

Christine Grossutti: *My Canadian Passport*

A Canadian passport represents a certain (dominant and enforced) way of thinking about the translocal. It is a paper record of my body's ability to move across national borders with the approval and knowledge of governments. It is tangible evidence of the degree of power and privilege I possess while moving about the face of the earth.

To cross borders with relatively few restrictions, is a privilege I have not earned. It is an extension of other similar privileges I enjoy. My possession of a Canadian passport is linked to a lineage of passport ownership. My mother and father arrived in Canada as infant children of immigrants who originated in the United Kingdom and Italy respectively. Ownership of British passports would have been very important to my maternal grandparents as they decided settle in Toronto in the 1950s. My paternal grandparents, who originated in northern Italy, relied on relatives who had come here before them on work permits to build the Canadian Pacific Railway to sponsor them in order to be allowed into the country just after World War II. There is an urban myth that the racial slur for Italians "wop" is an acronym for "Without Papers," a reference to the fact that many early Italian Immigrants to North America arrived without proper documentation, but I can find no evidence that this is true. I can remember hearing this word, and other unflattering associations, when people learned of my last name due to some vaguely perceived history.

In the summer of 2011, with passport in hand, I was able to travel back to the places my grandparents came from for the first time. Visiting the village where my father was born, Bertiole, it was rather apparent that my grandparents had brought with them ways of relating to their surroundings in Toronto and then St. Catharines, Ontario. The stucco bungalows, small water glasses of homemade wine, tomato gardens and potted cacti along the sunniest side of the house all seemed familiar to me. Until this moment I had attributed the style in which my grandparents kept their home to personal preferences, but now I was able to link it to a culture and a place. In my suitcase, I brought back wine and sachets of dried lavender flowers from the local lavender festival. Upon my return to Kingston, I felt increasingly aware of how I am not truly of this place, but my life and my culture has been imperfectly pasted onto this land, obscuring what lies beneath.

This was not the first time that I used my passport to travel. The first stamp I got in my passport was from Jamaica. I was tagging along on a holiday to a resort near Negril. Here the unequal power relations represented by my passport were apparent. I felt like Jamaica Kincaid's "Ugly Tourist". I was aware that my presence was resented by the people who lived and worked around the resort year round but was tolerated for the money I brought with me. I felt the sway I held over the taxi drivers, the craft vendors, the fruit stand owner in my power to choose this stand or that, to spend or to pass over.

I was able to enter Jamaica with no pre-arranged Visas, but for Jamaicans to enter Canada, or any wealthy country in the capitalist world system, they need a Visa. According to the Citizenship and Immigration Canada website, a person can be refused entry on several grounds. These include being unwilling or unable to financially support oneself, having committed a crime or if a member of that person's family has committed a crime. In this way, being labelled inadmissible rests on circumstances that can lie outside the locus of an individual's control. To be born into poverty or privilege is not a choice anyone can make, but the associated costs and benefits flow nonetheless.

When I return again to Kingston, I am relieved in a guilty sort of way. I place my Canadian passport back in its place where it sits until my whim and privilege converge again to carry me across borders with the ease I have come to expect as a Canadian citizen.