sup> Bromley, 2000: 9.

<sup>18</sup> Bromley, 2000: 7.

<sup>19</sup> Keefer, 1995: 89.

aimed at establishing links of partnership and mutual understanding, rather than re-instating victim positions. In her re-inscription of the Irish migratory experience, Urquhart debases, for instance, mythologized, victim-based visions of Ireland by acknowledging the historical similarities of oppression suffered by the Irish and by the Native peoples of Canada, and by drawing parallels between Ireland and Canada as colonial countries. Her retelling of the hardships suffered by the Irish during the Potato Famine and as immigrants to the new country, together with their struggles to preserve their rich culture against colonial assimilation, is in no way uncritical. Indeed, as the generational saga unfolds, Urquhart's criticism against Irish myths and stories which perpetuate domination and violence<sup>20</sup> and against patriarchal attitudes towards women and the land becomes clear. Moreover, through the novel's political subplot, she exposes the danger of transporting extremist Fenian political ideals to the new land where they lead to the tragic assassination of Thomas D'Arcy McGee, one of the Fathers of the Canadian Confederation, and to the dramatic end, on the fictional plane, of the relationship between Eileen and Aidan. In contraposition, Urquhart's female-centered tale posits the retrieval of Irish folklore, myths and animistic beliefs that promote a more "feminine ethos", such as the belief in the Manitou, the spirit which lives in all things, which is also present in the earth-based religions of the Ojibway.

In *The Green Library*, Keefer similarly adopts a compassionate but critical perspective to describe Ukraine's past of colonization and enslavement, the hardships of present-day life in post-Tsarist Kiev after the Chernobyl catastrophe, and the killing and deportation of the Ukrainians during the Nazi regime. The links drawn between the colonial histories of Ukraine and Canada, and of Quebec in relation to Canada, undercut patriotic idealizations about both countries. The Ukrainians are, in fact, acknowledged as collaborators of the Nazis in killing 70,000 Jews at Babi Yar, while the Anglo-Canadians are acknowledged as responsible for the cultural and linguistic domination of the Quebecois. The insidiousness of power relations, which turn victims into victimizers, is then further exposed through references to the discriminatory premises of Canada's immigration policies, which subjugated and humiliated many of the Eastern European DPs by relegating them to work in gulag-like camps. Such a dissipation of idealized constructions of Canada as a prejudice-free haven of equal opportunities functions to foster a sense of connectedness not only among the members of the Ukrainian ethnic community, but also with other immigrants to the country who share similar histories of dispossession. It

<sup>20</sup> Cfr. Eisler, 2002: 213.



therefore contributes to spurring mutual knowledge and trust which, in the partnership model, ensures a “low degree of fear and social violence”<sup>21</sup> and peaceful cohabitation.

Rather than embrace models of ethnicity which hinge on us/them dialectics that re-inscribe the primary boundary lines of ethnic identification<sup>22</sup>, both authors point towards more dialogic models based on forming – as Keefer writes – a sense of “*communitas*”<sup>23</sup> and interconnectedness among individuals both within the ethnic community and with other ethnic groups. The creation of such inter-relational bonds places the emphasis on inter-subjectivity as an appropriate model of identity for both the ethnic subject as an individual and for a multicultural nation like Canada, where the presence of multiple ethnicities and races requires a crossing of borders between different selves, in order to establish a loving connection with others. Since, as Julia Kristeva writes, “[L]iving with the other, with the foreigner, confronts us with the possibility or not of being an other”<sup>24</sup>, this reformulation of ethnic identity promotes relations of dialogic partnership based on what Eisler describes as a ‘culture of caring’<sup>25</sup>, rather than perpetuating hierarchical relations among the country’s many minorities. It thus calls forth the performance of cultural citizenship as an appreciation of difference and a respect for multiple modes of being and belonging, which fosters a sense of moral equality among all citizens.

Implicit in this reimagining of identity as a transcultural constellation of differing subjectivities is also the awareness that ethnic identification can no longer be defined in unitary terms or associated with a single homeland, but must be conceived of as trans-national. The idea of ‘home’, like those of ‘nation’ and ‘citizenship’, thus become for many writers a fluctuating, deterritorialized “ideoscape”<sup>26</sup>, an imaginative space that transcends political and geographical confines, a space where history, memory and place co-habit and intermingle, thereby prompting a sense of non-belonging to any place in specific and of co-belonging to multiple spaces where infinite inter-connections are possible. Such

<sup>21</sup> Eisler, 2002: 212.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, the theorizations of ethnicity put forward by Sollors in *Beyond Ethnicity*.

<sup>23</sup> Keefer, 1995: 100.

<sup>24</sup> Kristeva, 1991: 13.

<sup>25</sup> See Eisler, 2000, 2002. The fundamental value of caring for life, for the self, for others, and for Mother Earth is considered as the basis not only for “creating more sustainable, equitable and humane workplaces and communities” (2002: 83), but also for educating future generations towards empathic and responsible relations in the home, in society, the national community and the international world.

<sup>26</sup> Appadurai, 1990: 296; 299-300.

a perspective prompts a welcoming of a nomadic<sup>27</sup> and cosmopolitan citizenship, as we find, for instance, in the works of Genni Gunn, whose fictional and poetic worlds are often populated by rootless migrants ever journeying towards new, unexpected landscapes and emotional terrains<sup>28</sup>. For Gunn, like for the other migrant writers discussed, identity is an ongoing transformation, a constant chameleon-like metamorphosing which defies fixation within pre-established boundaries and hinges on the awareness that our various identities can never add up to build a solid, final sense of who we are. Instead, an identification with global landscapes seems mandatory in order to embrace fluidity and empower the subject as a *métissage* of all cultures<sup>29</sup>. Her characters, like her poetic personas, are thus international citizens or “global souls”<sup>30</sup> to use Pico Iyer’s definition, who live in the cracks between many cultures and feel at home in the infinite dimensions of journeying, in the space between arrival and departure, rather than in any specific final destination.

Understanding citizenship as cosmopolitan and nomadic means not only envisioning it in disjuncture from the nation-state, but also as an act of constant negotiation, which entails co-belonging to various communities at the local, national and supranational levels. Thus, by claiming membership within multiple collectivities, the performative diasporic narratives of migrant writers also accord agency to those gendered and racialized individuals who may not have equal rights as citizens within the nation-state. The readjustment of self/other, male/female relations foregrounded in many texts often involves reclaiming active participation for women, who in dominator societies are not granted equal social and political recognition. In her poetry Gianna Patriarca, for instance, analyzes the burdensome legacy of gender biases from her patriarchal heritage culture to draw attention to the subjugated role of women both in the old country and in Canada<sup>31</sup>. As she ironically debases faulty constructions of female identity within the passive and submissive roles of procreators and mothers, she welcomes an acceptance of feminine values, such as nurturing, caregiving and empathy, which

<sup>27</sup> The idea of “nomadic citizenship” is theorized by May Joseph, who envisions it as transnationally tied to “informal networks of kinship, migrancy, and displacement” rather than to the nation-state (1999: 2).

<sup>28</sup> See, for instance, Gunn, 1993, 2007.

<sup>29</sup> Gunn, in fact, weaves a web of references to many world cultures and myths, such as those to the God Hun-Dun or to the Inuit legend of Sedna in *Faceless*, which functions both to debase the faulty constructions of selfhood that are universally present in dominator societies throughout the globe and to retrieve shared feminine values across cultures.

<sup>30</sup> Iyer, 2000: 18.

<sup>31</sup> See Patriarca’s poetic trilogy *Italian Women and Other Tragedies*, 1994; *Daughters For Sale*, 1997; and *Ciao, Baby*, 1999.

are central to the partnership model. Moreover, through her poetry, she gives voice to all those silenced Italian women who, owing to their gender and ethnicity, are otherwise doubly excluded from participatory agency both in their ethnic communities and in the broader Canadian (and Italian) society. She thus participates in the global feminist citizenship project which aims at recognizing – as Lister writes – “women’s agency and achievements as citizens”, without ignoring “the deep-seated inequalities that still undermine many of their citizenship rights and particularly those of ‘minority group’ women”<sup>32</sup>.

Owing to its performance of cultural citizenship and partnership, the transcultural writing of immigrant Canadians provides a valuable didactic tool through which to investigate how dominator models can be debased and how to rethink citizenship in transcultural and un-gendered terms<sup>33</sup>. With their dissipation of homogenizing politics of self-representation and their celebration of plural, fluid, multiple, interconnected, inter-relational and shifting identities, these texts prompt a readjustment of self/other relations which is crucial for the development of social, political and cultural practices based on an acceptance of diversity and plurality as positive values. Moreover, their reformulations of ethnicity, culture, gender and nationality beyond dominator divisions show that active cultural/cosmopolitan citizenship involves transforming current power relations which still foster racist and ethno-phobic tensions both in North America and Europe. Thus, the transcultural and partnership paradigm they posit ultimately leaves both Canadian and European multicultural societies with the hope that, by establishing genuine dialogue, they can move beyond the invisible ghettos which reinstate discriminatory majority/minority dynamics and achieve equal empowerment for all citizens, who are fundamental participants in the ongoing dialogic process of identity construction.

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<sup>32</sup> Lister, 2003: 6.

<sup>33</sup> As Hua points out, traditional formulations of citizenship are deeply gendered, since they hinge on male-centered narratives of agency, which lead to mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion (2011: 46-50).

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