

Exclusion, Failure, and the Politics of Citizenship

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The definition of "Citizen" in *The Traveller*: 'a person who thinks he understands what is going on'.

Introduction

Capitalist liberal democratic states are undergoing profound changes. Welfare states are being cut back, inequalities are widening, unemployment – or underemployment – is growing. The problem of poverty in wealthy countries is a problem that is, we are led to believe, seriously exacerbated by immigration. Immigrants are said to take jobs, thereby increasing unemployment and lowering wages, and they rely on social assistance, thereby both reducing state resources and undermining the social solidarity that redistributive mechanisms require. As the [Toronto Sun](#) puts it: "They take jobs away from Canadians, drive wages down, inflate housing prices, and fuel tax increases to pay for their suite of entitlements – housing, medical care, education," etc. This kind of sentiment is commonly voiced in the media across North America and Europe. The impact of migration on labour markets, communities, and housing is generally construed as strongly negative. In other words, if only it wasn't for the impact of those pesky migrants everything would be, if not fine, at least much better.

This conclusion, however, rests upon the deeply problematic assumption that labour markets and communities are inherently stable systems that are only subject to change because of immigration. But, of course, labour markets and communities are always changing: women entering labour markets, the age structure of the population, new skills sets and technologies, are only some of the factors that shape the changes in labour markets and communities in the last fifty years. Change is thought of extremely negatively when it comes to immigration. Furthermore, political groups on the right who generally do not prioritise unemployed or homeless populations will often have them at the top of their agenda, claiming that these are the groups who suffer the negative impacts of immigration.

In this paper, I want to encourage us to begin to move beyond seeing migrants essentially as competitors with citizens for the privileges of membership in national societies. I will begin by considering who is the migrant and who is the citizen, and introduce the concept of 'the community of value' to capture that these are normative as well as formal categories. The community of value, I will argue, is defined from without through the exclusion of migrants, and from within through the concept of the Failed Citizen. I will consider the politics generated by exclusion and failure, and ask how these can be challenged to enable us to move toward developing a common agenda that acknowledges without pathologizing migration, and that centralizes the issue of migration because of its relevance to everybody, not because of particular suffering endured by migrants.

The Migrant, The Citizen, and The Community of Value

So who is 'the migrant'? I would argue that there are three types of migrant: the migrant in law, the migrant in quantitative data, and the migrant in public debate. Crucially, these three different meanings of 'migrant' do not straightforwardly map on to one another, indeed in practice they often refer to quite different sets of people. While 'migrant' is typically formally undefined in law, they might be reasonably said

to be the ‘non-citizen’ or ‘the person subject to immigration controls’. However, the migrant who figures in data generated by censuses, whose movements and integration is tracked in large scale datasets is often defined as ‘foreign-born’. Many ‘foreign born’ people are also formal citizens (at least in liberal democracies) and they are *not* subject to immigration controls. This is a challenge for basing policy on evidence, as the evidence gathered on foreign born is misleading if it is used to guide immigration policy. The challenges are compounded because the migrant as imagined in public debate is not the foreign born professor, financier, or architect, but the person who cleans their house. In public debate ‘migrant’ is not simply about either legal status or where a person is born but is about being one of the global poor.

Citizenship, too, is not just a formal legal status. Indeed, in recent years, the concept has been seriously stretched. We have a multitude of citizenships, including the global, intimate, urban, environmental, sexual, social, and cosmopolitan (Hampshire, 2013). There is a danger that citizenship can be used to mean everything and nothing at the same time and that its relation to a legal status is overlooked (Bosniak, 2006). Migration serves to illustrate the importance of formal status, and political scientists have done a lot of work recently to remind us of the importance of citizenship as a core institution of the contemporary liberal state. Yet this does not mean that either migrants or political scientists are blind to the more subjective accounts of citizenship. Citizenship is both formal and normative. While legal status matters, citizenship cannot be reduced to legal status alone. States do not simply portray themselves as arbitrary collections of people held together by a common legal status but as *communities of value*, comprised of people who share common ideals and patterns of behaviour (Anderson et al., 2011). The community of value is populated not simply by Citizens, but by *Good Citizens*, imagined law-abiding and hard-working members of stable and respectable families. Immigration and citizenship are not simply about legal status, but fundamentally about status in the sense of worth and honour, that is, membership of the community of value (Anderson, 2013). The debates around immigration are about the contours of the community of value as much as they are about trade-offs and economic impacts.

We can examine the borders of the community of value by paying attention to how people move into it by becoming citizens. In liberal democracies, citizenship is typically derived from birth or acquired through ‘naturalisation’. Naturalization is the process by which individuals can be given the same status as those who are ‘natural-born’ citizens (or subjects), hence the term. While for those born into citizenship it is essentially a free good, for those who acquire it citizenship is more akin to membership in a club. Unlike the natural-born, those who naturalise must fulfil certain requirements to be granted membership. Naturalisation procedures attempt to link formal citizenship to substantive citizenship and in these attempts we can see the shape of the community of value. Requirements to join the club are not purely formal and the migrant is expected to be a *Good Citizen*. The ways by which individuals become citizens, and how we decide who is able to become a citizen, reveal ideals of citizenship and membership and how the nation/state community is imagined. Thus migrants who wish to become UK, Australian, Spanish, or French citizens must be of ‘good character’ and not being of good character is the most common grounds for refusal – in the UK, for example, it accounts for 37% of refusals (Blinder, 2012). But what constitutes having a good character? It has some components that seem relatively straightforward: not having a criminal record, not

being a bankrupt, and having paid taxes, and these run alongside the requirements not to be involved in terrorism, crimes against humanity, war crimes, or genocide. However, to testify to their possession of a good character, applicants typically have to have a citizen of standing (a professional or other person deemed respectable) prepared to attest to their worthiness. That is, it requires contact with Good Citizens.

The rhetoric of acquiring citizenship also draws on national values. For example, in the citizenship test booklet, *Discover Canada*, we learn that “Taking responsibility for oneself and one’s family” is a key responsibility of citizenship, and that “Getting a job, taking care of one’s family and working hard in keeping with one’s abilities are important Canadian values. Work contributes to personal dignity and self-respect, and to Canada’s prosperity”. In practice, these values along with others like freedom of speech, respect for human rights, and the rule of law and democracy, while presented as particular and national, tend to be common in the citizenship statements of most liberal democracies, and are those agreed upon by liberals regardless of nationality. However, these substantive requirements of naturalisation processes also reveal how the moral spaces of citizenship extend beyond the migrant. In the US, for example, involvement in prostitution, polygamy, and being a habitual drunkard all exclude one from naturalisation. Yet, of course, there are natural-born citizens who are habitual drunkards who still remain formal citizens, just as not working hard in Canada does not mean that your citizenship can be stripped from you. Foregrounding the community of value as expressed in naturalisation processes emphasizes that not all natural-born citizens are Good Citizens. While the Foreigner/Non-Citizen can define the nation from the outside (Honig, 2003), the community of value can also be defined from the inside, by the Failed Citizen (Anderson, 2013).

The Failed Citizen

I use the term Failed Citizen to allude to those individuals and groups who are imagined as incapable of achieving, or failing to live up to, national ideals. It includes a wide range of people, like the benefit scrounger with too many children, the prostitute, the rioter, and others. The Failed Citizen, like the Non-Citizen, can be legally “fixed” in several ways, such as by receiving a criminal conviction. Criminals may be formal citizens but they are strongly imagined as internal Others. A citizen criminal cannot be ejected from the state but they can be excluded from membership in multiple ways, including, in some states, through capital punishment. Even a minor conviction can result in a permanent loss of rights. In many states in the US, for example, a felony conviction by anyone in a household is grounds for the household’s eviction from public housing, and convicted drug felons lose the right to vote, to Medicaid, to food aid, public housing, and to any form of government education grant, *for life* (Brewer & Heitzeg, 2008). For these people the promise of formal citizenship is largely reduced to the bare toleration of their presence on state territory. Put like this, and purged of its moral claims, the distinction between the categories of Non-Citizen and Failed Citizen becomes unclear. How helpful is it to assert that ‘illegal immigrants are not criminals’ without thinking about what ‘criminal’ means in the first place?

Importantly, both Non- and Failed Citizens are not simply defined in relation to the law. The Failed Citizen, perhaps even more obviously than the Non-Citizen, is largely a normative category, and interestingly, as with Non-Citizens, the problems of

Failed Citizens are often presented as problems of 'culture'. In the UK this is termed a 'culture of entitlement' which combines with lack of parental discipline to result in unemployment and welfare dependence. These 'migrant' cultural problems and their resultant exclusions can be presented as running through generations of families. The community of value is defined from the outside by exclusion and from the inside by failure, but the excluded also fail, and the failed are also excluded. Both the excluded and the failed are strongly imagined as the poor, but also as the *undeserving* poor who want something for nothing. One is global, to be denied because they do not belong, the other national, to be denied because they have not contributed.

Neither The Non-Citizen nor the Failed Citizen is properly modern. For example, both the national poor, and the migrant are often portrayed as having backward ideas about gender and gender relations. The depiction of Failed Citizenship is often one of 'uncivilised' gender relations of oppressive masculinity and excessive femininity (Webster, 2008). Migrant communities too are often seen as sites of oppressive gender relations. This cannot be separated from the gendered framing of citizenship. The Good Citizen, the Non-Citizen, and The Failed Citizen are men. Poverty, deservingness, and citizenship are strongly gendered. Women's citizenship has always been mediated, essential yet indirect (Brace, 2004), and this is also true of Citizenship's Others. In the same way that The Wife is necessary but subordinated to the Good Citizen so the Others of the Good Citizen are male but space is made for the female as a Victim of Trafficking and as the Benefit Scrounger. In the latter case, women can be depicted as instrumental single mothers, having children not out of love and proper maternal feeling but in order to claim benefits and housing. This is similar to the portrayal of migrant mothers as having so-called 'anchor babies' in order to claim settlement and citizenship. The relation of women to membership of the community of value is not only about race and class, but also about the right kind of motherhood.

The Politics of the Community of Value: Tolerated Citizens

The borders of the community of value are permeable. For example, the 'deserving' Benefit Dependant is at continual risk of sliding into the category of Benefit Scrounger. In April 2011, the UK's Prime Minister, David Cameron, stated that:

We are finding a large number of people who are on incapacity benefits because of drug problems, alcohol problems or problems with weight and diet and I think a lot of people who pay their taxes and work hard will think, 'That's not what I pay my taxes for. I pay taxes for people who were incapacitated through no fault of their own.' (Daily Mail 2011).

According to this narrative, the welfare claimant, not having the self-mastery to control their consumption, slips effortlessly into becoming the benefit scrounger. Similarly, the Non-Citizen, whatever their immigration or citizenship status, is easily imagined as The Illegal. Both the illegal immigrant and the benefit scrounger are also strongly associated with criminality.

Different groups and individuals can slip in and out of the community of value, sometimes accepted, sometimes marginal, sometimes examples of fine institutions and national generosity, and other times a threat to national identity and themselves

intolerant. That is, as well as Good, Non-, and Failed Citizens, there are also not-quite-good-enough and just-good-enough Citizens who mark the borders of citizenship. These are Tolerated Citizens. The fragility of the Tolerated Citizen's hold on acceptance, the contingency of their acceptance, permeates the politics of citizenship. Those at risk of failure, or of not belonging, seek to disassociate themselves from one another. Migrants and their supporters are usually eager to differentiate themselves from the Failed Citizens with whom they are often associated. Assertions that refugees are not criminals, or that migrants do not claim benefits, are attempts to counter these associations by affirming the community of value. Migrants and Refugees are fit to belong because they have the right kinds of values. This assertion of the community of value implies a contrast with criminals and benefit scroungers. Similarly, citizens at risk of failure may seek to disassociate themselves from non-citizens and to assert the importance of the community of value and national identity in order to bolster their claim to rights.

Contingent acceptance turns Tolerated Citizens, who must often struggle for acceptance into the community of value, into the guardians of Good Citizenship. Because these categories and boundaries are constructed, even though they are often imagined as real, they easily collapse into one another, legally and metaphorically. Those who are not firmly established in the community of value must be endlessly proving themselves, marking the borders, particularly of course by decrying each other to prove that they have the right values. For example, The Migrants (hardworking, legal, and a taxpayer) must distance themselves from the illegal immigrants. This is common currency, but in a Canadian context, it is particularly noticeable in the *Toronto Sun*, where the emphasis is very much on the illegal immigrant who spoils it for everybody else but particularly spoils it for the legal migrant. This Migrant's impressive 'work ethic' (silently disciplined by deportability and the figure of the illegal) is a reproach to the lazy and lack-lustre benefit scrounger (Anderson & Ruhs, 2010). On the other hand, the illegal immigrant is a foil to nationals who are not getting jobs because they are being undercut by people prepared to flout the rules. This is the white working class as 'beleaguered native', the benefit claimant let down by governments, past or present (or both) that fail to provide jobs for their nationals, because they are said to be variously influenced by unscrupulous employers, lobbied by vociferous migrant groups, and removed from the daily lives of the national population at the sharp end (Rogaly & Taylor, 2010). Both claimants and scroungers may manifest their resentment in racism – which, of course, is never endorsed, though it is explained through reference to illegality and is implicitly set in contrast to the 'multiculturally sophisticated middle classes' (Rogaly & Taylor, 2011) (including those designing and writing the policy documents). In the end, both hardworking immigrant and deserving claimant are tolerated members of the community of value, and their claim to Good Citizenship must continuously be asserted and proven. The Illegal Immigrant, the Benefit Scrounger, and The Criminal are not just parallels; they are intricately related, both to each other and to their shadows, the immigrant and the claimant.

Challenging the Politics of Exclusion and Failure

There is political pressure to keep apart Non-Citizens and Failed Citizens, for migration activists and migrants themselves to claim that the migrant, whatever their formal status, is a Good Citizen, not a Failed Citizen. 'Migrants do dirty, difficult,

dangerous jobs that nationals refuse to do' comes perilously close to the kinds of claims made by employers that 'migrants have a better work ethic than British/Canadians/Italians etc., who can't be bothered to get out of bed in the morning'. At the same time, activists and organisers working on issues related to failed citizenship – homelessness, unemployment, even racism – try to keep out immigration matters, which just complicate the work that they do. I want to suggest that now more than ever we need to not be afraid to bring together exclusion and failure, and to ask, who is this Good Citizen anyway? How to do this is inevitably nationally specific and requires us to complicate the notion of The Failed Citizen, and to interrogate ideas of the global and the national 'poor' and their relation to class. This is a big job and needs to accompany practice.

In what follows, I would like to outline the strategies that are often used to drive apart migrants from marginalised citizens, and to explore ways of proceeding politically that counteract these strategies. I am going to focus on the UK, as it is the context I know best, and to focus on the Failed Citizen as welfare dependant, a type of failure that, as I suggested in the beginning, is particularly important at a time of economic instability and growing inequality.

The UK has always been rather suspicious of such nasty republican words as citizenship, and public debate is pre-disposed to scare quotes around 'citizen'. In fact, the terminology was introduced via Canada. It was after the 1948 British Nationality Bill that a person was no longer naturalized into the status of subjecthood but citizenship in the UK and colonies. There was some dispute about the term citizenship, but 'The dominions are insisting that we shall not be in a different position from them. They create their citizens' (Lord Chancellor, Parliamentary Debates House of Lords Vol. 155. Cols. 784-5, cited in: Dummett and Nicol, 1990: 138). From the outset, citizenship has been a contested term in the UK, but the citizenship scare quotes are increasingly important as the term has become very self-consciously inclusive and includes the foreign-born 'citizen'.

As mentioned previously, part of the power of the Failed Citizen figure derives from their recognisability and their malleability. In all liberal democratic states, I think we have a strong idea of who the welfare dependant is. Yet, drawing lessons from the figure of the migrant, we need to first acknowledge the malleability of the political figure. In the UK, the welfare state has strong political traction. Indeed, interestingly, support for the welfare state, particularly the NHS, is strongly associated with Britishness, but there is considerable confusion about what the welfare state actually is. In public debates about immigration and the welfare state, the contributions made by low waged, flexible workers, including but not limited to migrants, is overlooked. The labour and skills in cleaning public offices, schools, and hospitals, in providing health and social care, and so on receive virtually no attention. Rather, the focus is almost exclusively on social assistance. In the UK, only 3% of the welfare budget is spent on the unemployed, which is the source of the greatest political anxiety. The great bulk of welfare payment goes to pensions, and to those who work. In the UK, what characterises the welfare state at the moment is the increasing dependence of low waged working households on child and housing benefits. Furthermore, as Mettler (2011) has observed in the US context, the more a government social programme benefits the wealthy, the less obtrusive it is. Policies for the poor are designed in ways that make it hard to escape the knowledge that the government is providing help. But for the wealthy, programmes are 'submerged'. Crudely put, if you have to go to a government office and apply for support, you know you are receiving

state support. If you do not, then it is just the way things are organised. In the same way as the wealthy professor is not a 'migrant', so the homeowner with a mortgage interest deduction is not a recipient of state assistance. I am providing this context because it illustrates how the debate is loaded by the very terms within which people tend to think of both migration and welfare states. When engaging with these issues, we need to remind people of the definitions of terms from the outset.

To look at a very specific instance of what this means for public discourse, in January 2012, the Employment and Immigration ministers jointly wrote a newspaper article headlined *370,000 migrants on the dole*, in which they asserted:

The integrity of our benefits system is crucial to the reputation of our welfare state – to whether taxpayers feel they are getting a fair deal. There's a natural instinct that says that no one from other countries should receive benefits at all. But if someone works and pays taxes here, it is not unreasonable that we should help out if they fall on hard times (Grayling (Employment Minister) & Green (Immigration Minister), 2012).

When the data were analysed, it was clear that a large proportion of the 370,000 'migrants' were British citizens. Despite its formal unitary status, distinctions are made in and outside of government, between natural-born and foreign-born citizens. The authors make a claim for the 'naturalness' of belonging, which seems to derive from being 'from' the country, or at least not from another country. But as liberals are able to assert reason over instinct in a somewhat hedged way ('it is not unreasonable'). Even then, this reason does not allow that welfare benefit is a right for those who have paid taxes, who do not seem to be the same as The Taxpayer who must get a fair deal. Rather, for those not born in the UK but who work and pay taxes, this is 'helping out', a mark of the generosity of the UK authorities rather than any entitlement on their part. The Taxpayer is the person born in the UK. The 'citizen' holds rights, who can dispute that? But it is the 'taxpayer' who must pay for them.

The juxtaposition of the immigrant with the Taxpayer, rather than the immigrant with the Citizen, suggests the importance of property ownership for the true citizen stakeholder. While the virtue of the Taxpayer has been further highlighted by the tales of corruption and tax avoidance that have been the staple of revelations about banking and transnational tax avoidance, the Taxpayer excludes people who don't pay taxes, people on social assistance, those providing care to loved ones, the elderly, those out of work, and so on. That is, the Taxpayer is not only threatened by too many immigrants, but also by too many lazy benefit dependants, too many people wanting something for nothing, the 'picky and pampered workforce' who aren't prepared to work for a living. "If you don't want to take just any old job that comes along, if you don't want to demean yourself with a position that doesn't match your training or if you don't want to move, fine. That's your choice. Just don't expect the rest of us to pay to keep you in your preferred lifestyle" wrote Lorne Gunter on May 15, 2012. There is another interesting point here. The problem with the migrant, in contrast to the national, is precisely that that they *are* prepared to work in positions that do not match their training, and to take whatever comes along. Moreover, the problem too is that they move too much, in contrast to the national, who is often presented as not moving enough. This is evident in Canadian debates, but also in the UK, small though it is. The benefit dependant is not just refusing to move to a different region. They will not even move out of their housing estates or go to the

next town to find a job. The non-citizen is too mobile, the failed citizen is not mobile enough. The national and regional labour market is presented as a space of privilege for citizens, where jobs are preserved for them. But the scale of the national/regional is also disciplinary, the area within which one is compelled to search for work, despite the requirements of social relations and the tug of responsibilities and love. The politics of mobility need to take in the mobilizing and immobilizing pressures enacted by immigration and welfare benefits on both Non- and Failed Citizens.

Considering the politics of immigration and of welfare benefits together it is striking how in the UK statements about preserving the welfare state for the British are often made just before swingeing cuts and restrictions are brought in. In Prime Minister Cameron's speech on immigration and welfare benefits on 25th March 2013 he claimed that migrants were attracted to Britain's 'generous' welfare system. 'Generous' was certainly not how it was being described the following week when government changes meant, among other things, that thousands of the most vulnerable claimants who qualify for emergency assistance were given food stamps controlling users' access to alcohol, cigarettes, and all non-essential food items. But some of the power of this derives from the implication that, whatever claimants think, migrants consider the welfare state to be generous – and there are a lot of 'them'. I have already described how the anxiety about immigration is an anxiety about the mobility of the global poor. This anxiety must be challenged, and this requires moving beyond the claim that only the wealthier migrate, and the hope that even if we had open borders most people would stay put. In terms of the Gini coefficient, which measures income inequality, global inequality is higher than inequality within any individual country (Milanovic, 2011). In contrast to the 19th century, most differences in income can be attributed to someone's country of residence rather than their position within their own society. Even if individual incomes within countries were equalised, global inequality would be reduced only marginally (from a Gini coefficient of 69.7 to 61.5), far less than if the mean incomes of all countries converged while leaving income inequality within every country unchanged. Global inequality serves as an implicit threat, a warning to hold on to privileges as there is not enough to go around. These are the assumptions that underpin a fear of the undeserving poor, and I suspect that countering it, and feeling able to demand more rather than accommodate claims that expectations must be lowered, will be key to efforts to politicise and organise in liberal democracies that are facing austerity drives and cuts.

Conclusion

To bring the migrant and the citizen together, we need to reframe matters of mobility and labour. The economist Phil Martin has quoted a question and answer he says is often heard in emigration areas: 'What is worse than being exploited abroad? Not being exploited abroad'. But the 'choice' to be exploited and its associated misery is not confined to migrants. Many citizens, particularly those in low wage work, do not work in marvellous jobs, free from exploitation, expressing and actualising themselves through their labour, gaining a sense of contribution to a greater good. Similarly, while migrants struggle to have their family relations, including heterosexual marriage, recognised and respected, the relational possibilities for all of us, migrants and citizens, are heavily constrained through ideals of heteronormativity, monogamy, and exclusion. This is not to deny that to be able to

work in a job, to be acknowledged as a monogamous partner, to vote or stand in an election, are precious rights for those who are denied them, and their recognition can change lives. However, they are also limited. Recognizing simultaneously the artificiality and the consequences of categorizing people as migrants and citizens reveals that the politics of migration are far broader than immigration policy.

No set of border controls has ever worked to fully contain people's desire and need to move. In this sense, national borders are a dystopian/utopian project. No state, however powerful and well resourced, will manage to control migration and ensure that only those with the right motivation, values, and plans cross the border in the right direction. The logic of job, family and citizenship, assumes a certain community of value. Moving beyond the choice between exclusion or exploitation by beginning, not with a job, but with the need for subsistence, not with a spouse, but with the need for mutual care and support, and not with the right to exclude, but with the assumption of people's full inclusion has the potential to open up politics and analysis. It invites an open, complex, and multifaceted contemporary 'us' that has the possibility of being shaped by shared imagined futures as well as shared imagined pasts.

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