Changing Boundaries of Citizenship

November 9, 2001 – It would be hard to find better evidence of the ever-changing definition of what it means to be a citizen of this country than recent debates over the acceptable limits of the law in the pursuit of terrorism.

Those who are arguing over the fine print of Bill C-36 - the federal government's omnibus anti-terrorist legislation - are, in reality, debating the boundaries of citizenship. The context has changed since September 11th, and the definition of what it means to be a Canadian, many argue, will have to adapt to the new environment. The process by which that change takes place, and the weight given to differing opinions, will, itself, reflect the current political consensus on the balance between the rights and responsibilities of Canadians and how those are distributed. It is a critical moment for us as a country, with some people's very sense of belonging hanging in the balance.

This is territory that Jane Jenson, Director of CPRN's Family Network, knows well. She has been analyzing citizenship and social cohesion in papers published here and elsewhere for years. Her work is more relevant than ever.

In a recent presentation to CPRN's Board of Directors, Jenson defines citizenship as both a status and a relationship - between state and citizens - a relationship that is constantly being redefined in terms of what is public and what is private, who is in and who is out. The boundaries of this citizenship involve the interaction of three dimensions: rights and responsibilities; access; and belonging.

In "Citizenship and Governance: Some Research Questions" Jenson elaborates on four "challenges" to those boundaries:

- A diversity debate - who belongs and what are their rights?
- A locational debate - what is the political unit of citizenship?
- A debate over social citizenship - what is the line between rights and responsibilities?
- A debate about participation - how to turn formal equality into real participation?

She concludes with suggestions for research in response to each of these challenges.

You can access or download a Powerpoint version of her presentation by clicking here.

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