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Community Cohesion: Indigeneity and the Politics of Citizenship

Citizenship defines ‘belonging’. It is, potentially, the state’s principal cohesive force; the instrument through which individuals are brought in to a positive relationship with the state, as members of a common and cohesive political community. It is only through recourse to the state’s legal and political institutions that indigenous peoples can establish their claims for self-determination and autonomy. Yet, citizenship is an ideological and power load concept used to exclude, as much as it is used as a cohesive instrument of inclusion. In Australia, it has never routinely contributed to the maintenance of a political order in which government is truly by the peoples’ consent, with indigenous peoples participating actively and on their own terms. Citizenship’s positioning of people vis-a-vis the state provides insight into wider dynamics of power and authority, and helps to explain why Aristotle’s proposition that the citizen is ‘he who has power to take part in the deliberative or judicial administration of any state’ (Hindess 2000) does not always reflect contemporary indigenous political experience. While acknowledging Moreton-Robinson’s (2004) positioning of ‘Whiteness’ as ‘the definitive marker of citizenship’ (p. 79), the paper proposes differentiated, or two-tiered citizenship, as a conceptual basis for ‘belonging together differently’ (Maaka and Fleras 2005) and for exploring citizenship’s non-colonial inclusive and cohesive possibilities. It assesses Australian public policy’s limited, but increasing concessions to differentiated citizenship; arguing that these are preliminary to the full extension to indigenous peoples of liberal aspirations for individual freedom and equal democratic agency.