Introduction: Emergent forms of citizenship in Québec

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Introduction

Québec, like other contemporary societies, is undergoing a series of profound economic, social, political, and cultural transitions. Accordingly, this special issue proposes to offer an analytical portrait of a certain number of these transitions and articulations through a series of papers that examines emergent forms of citizenship in Québec. The special issue arrives, nonetheless, at a very particular time. In 2012 one of the most important social mobilizations in Québec history has captivated, structured and transformed the political futures of the province. We are referring, of course, to the student strike that erupted in February of 2012 (see Dufour 2012; Oswin 2012). While on the surface the central issue of the conflict was a proposed increase in tuition, the strike reached deeply into the heart of the political fabric of Québec. The issues the strike raised include the future of social and economic rights in the province; legitimate modes of democratic governance (social mobilization and popular protest vs. ballot boxes); and the “appropriate” use of law and order to contain popular protest. In May, the government imposed a highly punitive “special law” to literally break the student movement and then
Prime Minister Jean Charest called for elections as a presumed solution for the political and social crisis.3

While in some ways, the student movement seems to have pushed other urgent issues in Québec aside (such as indigenous issues, the environment or healthcare), it serves, we contend, as an interesting counterpoint to the papers presented in this special issue. For, as argued in the theoretical discussion of citizenship presented below, critical examinations of contemporary citizenship formation should include attention to “the centers” of citizenship as well as sites that sit on “the margins,” for the fates of each are, in complex ways, bound up with each other. As will be discussed below, the student movement has emerged at a time when the formal structures of politics in Québec are in flux and marked by great uncertainty. This creates a complex terrain for the issues explored in this special issue. Before introducing citizenship in the Québec context, we would like to first briefly outline certain key theoretical topics in the contemporary discussions of citizenship that help to frame the research presented here. We begin with a discussion of the broad structures that shape what Marston and Mitchell call (2004) “citizenship formation.” We then address the issues of temporal and spatial contexts and subjectivities, finally turning to the idea of citizenship as act (Isin and Nielsen 2008).

**Contemporary citizenship formation**

Citizenship, as a recent commentary suggests (Staeheli 2011; see also Nyers 2004), appears to be a theoretical object so fraught with contradictions and pulled in so many directions that it seems necessary, even inviting, to abandon it. At the same time, however, as we move from political abstraction to a contextualized analysis of contemporary political landscapes, the importance of citizenship as a theoretical analytic becomes more evident. When placed in context, it becomes apparent that the process of citizenship formation is not, in fact, all or nothing, but helps, rather, to delimit and illuminate important sites of social and political transformation. Discussions of citizenship are, in other words, more bounded and relevant than theoretical positions sometimes permit. By way of example, the topics addressed in the articles presented here – indigenous video, marginalized urban youth, asylum seeking, and contemporary negotiations of the borders between francophone and anglophone communities – all address live issues in contemporary Québec, representing distinct sites of negotiation around varied processes of inclusion and exclusion. Interpreting these issues through the lens of citizenship offers therefore a (non-exhaustive) means for thinking about political

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3 On September 4th, Québec voters elected a minority *Parti Québécois* government (59 seats), under the leadership of Pauline Marois, with the *Parti libéral du Québec* forming the official opposition (50 seats). Jean Charest, the departing prime minister, was not reelected. *Québec Solidaire*, another sovereigntist party further to the left of the PQ, garnered two seats, while the *Coalition Avenir Québec*, a right-leaning autonomist party, earned 19 seats. The cancellation of the tuition hike, the repeal of the special law and the organization of a summit on higher education were among the first official pronouncements of the incoming government.
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change that engages directly with lived experiences of the political. These papers are written, nonetheless, at a moment when the tenor of discussions around citizenship has shifted significantly. While it once seemed that the proliferation of citizenship studies signaled optimistically a return of the political and concomitant expansion of democratic horizons (along the lines of Laclau and Mouffe 1985), current discussions of citizenship signal a deep concern for the receding nature of political possibility, as neoliberal and security directives assault collective and individual rights (Marston and Mitchell 2004; Mitchell 2005) and the very foundations of modern citizenship – as produced in relationship to nation-state sovereignty - are severely compromised (Brown 2010). The papers included in this special issue (except, perhaps, that of Martin et al.) are not overwhelmingly pessimistic about the possibilities of citizenship in Québec. Implicitly and collectively, however, they all engage with certain limits in the contemporary nature of citizenship formation, thus serving as cautionary tales. We will address this issue further when we introduce the individual papers.

In traditional terms, citizenship is equated with membership in a political community. Technically, such membership is established through a series of rights and obligations towards the state and towards other members of the political community (Lister 2007). Normatively, citizenship rests on the ideal of “equality of status” and is underpinned by a sense of belonging (Lister 2007). Critical studies of citizenship highlight, nonetheless, that citizenship mediates and is mediated by a range of formal and informal relationships and institutions, including those that are articulated through the state, the market, neighborhoods, communities, and the home (Marston and Staeheli 1994; Marston and Mitchell 2004). In this sense, citizenship is intertwined in complex ways with the space of the “social” (Brodie 2008). And, just as citizenship can be an object of popular mobilization and the fight for inclusion, it is also a technology of control and exclusion (Isin 2009). In this sense, following Marston and Mitchell (2004: 95), we find useful the concept of “citizenship formation” or a “non-static, non-linear social, political, cultural, economic, and legal construction,” particularly useful, for it captures the ways in which citizenship is negotiated and multiple, moving through heterogeneous social fields.

As has been amply documented and widely discussed, the contours of contemporary citizenship are under extraordinary pressure. In particular, neoliberal globalization eviscerates progressive notions of social citizenship and state practices of redistribution, undoing social compromises that characterized Keynesian forms of citizenship (Isin and Turner 2007). At the same time, the neoconservative drive to secure borders, populations, and movement curtails civil and political liberties, forcibly shifting the contours of political agency (Brown 2003; Nyers 2004). As Brown (2010) has so clearly articulated, furthermore, globalization severely compromises the very nature of state sovereignty and its derivative, “popular sovereignty,” and with those, the space of the political. She
affirms, perhaps controversially, that, “it would also seem there can be no political
life without sovereignty…” (2010: 51).

It is not just the formal structures of citizenship that are changing. More
complicated to apprehend is the idea that modern subjectivities, and by extension
political subjectivity, are also shifting. This transformation has numerous registers.
First is the notion that burgeoning cultures of fear undermine the rational calculus
of people, creating “anxious” individuals and groups (Nyers 2004; Isin 2004). In a
similar vein, contemporary state practices, which deploy actuarial accounting to
manage risk, dissolve all sense of humanity and individuality into numbers and
probabilities (Nyers 2004; Shamir 2005; see also Boudreau, this issue). In a
different direction, Brown (2010) suggests that religiosity and theology are
displacing secularism as basis for subjection. Staeheli (2011) argues, furthermore,
that political discourses related to “tolerance” and “responsibility” harden ideas
about “others,” making dialogue across social difference increasingly difficult.
Finally, the retreat of the state and reconfiguration of the market open up new
spaces for practices of informality and urgency (Pedrazzini and Sanchez 1998;
Boudreau, this issue). These trends may signal a strong rupture between excluded
social groups, the state and a larger social public, such that citizenship may not be
an appropriate lens for apprehending these relationships. We certainly don’t want
to romanticize “the 20th Century citizen” (raced, classed, sexed and logocentric as
such an ideal might have been), but on the surface the trends summarized here
suggest that, in various guises, dominant political discourses and practices recast
the subjectivity of citizenship in such a way as to devalue agents committed to
critical, autonomous dialogic practices.

Certain authors caution against analyses of citizenship that are inscribed in
the ineluctable decline of the nation-state (Nyers 2004). Others, notably feminist
geographers, continue to remind us that we should not cede too much power to
disembodied, global narratives on political and economic change (Nagar et al.
2002; Oldfield et al. 2009; Pain 2009). These positions are advanced in relationship
to several key ideas that have much to do with the tensions between the ideas/ideals
of citizenship and the translation of those ideas into geographical and historical
contexts. First, while the nation-state has been central to citizenship formation in
the modern period, citizenship is, in fact, multiscaled and structured by processes
that are both more local and more global. As Isin (2009) insists, spaces of the
political have never corresponded with the boundaries of the nation-state. This
realization provides the means for sketching a postnational, even post-Westphalian,
outline of the sites of power and resistance, including new sites of citizenship
formation. Contemporary analyses of “citizenship formation” should have,
therefore, a double optic: while on the one hand they should critically evaluate the
spatial and temporal trajectory of the historic “centers” of citizenship formation,
attention to alternative spatial and temporal constellations of political acts, actors
and contexts must simultaneously be on the agenda.
Staeheli (2011) emphasizes, furthermore, the importance of contextualizing citizenship in space and time. This argument has several implications. First, it suggests that the temporalities and spatialities of citizenship formation differ from place to place. For example, while in the Global North the decline of the welfare state and the waning of state sovereignty are crucial leitmotifs of the contemporary period, in other regions of the world the complexities of post-colonial state formation may be a more pertinent baseline for conceptualizing citizenship (Mamdani 1996; Ahluwalia 1999; Oldfield et al. 2009). Thus it is important to pay attention to the ways in which political, economic, social processes work through space, pressing against political ideals and abstractions. The idea of contextualizing citizenship goes further, however. Citizenship is primarily a lived relationship that exists in and through the thickness of social relations. This perspective brings us closer to an everyday, quotidian positioning vis-à-vis citizenship (Dickinson et al. 2008; Gilbert and Veronis, this issue). Through the idea of “crafting citizenship,” Oldfield et al. (2009) capture this idea very well. As they argue, research that foregrounds the subjectivity and agency of individuals and groups, particularly “so-called marginal bodies in marginal spaces,” highlights the “processes of negotiation and lived substantiation of citizenship in local contexts” (ibid: 1-2). In a similar manner, contextualizing citizenship in space and time draws attention to what Isin (2009) has called to “activist citizenship,” or the multiple political trajectories through which subjects seek rights. Activist citizenship continuously challenges received notions of citizenship, particularly its exclusions, while making visible new theoretical, empirical and political agendas. Finally, contextualized analyses of citizenship can assist in exploring the contemporary borderlands of citizenship by highlighting the changing presences and absences of the state and the other institutions and relationships that structure citizenship. We can identify emergent forms of citizenship as new political subjects interact with these shifting contexts.

**The Québec context**

This special issue is organized around a particular territory, that of Québec. While it is impossible to fully capture the complexity of citizenship in Québec, certain preliminary and general remarks remain essential. One foundational moment that informs any discussion of contemporary Québec is the Révolution tranquille that initiated in the 1960s. This social and political transformation, which consolidated francophone economic and political power throughout the province, also led to the construction of a social democratic political system. Strong state institutions as well as generous social programs (heath care and education, for example) have characterized this “vast institutional strategy,” known as the système québécois (Thériault 2011). Associated with renewed expressions of Québécois nationalism, la Révolution tranquille was inflected at times with political and social radicalism, while moving partially towards the creation of an independent state. Referendums in favor of Québec sovereignty were held twice (1980 and 1995), both unsuccessful. Thus, while Québec does enjoy a peculiar
status within Canada, its relationship with Canada is not clearly defined, and remains an always fraught, always unstable, always politicized subject not only between the governments and peoples of Québec and Canada, but also within Québec.

Over time the guiding principles of the système québécois have shifted, nonetheless. As charted by T. Martin (2012), starting in the 1980s, a “post-Keynesian” version emerged in which the government sought out “partnerships” with actors from within civil society, in particular. According to the same author, the liberal government under the leadership of Jean Charest (2003-2012) engaged in a wholesale neoliberalization of the social contract, visible in positions on the environment, education, health and territorial development. In a parallel manner, Salée (2001) notes a shift in the dominant nationalist discourses in Québec from one based in ethnic/cultural formulations to one that is based in citizenship and territory. In theory, this latter formulation, in keeping with civic forms of nationhood, addresses everyone in Québec and accords more room for both historic difference and the decidedly multicultural character of the province. Yet, as Salée argues, multicultural discourses on inclusion often seek to moderate and contain claims to difference instead of fully acknowledging their epistemological and political foundations. Through transnational practices and affiliations, certain contemporary social movements challenge, furthermore, Québécois (and Canadian) national identity (Labelle and Rocher, 2004).

Recent events confirm, moreover, that the broad structures of citizenship in Québec are changing. The student movement discussed previously – and the government’s rabid response - highlights deep fractures (ideological, generational) within province regarding the guiding principles that should underpin Québécois society. In a similar vein, Dupuis-Déri (2008) documents a resurgence of social movements in Québec since the anti-globalization protests at the Summit of the Americas held in Québec City in 2001. Of note as well are important shifts in party politics. At the federal level, the Bloc Québécois was swept out of the federal parliament in 2011. In a large majority, Québec voters opted for the center-left, federalist NDP. The election of a conservative majority under the leadership of Stephen Harper – inaugurating major reorientations in federal policy⁴ - means, therefore, that Québec is now represented by a different kind of political minority. At the provincial level, the emergence of new parties has destabilized the traditional bipartisan dynamic (see footnote 3). While in flux, these processes may signal a significant transformation of the système québécois and the delicate compromises between the federal and the national (provincial) level that have also underpinned that system.

Yet, the particular society that is Québec, is also traversed with other political, social and economic processes that also unsettle and inform struggles

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⁴ Some of the targeted areas include immigration, environment, gun control, and culture.
over citizenship in the province. First, Québec is a settler society and has always been and continues to be multiethnic and multicultural (Labelle et al. 2004). Indigenous claims to territory and rights destabilize core national narratives of territorial belonging, while highlighting the violence of (continued) dispossession (Labelle et al., 2004; Guimont Marceau, this issue). Transnational migration – both historic and contemporary - similarly challenges nation-state centric models of political society. And, while official discourses on the Québécois nation are shifting, the processes of integration/recognition remain open challenges for both first nations peoples and immigrant communities, particularly migrants from the Global South (Salée 2001; Labelle et al. 2004). These groups continue to experience structural obstacles to full citizenship in the province. Finally, Québec is a rapidly urbanizing society, deeply implicated in the globalizing circuits of symbols, information, objects and bodies. In sum, despite national impulses to ‘fix’ certain historical and territorial truths, the territory is mobile and the truth elusive.

Citizenship formation in contemporary Québec

Reflecting this complex terrain, the topics addressed in the papers presented here explore emergent forms of citizenship, particularly among groups that occupy distinct kinds of marginal locations in Québec. Two articles address particular forms of contemporary citizenship formation among groups that possess complex and contested historical roots in Québec, First Nations people (Guimont Marceau), and anglophone communities (Gilbert and Veronis). Two other papers address resolutely contemporary issues: the urbanity and informality of marginalized youth in Montréal (Boudreau) and asylum-seeking among Mexicans in Québec (Martin et al.). Two papers address the daily practices – or the habitus of (non)citizenship (Gilbert and Veronis; Boudreau) – while the two others address different modes of “activist citizenship” and the search for rights and recognition at the margins of the nation-state (Guimont Marceau; Martin et al.). Together, the papers in this special issue help us think about distinct fragments of late modern forms of citizenship as refracted through and intertwined with the territories of Québec. In what follows, we introduce each paper in turn.

The first paper in this special issue, written by Anne Gilbert and Luisa Veronis, addresses the relationship between francophone and anglophone communities, one of the central issues that informs identity, politics and citizenship in Québec. The paper does so, however, from a novel angle, by exploring the daily forms of citizenship practice among minority anglophone communities in Gatineau, a city located on the border between Québec and Ontario in the Canadian capital region. This population has historic roots in the area but has also displayed recent demographic growth. In the wake of the Révolution tranquille, anglophone communities throughout Québec experienced a significant re-configuration in citizenship, losing in particular official representation as anglophones at the provincial and federal levels. While in other locations throughout Québec, anglophone communities have moved since that time to consolidate power at the
municipal level, this phenomenon did not occur in Gatineau. How then, do anglophones exercise their rights? Gilbert and Veronis describe the construction of a flexible form of citizenship that is rooted in particular neighborhoods while being articulated with Ottawa (across the border) in an archipelagic manner. They exercise citizenship “by affinity” avoiding, it would seem, spaces that are deeply connoted as Francophone. This practice is marked at times by contradictions and ambiguities, as certain anglophones defend their identity as Quebecers when confronted with negative commentary regarding Québec. This citizenship by affinity is marked by a relative withdrawal from formal politics through what might be called a retreat into identity (shopping, services, social activities).

Despite the fact that the population Gilbert and Veronis describe is both marginal and marginalized in a formal political sense, they remain a well-anchored group, still able to exercise their rights. More than likely, these characteristics also reflect their social class, race/ethnicity, as well as language positions. This sense of anchored practice (however flexible it might be) contrasts dramatically with the topographies of citizenship described in the other papers. In different ways they all examine struggles and policing on the borderlands of citizenship. Their protagonists are often invisible, leaving only political traces of their presence.

Julie-Anne Boudreau’s paper attempts to apprehend the place of marginalized urban youth in Montréal. The article begins with an analysis of the cultures of urbanity that are linked with urban youth and street gangs. The modality of urbanity that figures here is associated with “instable” or “unpredictable” side of the urban: speed, mobility, complexity, strangeness, alterity (as opposed to the cultured, rational ideal of urban modernity). The “cultures of urgency” within which urban youth live have a complex spatial and temporal expression. As she writes, “this topological relationship to space equally signifies a discontinuous and reticular relationship to time, understood as a succession of situations (always now, immediate, in the present), rather than as a continuous period of time” (page 528). This topography is connected, furthermore, with actions that are often a product of a particular moment in space and time, adding to this sense of unpredictability. In response to the anxiety created by street youth in Montréal, the City has put into place a series of programs to manage “at-risk” youth. The logic of these programs is quite different than that which underpins youth action. Linear, interventionist, and actuarial, these programs target specific neighborhoods; they reduce complex individual and social behavior to statistical probabilities; and they refuse to see ‘actors’ and ‘actions’ with sociologically defined legitimacy. Boudreau places, furthermore, the political action of street youth within the realm of the informal, qualifying their relationship with the state as “negotiated” rather than “conflictual”. The presence of informal spheres signals, in her estimation, the “weakening of modern modes of sociopolitical regulation” (page 541). While she recognizes that street gangs are political actors, she questions the degree to which their actions constitute the search for citizenship. Their very presence indicates a weakened state, while their modes of political
action (that of negotiation) may point to dynamics that fall outside of the realm of citizenship. It remains unclear the degree to which these actors seek recognition, rights or inclusion, for example. Thus, the paper is quite provocative in questioning the limits of citizenship in a world where the spaces and processes of informality are gaining terrain.

The third paper in this collection, written by Stéphane Guimont Marceau, explores the participation of indigenous youth in the Wapikoni mobile, an independent project that teaches these young people to create and produce video. The author is interested in exploring the degree to which young peoples’ participation in this project, and in the multiple spaces of dialogue that have emerged as a result of the project, contributes to the construction of new forms of (indigenous) citizenship in Québec. The Wapikoni mobile is a project that operates within the legacies of historic territorial, cultural, and political dispossession that has produced spaces of erasure and non-citizenship for indigenous communities. Within this context, Guimont Marceau clearly demonstrates the profound subjective transformation that participants have experienced as a result of their experience with the Wapikoni mobile. Through their videos and through their words, they establish spaces of dialogue in multiple sites and at multiple scales: within and between indigenous communities in Québec; between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples of Québec; between indigenous peoples internationally; and with other global publics. In this sense, these young actors engage in acts of citizenship that weave together new territories of recognition, affirmation and action that escape the logic of both the Indian reserve and the nation-state matrix. Yet, as the author suggests, it is difficult to know how and under what terms this subjective transformation might lead to substantively new rights for First Nations peoples in Québec. In this sense, the Wapikoni mobile, and the spaces of dialogue created by its indigenous participants, occupy an ambiguous spot. They are forced to navigate through contemporary political terrain marked out by the ideal of a “subaltern counter public” (following Nancy Fraser) on the one hand, and the neoliberal and multicultural “indio permitido” (following Charles Hale), on the other. Such are the complicated issues of identity and representation in an era of globalization.

The final paper, written by Patricia Martin, Annie Lapalme, and Mayra Roffe Gutman, also takes up the issue of recognition and justice, this time focusing on the phenomenon of Mexican asylum-seekers in Québec. As they document, throughout the decade of the 2000s, Canada witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of asylum-seekers coming from Mexico. These authors, troubled by the stereotypical pronouncements of Canadian authorities regarding these individuals, sought to interpret this phenomenon from the perspective of Mexican asylum-seekers residing in Montréal. The paper they present largely jumps scale for it is interested in critically examining the construction of citizenship within North America. As they argue, neoliberal and security imperatives underpin the modes of governance that give shape to North America (namely the NAFTA and the SPP).
These emerging structures of governance are highly exclusionary and punitive towards the bulk of Mexican citizens, characteristics that are reflected in the current Canadian policy regarding Mexican asylum seekers. The authors then examine the narratives of certain asylum seekers in Montréal. These stories outline patterns of impunity and transnational criminality; they point to the emergence of a transnational homelessness; and they demonstrate how difficult it is “to play by the rules” that govern North America. The authors contend that seeking asylum constitutes an act of citizenship, for through this act, asylum seekers directly question the dominant discourses that structure North American space while at the same time demanding recognition and inclusion within Canada. By theorizing citizenship in relationship to North America, the authors demonstrate that in Québec, as elsewhere, certain struggles over citizenship are driven by processes that escape the control of the province. Nonetheless, thousands of Mexicans have attempted to make Québec their home (learning French, working in low-wage jobs, having children and raising families). Given that only 10% of Mexican asylum seekers eventually receive political refugee, however, this enormous movement of people may only leave traces of its passage through the Québécois political and social landscape.

The papers included in this special issue are all exemplary in demonstrating the complex topographies of citizenship, not only in terms of localized spatial practices (Gilbert and Veronis; Boudreau), but also in reflecting the multiscaled imbrication of space and citizenship (Guimont Marceau; Martin et al.). In this sense, another implicit theme that runs through the articles is that of mobility, be it crossing a provincial border, appropriating urban space, participating in exchanges at the national or international scale, or traveling to seeking political refuge in a foreign country. In all cases, identities, rights, and status are made (and undone) through these movements. It is also interesting to consider what these articles tell us about the presence of the state and its relationship to the process of citizenship formation. Boudreau and Martin et al. address these issues straight on. Boudreau explores the “soft” technologies of border control – statistics and probabilities – deployed against a population perceived as an internal threat. Martin et al., on the other hand, explore the “hard” technologies of border control – detention and deportation – deployed against a population that the Canadian government views as an external threat. These technologies dehumanize “the other” in a way that bodes particularly poorly for marginalized groups forced to operate at the margins of the law. The other two articles are a more ambiguous in this regard. In the article by Gilbert and Veronis, there is a shadow presence of the state that structures the localized geography of anglophone citizenship in Gatineau, particularly in relationship to the kinds of services offered. They note a relative retreat of the welfare state and political retreat among the people interviewed, particularly at the municipal level. Together, these trends may suggest a privatization of citizenship. Finally, Guimont Marceau examines the effects of a project with origins in civil society that seeks to establish indigenous control over self-representation through video. While participants appear to be univocal regarding the individual/collective
“empowerment” that the Wapikoni Mobile offers indigenous youth, some voice concern regarding how to transform such empowerment into concrete outcomes for indigenous communities. At the same time, the recent precipitous withdraw of federal funding from the project indicates how important state resources can be for supporting the emergence of new modalities of citizenship.

Concluding thoughts

By way of a conclusion, we would like to return, briefly, to student strike. The “Québécois Spring” demonstrated with stunning force some of the political practices that indeed distinguish Québec from anglophone North America. These include the importance of historical legacies, such as a long-standing project/promise of free education; institutional differences, such as the central role that college and university student associations play in political formation and mobilization; and a wide-spread political culture that translates into the collective capacity to bring hundreds of thousands of people into the streets, and that on multiple occasions. While in many regards, the movement remained strongly middle class, urban, white and francophone, certain critical currents and aspects of the student movement also demonstrated new kinds of political foment. The movement crossed linguistic lines, for example with the participation of students from Concordia and McGill Universities. At other moments, we (the authors) saw evidence of a coalitional politics between indigenous groups and the student movement, and between immigrant rights groups and the student movement. While these links are exceedingly complex and fragile, and certainly contested (see Mullings, 2012), the point is that direct connections do exist between the student movement and the other kinds of struggles over citizenship discussed in this special issue. In this sense, the issues that these articles address are not as isolated or fragmented as might they seem. When examined in conjunction with the strike, they indicate that the textures, identities and practices of critical and activist citizenship may be shifting in Québec in a way that is mindful of historical anchors, but attuned to contemporary struggles and debates.

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5 For a recent video regarding the strike, visit vimeo.com/47205376 and vimeo.com/42848523
References


