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To cite this article: Luke de Noronha (2022): Hierarchies of membership and the management of global population: reflections on citizenship and racial ordering, *Citizenship Studies*, DOI: [10.1080/13621025.2022.2091224](https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2022.2091224)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2022.2091224>



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Published online: 28 Jun 2022.



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# Hierarchies of membership and the management of global population: reflections on citizenship and racial ordering

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## ABSTRACT

This paper argues that one useful way to think about the relationship between racism and borders is to say that racism produces hierarchies of (non)citizenship. In the first section, I work these arguments through in relation to my research with the friends of family of deported migrants, examining how witnessing deportation both reaffirms and produces hierarchies of (non)citizenship. These examples offer an invitation to trace and theorise the dynamic relationship between bordering and race-making. I then go on to examine how citizenship is centrally imbricated in race-making at the global scale. There, I historicise citizenship as a global regime for the international management of populations, suggesting that citizenship does similar kinds of work to race under empire. Taken together, these two points raise questions about whether we can and should imbue citizenship with radical and emancipatory potential. Is the articulation and celebration of non-national citizenships a useful framing? I remain cautious, and this paper is intended to underline that caution by approaching the question from one particular vantage point – one in which the theorisation of and struggle against racism is made central.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 14 February 2022  
Accepted 15 April 2022

## KEYWORDS

Racism; immigration control; deportation; Jamaica; hierarchies of (non) citizenship

In my writing and research, I have been interested in theorising the relationship between racism and immigration control. So often anti-immigrant politics gets justified through the disavowal of racist intent and effect. Meanwhile, established anti-racist groups often fail to connect racism impacting citizens to immigration controls and the plight of non-citizens. These shortcomings demand political and intellectual responses from those who have thought carefully about what borders, and by extension citizenship, do in the world. This should lead us, in my view, to a position where anti-racist commitment necessarily entails a politics of border abolition.

I want to argue that one useful way to think about the relationship between racism and borders is to say that racism produces hierarchies of (non)citizenship. Within a given national territory, my focus being the UK, racialised outsiders are constituted at the border, and these processes of racialisation are layered on top of deeply sedimented histories of race-making. In this way, race is mobilised at the border and immigration controls are productive of race. Borders produce hierarchies of belonging and enact legal and spatial exclusion, which is what racism has always

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been about. Because borders are designed to demarcate and protect the borders of the nation, they are citizenship-defining acts. And it is thus difficult to separate racism from nationalism and citizenship. In the first section, I work these arguments through concretely in relation to my research with the friends of family of deported migrants, examining how witnessing deportation both reaffirms and produces hierarchies of (non)citizenship. These examples offer an invitation to trace and theorise the dynamic relationship between bordering and race-making. My argument is that 'hierarchies of (non)citizenship' offers a useful frame for analysing racism within polities that remain steadfastly committed to aggressive bordering in the service of nation-building.

Citizenship is also centrally imbricated in race-making at the global scale. In the second section, I historicise citizenship as a global regime for the international management of populations, suggesting that citizenship does similar kinds of work to race under empire. Taken together, these two points raise questions about whether we can and should imbue citizenship with radical and emancipatory potential. Is the articulation and celebration of non-national citizenships a useful framing? I remain cautious, and this paper is intended to underline that caution by approaching the question from one particular vantage point – one in which the theorisation of and struggle against racism is made central.

### Citizenship and racism in multi-status polities

In my research, I spent time with the family and friends of people who had been deported to Jamaica, those who remained in the UK. I examined how witnessing deportation impacted their understandings of their rights and belonging – that is, their citizenship. While they had different citizenship and immigration statuses, were racialised in different ways, and had different kinds of encounters with state institutions – not to mention differences of age, class, gender, and region – all were deeply impacted by deportation, and it framed the way they understood their relationship to the British state (see de Noronha 2020). Their experiences and narratives reveal how immigration controls are central to the (re)production of racialised relations and hierarchies *within* national territories. In this section, I return to some of these arguments. My point is that to understand how racism plays out in anti-immigrant societies, we need to trace hierarchies of (non)citizenship.

People move around, with or without authorisation, and when they arrive in 'receiving states' their entitlements change over time. They can be clandestine, illegal, temporary, in the asylum system or refused by it, allowed to work, or not, only for one employer, or only for a certain number of hours, and they can be granted various kinds of residency status – all with differential rules of access and conditionality. There are not only citizens and migrants, then, but variously positioned statuses between, with varying scales of detainability and deportability attached, where legal regimes themselves are on the move with as much intensity as people. Citizenship therefore stands at the end of a chain of conditional statuses, even as citizenship itself is increasingly revocable. One way to think about this legal stratification is in terms of hierarchies of 'non-citizenship'. With this in mind, I have found it useful to describe societies like Britain as 'multi-status'.

Managed migration regimes produce various forms of provisional and conditional inclusion, differentially incorporating non-citizens into the polity on different terms: as workers; spouses; victims; or undocumented and thus hyperexploitable labour. But even ‘migrants’ with the same set of rights and entitlements (or lack thereof) are not equally vulnerable to illegalisation and deportation. It may be trite to remark that the Australian backpacker who overstays their visa remains mostly insulated from the threat of border enforcement, while the heavily policed and negatively racialised regular migrant, who has temporary or permanent status, is much more likely to find themselves interacting with institutions of the state in ways that might precipitate deportation. In my own research, I met several friends of deported people who had permanent immigration status, but still organised their lives – where they lived; where they went; who they spent time with – around their fear of deportation. They felt that interactions with state institutions, especially the police, would render them at risk of illegalisation and deportation. They might even concede that they have sometimes broken the law. They were in possession of marijuana, for example – or even guilty of a driving infraction – but it should be obvious enough that such illegal activities are not policed evenly. Most people who break such laws get away with it.

The point is that institutional racism propels *certain* non-citizens towards deportation. The racism of teachers, employers and police officers determines which irregular migrants are most likely to have their foreignness realised through deportation. Borders are not neutral instruments that distinguish political members from non-members, then, but technologies of differentiation which take force and become meaningful in spaces structured by racism. To describe Britain as multi-status is not merely to state that ‘legal status matters’, but to recognise that *how* legal status comes to matter is intimately connected to racism.

Of course, racism produces second-class citizenship among those who are formally included as well. This is one way of describing racism within a given political community. Clearly, heavily policed young black men in the UK, for example, are denied the right to childhood, the assumption of innocence, and freedom of association, precisely through pre-emptive policing (de Noronha 2020). Once incarcerated – which black men are much more likely to be due to disproportionate treatment at every stage of the criminal justice system – citizen prisoners are denied the most fundamental civil and political rights (the right to liberty; the right to vote). But what I have been interested in is the relationship between criminalisation and citizenship where an increasing proportion of young minoritised people who encounter the police lack citizenship status, and where the deportation of ‘foreign criminals’ has been made a top priority.

This has led me to theorise the relationship between second-hand citizenship and non-citizenship: that is, the relationship between racism affecting black and brown British citizens and the system of illegalisation, detention and deportation affecting ‘migrants’ who are racialised in similar ways, and who might be part of the same communities and families. Discrimination against ‘immigrants’ is legal and necessary – how else could immigration controls be enforced? – while discrimination against minoritised citizens is not, which is why we have equality laws. And yet, clearly, we miss the point if we view these two sets of processes as distinct. Some other examples might help work this through.

Perhaps, the most obvious example of how immigration controls negatively impact citizens is in relation to the mothers, partners and children of illegalised and deported non-citizens. Many of the mothers of the deported men I met in Jamaica were naturalised British citizens. There are thousands of mothers and fathers like this living in the UK, naturalised British citizens, or at least regular migrants, who have watched their children being deported. This is something white British citizens by descent and birth simply do not have to worry about; hence, immigration controls produce and strengthen hierarchies of citizenship along racial lines.

Similarly, the partners of illegalised migrants are often citizens, and they suffer immensely as a result of immigration control (e.g. traumatic family separation; loss of earnings and childcare; benefit sanctions and evictions). Importantly, it is 'ethnic minority' British citizens who are more likely to be in relationships with non-citizens, and in this way, again, the uneven enforcement of immigration controls tends to reaffirm and reproduce racialised hierarchies within the citizenry. Moreover, illegalisation and deportation (i.e. the production of non-citizenship) have especially marked effects for the children of migrants, both those with citizenship and those denied it. When their parents are deported, children who are citizens have the choice to either leave the country of their nationality with their parents, or to remain in the UK permanently separated from them. These instances clearly illustrate the highly unequal character and substance of citizenship – not least in terms of the right to family life – and hint at the ways in which this unevenness is racially contoured.

The point here is not only that racism within a given polity determines whose illegality is most likely to be realised; the relationship is also more dynamic. In other words, racial conceptions and racist practices within a country like Britain are also determined by the politics of immigration and citizenship. The legal, institutional apparatus of bordering – however, apparently technical – cannot be neatly parcelled off from the cultures of racism that shape popular national culture. Put more starkly, the acts of racist aggression and violence on the streets are in dialogue with the expulsive practices of border control – different manifestations of the same imperative to demarcate the nation and its citizenry through the exclusion of ethno-racial outsiders (Valluvan 2019).

It should be easy enough to observe that racism produces hierarchies within and among the citizenry. It is also easy enough to acknowledge that institutional racism impacts who among the pool of non-citizens is most likely to be deported. The broader point, though, is that the borders of political membership, of citizenship, are constantly being demarcated through various acts of exclusion and expulsion by different actors, at different scales, in different ways – on the streets, in the media, in the legislature and the courts – and this is precisely how racism gets reproduced at the very heart of national projects. There is no straightforward relationship between racism and nationalism – or racism and citizenship – but they are co-constitutive. The challenge is to trace these processes of mutual constitution, and in my work I found one method by tracing deportation stories and their after-effects.

Beyond my research into deportation, perhaps the clearest example of racism as the production of hierarchies of (non)citizenship is in relation to practices of citizenship stripping. In the UK context, it is estimated that hundreds of people have been deprived of their citizenship since 2010. Former home secretary Sajid Javid said that over 150 people had been stripped of their citizenship on the basis of terrorism and serious crime

between 2010 and 2019. Britain is therefore an important case study in citizenship deprivation powers, not least because many other states have followed its lead – countries including Canada, Belgium, Australia, Germany, France, and Sweden. As Nisha Kapoor explains, ‘While citizenship has always been a privilege, the growth of citizenship deprivation legislation reflects the extension of border control from policing immigrants to disciplining citizens, reifying and furthering systems of racial exclusion. It is a shift that has involved growing reliance on and subservience to executive power’ (Kapoor 2018, 17).

It is not necessary to chart the history of case law on citizenship deprivation here, but it is important to underline that each time these powers are extended, more people become vulnerable to denationalisation. The Nationality and Borders Act 2022 includes a provision which makes it possible for the government to deprive someone of their citizenship without even informing them. Even before this Bill, it was becoming increasingly clear that citizenship for naturalised citizens and dual nationals – the overwhelming number of whom come from ethnic minorities, often with Commonwealth family ties – was just another form of immigration status. Many citizens remain deportable, their political membership revocable. Again, we see the close connection between racism and citizenship, and between second-class citizenship and non-citizenship: internal enemies are *turned into migrants* so that they can be legally and spatially expelled. The racialisation of the figure of the Muslim – a notably civilisationist, culturalist racism – gets played out precisely through innovations in citizenship law and a re-drawing of the lines of political membership. The cultural force of racism takes legal form through citizenship.

With this in mind, anti-racism must seek more than inclusion for second-class citizens, because it is precisely the exclusionary logic of immigration control that promises to continually reproduce both non-citizens and second-class citizens, through unappeasable demands for the expulsion of ethno-racial outsiders (Valluvan 2019). We can try to squeeze more migrants into the citizenship box, but it will not solve the problem; there are always ‘more where they came from’. Citizenship continually reproduces the ‘us’ and ‘them’ which is precisely the challenge for thought and politics we need to overcome. Anti-racism must therefore seek to dismantle the citizen-migrant binary through a radical politics of non-exclusion (Sharma 2020).

Considering anti-Muslim racism is instructive for other reasons too, not least because it demands we move between scales: between the global War on Terror (think European civilisationist narratives and the ‘Coalition of the Willing’); to national debates about the apparent failures of multiculturalism and the need for social cohesion; and on to those more local conflicts in particular cities and towns with their own complex histories of migration and racism. Moreover, the disenfranchisement and surveillance of Muslims remind us that citizenship and bordering subscribe to the logics of war and enmity. Indeed, nation-states are most bold and self-assured when defining the citizenry through the violent exclusion of enemies. As such, the citizenship stripping practices enacted against Muslims, even if relatively few in absolute numbers, illuminate the broad argument I want to make in this paper: racism is inseparable from nationalism, and therefore it is via the demarcation of national citizenship that racial orders are reconfigured at different scales.

In this next section, I discuss how hierarchies of citizenship at the global scale are fundamentally entangled with the (re)production of a racist world order.

### Citizenship and the racist world order

Following Barry Hindess, we must view citizenship not only in terms of internalist relations between a given state and its citizens, but as the international system for allocating individuals to states. Where the internalist version of citizenship focuses on the citizen–state relation – in terms of rights and responsibilities and the social contract – Hindess emphasises that citizenship is ‘a marker of identification, advising state and nonstate agencies of the particular state to which an individual belongs’ (Hindess 2000, 1487). Citizenship is thus a ‘supranational regime of government’ for ‘the international management of populations’ (Hindess 2000, 1493). Citizenship divides humanity into discrete nationalised and territorialised populations, producing and enforcing the segregation of political communities in space and in law. Indeed, citizenship is a property relation: states belong to citizens and citizens belong to states – trespassers can therefore be dealt with as criminal interlopers (this explains why the politics of No Borders is necessarily anti-capitalist). Following the autonomy of migration approach, we can see that it is precisely because human mobility is such an irrepressible and excessive social force, a sign of life, that citizenship must be continually demarcated through acts of violent bordering and immigration control.

Thinking of citizenship as the global system for ‘the overall government of the population covered by the modern state system’ helps to historicise it (Hindess 2000, 1495). Importantly, it is the ‘twentieth century wave of independence [that] marks the point at which citizenship became a universal human condition’ (Hindess 2005, 247). This is important because even as newly decolonised nation-states acquired independence, sovereignty and national citizenship, many features of the global order remained in place. Decolonisation certainly transformed the political system under which the global poor were incorporated into the world system, but that world system remained a racist world order – with particular centres, peripheries, power networks, disparities and vectors of domination. ‘Indeed, where the liberal government of non-Western populations was once predicated on a denial of citizenship, contemporary liberal attempts to govern the people of the non-Western world are increasingly channeled through the institution of citizenship itself’ (Hindess 2005, 242). Even a cursory account of US global hegemony since decolonisation should alert us to the ways in which discourses of sovereignty, democracy and citizenship function as tools of imperialism.

Indeed, the rules governing this international system of states profoundly limit the autonomy of formerly colonised states and their populations. While international law demands that states allow their citizens to freely leave their countries – after all, how can a citizen freely consent to the social contract without the ability to exit the contract? – there is no attendant obligation on any other country to grant them entry, hence the limited freedom of movement for the global poor. Meanwhile, states must allow the return of their own citizens, which becomes particularly salient in the context of mass deportation regimes. Here we see that citizenship, when viewed in global perspective, is a system for allocating individuals to states – states, which have highly varied capacities to provide rights, resources, and services to their citizens, and hold different positions in

relation to key international institutions, most notably those managing the global economy. Therefore, for most people around the world, citizenship is a legal-political status that symbolises and maintains their global marginality and restricted mobility; less a source of rights and responsibilities and more a means of being ascribed, managed, and fixed globally – a badge of dishonour based on the ‘birthright lottery’ (Shachar 2009). This became especially clear during my research among deported migrants in Jamaica.

Deported people live their Jamaican citizenship in relation to their British alienage; Jamaican citizenship was inseparable from their non-citizenship in the UK, but also their exclusion from other countries in the ‘global North’. For example, when ‘foreign criminals’ are deported to Jamaica, their police records travel with them. This means that not only are they prevented from returning to the UK, they are also unable to migrate elsewhere, because criminal records block them from securing a visa in the US, Canada or the EU. Deported people are prevented from fleeing their predicament in Jamaica – one of isolation, underpaid work and profoundly limited opportunities – and in this way citizenship status immobilises. Deported people are contained by their Jamaican nationality and by their criminal records, which are determined by the modern technologies that identify and fix individuals (passports, finger prints, electronic databases). In this way, citizenship works as an international ‘geography of containment’ (Camp 2004).

Especially for ‘deportees’, Jamaican citizenship is not primarily about rights and responsibilities in relation to the Jamaican state, but represents a way of being positioned, managed and fixed globally. Given that most deported people are sent from the developed to the underdeveloped world – and often from former metropole to former colony – this obviously has racial significance. In theory, citizenship provides every individual around the world with a ‘home’ (see William Walters on domopolitics, 2004), which makes contemporary deportation a form of ‘return’. However, once we begin to question nationalist fairy tales – most obviously via even the briefest account of colonial history (that is, modern history) – the whole edifice falls apart. Mythic social contract origin stories work to gloss over always violent and contested histories of state-formation and nation-building, and citizenship thus operates as a tool of colonial forgetting. Mapping hierarchies of citizenship in global perspective should be the starting point for acts of remembering. From this perspective, citizenship starts to look not raceless but saturated by race (while liberal states firmly denounce any exclusion of immigrants on the basis of ‘race’, they necessarily exclude non-citizens on the basis of poverty and nationality, and as Bridget Anderson reminds us, it is the history of European colonialism which has stitched race, nation and poverty together (Anderson 2013)).

These observations are important when citizenship still manages to retain its hold on the ideal of political engagement and subjectivity. If we recognise that citizenship is a tool of domination and exclusion, which reproduces global inequality, then does it make sense to imbue the concept with emancipatory potential for those struggling to claim rights against the state and the international state system? People who move and stay without authorisation are often described in terms of their expressly non-national citizenship acts and practises. But from the perspective of deported people in Jamaica – and many others for whom citizenship is a badge of dishonour and a mark of frustrated mobility – it appears difficult to frame their agency and autonomy in terms of citizenship. Moreover, if we recognise that at the global-scale citizenship tends to perform a similar function to race under empire – legally



and spatially producing and enforcing the segregation of political communities, within a broader project of uneven capitalist development, and via the conceits of liberal governmentality – then it becomes even more difficult to enlist citizenship to name the political subjectivity of the disenfranchised. At least to me, it is not clear what gets elucidated when citizenship becomes both things at once.

### Citizenship: what is there to salvage?

Peter Nyers and Kim Rygiel have argued that ‘the language of citizenship is still that which best encapsulates the language of political subjectivity’ (Nyers and Rygiel 2012, 11). For them, the concept of citizenship can be rethought ‘through movement’, and migrant activism and resistance can usefully be framed as producing new citizenship subjectivities and spaces. Despite their highly generative analysis of migrant activism, which seeks to unsettle exclusionary citizenship regimes through careful attention to the politics of movement, I am not convinced that rethinking citizenship in this way helps us see the problem more clearly, or our way out of it. Indeed, trying to hold onto citizenship as *both* political subjectivity, and yet also the name of our political subjection, appears to me, at least, muddled.

I am not suggesting that Nyers and Rygiel – and those who share their position – want to naively reaffirm liberal conceits. Their whole point is to critique and resist anti-immigration and nativist politics via an account of migrant agency and activism (like them, I find the ‘autonomy of migration’ approach profoundly compelling). They are conceiving of citizenship as *both* a site of domination and emancipation, something many critical scholars and thinkers do with (enlightenment) concepts like freedom, justice, and humanity/humanism. Therefore, ours is certainly not a political disagreement, and perhaps not much of an intellectual one, but primarily concerns which concepts we choose to imbue with political potential. While it can of course be argued, quite convincingly, that is necessary to hold onto the contradiction and complexity at the heart of citizenship, my own perspective is that asking the concept to retain its emancipatory potential can distract from, or confuse, the analysis of citizenship as the legal regime for the demarcation of nationalised and territorialised populations, which is constantly being defined through the exclusion of ethno-racial outsiders. In my view, anti-racism demands the abolition of borders and national citizenship, and thus emancipatory struggles against race and nation should reach for languages other than citizenship to name their struggles and demands.

A longer set of reflections would be required to work this argument through, but clearly I am identifying a point of disagreement that cuts across scholarship employing radical ‘autonomy of migration’ and No Borders approaches. For example, Nicholas De Genova, another ‘autonomy of migration’ scholar, describes citizenship as ‘the form of our *unfreedom*’ (De Genova 2015, 194). He notes that ‘the sovereignty of the state is predicated upon the cannibalization of our own powers and freedoms – the powers and freedoms of life itself’ (De Genova 2015, 201), and therefore the challenge for critical thought is to think beyond and after citizenship (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013), as part of the struggle against the deadly workings of race and nation.

There are good reasons to abandon our positive investments in citizenship at our current juncture. When citizenship becomes policed via ever more intensive and expansive modes of nativist exclusion/expulsion, and at the same time becomes stripped of its positive content for the (provisional) insiders (note the withering away of social rights, political inclusion, and even civil liberties for citizens). What sense is there in using the same concept to name political subjectivity and resistance? Can not those subversive, oppositional and hopeful political formations be named otherwise? Even for those still working with a Rancièrian version of the political, is citizenship really necessary to name acts of resistance, new communities of mutuality, and oppositional claims-making? I think we can find new names for the colourful, restless, hopeful politics and subjectivities of those seeking to build new ways of relating to one another and the planet without recourse to ‘citizenship’. Given that the legal and institutional substance and force of citizenship is precisely as a system for producing and organising nationally segregated political communities, I do not think it makes sense to invest too much critical energy in the terrain of non-national citizenships.

In my assessment, the analysis presented in this short paper precipitates a desire to build a world beyond and after citizenship, which is ultimately a No Borders politics. This might seem utopian, even naïve, but it is unclear to me where else a reckoning with what citizenship does in the world leads. Just as the settler produces the native, the citizen produces the migrant: the illegal, detainable, and deportable migrant (Sharma 2020). Ultimately, it is only the abolition of borders that can ensure the destruction of these deadly binaries. To conclude, as always, we must summon hope by glimpsing those forms of political community beneath and beyond the national: the conviviality of young people in diverse urban settings, and the planetarity of emergent forms of ecological mass action. In my view, to study citizenship is to try to understand what we are up against – the deadly force of nation, race, and territory; the false promises of specifically national forms of sovereignty, independence and democracy; and the technologies of identifying, fixing and immobilising individuals and populations – and to begin questioning what lies after and beyond.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributor

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