

MEDIATING CITIZENSHIP: COMPARING BROKERAGE IN BRAZIL AND THE NETHERLANDS

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Abstract

Recent studies have demonstrated how citizenship can be mediated by particular individuals that operate as brokers. This literature analyzes how the gap between state and population is bridged, and also shaped, by practices of brokerage. Although the literature on mediated citizenship is based on studies on the Global South, I argue that it forms a fruitful lens to look at current forms of 'active citizenship' and participatory governance in the Global North. In this paper, based on anthropological research, I will use such a lens and compare the situation of residents of marginalized urban areas in both Brazil and the Netherlands.

In both sites, I argue, citizenship gains shape in three different, yet overlapping, political domains. The first domain is that of governmental politics. It consists of projects, programmes and policies, varying from policing to citizen participation. These projects, programmes and policies often have a strong moral dimension as they imply normative models of 'good' citizenship. The second domain is that of electoral politics. It contains all those practices and procedures that are, directly or indirectly, instrumental in getting votes and assuming or maintaining public offices. These practices may be of a personalist or clientelist kind. The third domain is that of contentious politics. It comprises of social activism, contestations and a critique of policies and power structures. In all these domains, specific politically engaged residents play an important role as brokers who mediate between their fellow residents and the state. I will discuss the role of community leaders in the city of Recife, Brazil, and use particular insights as a lens to look at 'active citizens' in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. I will explore the impact that community leaders and active citizens have on the relationship between residents and the state and on the related political imaginaries. In so doing, I will show how, in both the Global South and the Global North, such brokers produce forms of mediated citizenship.