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MIGRANT CITIZENSHIPS AND AUTONOMOUS MOBILITIES

PETER NYERS

Abstract. The study of the political agency and subjectivity of refugees and migrants has become an increasingly important topic within migration studies. Migration involves struggles around fundamental social and political issues, namely mobility, residence, and citizenship rights. Expressions of this struggle can be found in local actions against detention, deportation, and other border controls; campaigns for regularization and status; the revival of sanctuary cities; and global struggles for freedom of movement. However, the traditional concepts and frameworks of migration do not adequately take into account the full dynamic range of migrant practices of political subject-making. This article analyses the “autonomy of migration” literature within migration studies and critically assesses whether the concepts from this perspective can be mobilized to understand the political agency and subjectivity of migrants. While the autonomist approach to migration makes vital and dynamic contributions to our understanding of migrant political agency, its dismissal of citizenship as an exclusionary concept would benefit from a more nuanced approach.

To speak of “migrant citizenships” may at first be interpreted as an odd way of phrasing the relationship between these two concepts. The traditional narrative is familiar: migrants arrive to a country and after a certain amount of time, and after following certain procedures and meeting certain criteria, they may apply for national citizenship. There is a vast literature that examines, often critically, the migration-citizenship process. This process is at once formal and legalistic and also enacted and performative. For example, migrants must follow the rules and be recognized by governing authorities; they must also live their lives a certain way, i.e. hold a job, remain law-abiding, engage in civic life, and so on. The resurgence in interest in citizenship tests and citizenship oath ceremonies is illustrative of this desire to formally combine the legal and performative dimensions of citizenship, and also to valorize citizenship and make it more exclusive and valuable. At stake here is protecting the alleged value, worth, and honour that is increasingly placed on citizenship. As Linda Bosniak (2006, 19) explains: “it is precisely because of the concept’s immense emotional resonance and perceived value that people disagree so sharply over the conditions for its proper application.”

The migrant citizenships discussed in this article are different from the conventional model. These migrant citizenships are also both formal and performative, but ones that follows a different “script” (Isin 2009, 379) than the conventional narrative. This article engages with approaches to citizenship that analytically privilege the perspective of the migrant. This is a kind of migrant citizenship “from below,” one that is attentive to the practices and political enactments of migrants (Nyers and Rygiel 2012). Migration involves struggles around fundamental social and political issues, namely mobility, residence, and citizenship rights. We can see expressions of this struggle in the social movements of migrants and refugees:

local actions against detention, deportation, and other border controls (Anderson, Gibney, Paoletti 2011, Nyers 2011); campaigns for regularization (Nicholls 2013); the revival of sanctuary cities (Ridgely 2008); and global struggles for freedom of movement (Stierl 2012). In this way, the challenges posed by migration are not limited to social and economic challenges, or even security threats. Migration poses some deep challenges to classic questions about politics: what counts as political activity? who is a member of the political community? who can be considered a political subject? It takes some creative thinking and experimentation to answer these questions because the ontology of sovereignty and state citizenship does not adequately explain the political lives of migrants. New citizenships, what I call “migrant citizenships,” need to be theorized and explored.

This article engages with a body of scholarship loosely organized around the label “autonomy of migration.” This perspective came about as a response to the “control bias” that is prevalent in much of literature on how migrants encounter borders and border control (Scheel 2013a). As the possibilities for human agency and creativity are boundless it becomes clear that there is no easy policy or technological fix to irregular migration. What is refreshing and innovative with the autonomy of migration perspective is how it approaches the border first and foremost as a site of social and political struggles. Mobility and controls cannot be disconnected, but the way their relationship is perceived can be changed. For autonomists, mobility exists prior to controls, and not the other way around. Human agency is therefore at the conceptual, analytical, and political forefront of this perspective on migration. However, it is a perspective that would likely resist the formulation “migrant citizenships.” Why? Because citizenship, in any form, is seen as being a bordered concept, responsible for the ongoing exclusions at the local, national, and global levels of politics. Citizenship is envisioned as almost entirely aligned with the forces of control. As Tyler (2010, 183) puts it, citizenship “cannot avoid an optic which looks at peoples’ movements from the perspective of control.”

After providing an overview of some of the main features and contributions of the autonomy of migration approach, the article will critically engage with this perspective’s treatment of the concept of citizenship. Autonomist approaches tend to emphasize the negative and exclusionary dimensions of citizenship. In this view, citizenship has become commoditized as something exclusive; its value comes, in part, from being denied to those who are deemed unworthy of this status. The rise of “differential inclusion” as a common buzzword in citizenship and migration studies is further evidence of the way that the exclusionary dimensions of citizenship have become more acute and prominent in political discourse and practice (Andrijasevic 2009). Rights are being differentiated, segregated, and stratified across space and time. But this is only part of the contemporary story of citizenship. Others have emphasized the contestatory dimension of citizenship, that is, citizenship as political subjectivity that has a highly ambiguous relationship with the state. Here, the focus is not so much on the legal or formal dimensions of citizenship, although these are undoubtedly important, as on the performative

elements. The “acts of citizenship” (Isin and Neilsen 2008) literature, for example, works through the political paradoxes that arise when people constitute themselves as political subjects, citizens, prior to being legally or discursively recognized as such by state authorities. This, I argue, has important resonance with the autonomists’ view regarding the primacy of the power of movement over the power of controls. Here, the political subjectivity of citizenship precedes the legal recognition of citizen-subjects. Migrant citizens, in short, make claims on the state for rights and recognition, and at the same time they are capable of evading legal capture and, indeed, transforming the legal regimes and institutions of state citizenship.

MOVEMENT DESPITE BORDERS

It is well known that border regimes have become increasingly restrictive, exclusionary, and dangerous to the vast majority of the world’s population (Johnson 2014). One way to illustrate this shift is to look at the changes in the political discourse around deportation in Western states. In the not too distant past, liberal democratic states were largely content to paint deportation as a normal administrative function of the state. While the appearance of refugees and irregular migrants would still periodically be the object of a media spectacle and represented in crisis or emergency terms (Mountz 2010), deportation was typically cast as a routine, mundane, and everyday practice. By contrast, in recent years it has become a central feature of migration controls, prompting Gibney (2008) to name the trend the “deportation turn” in migration policies. To be sure, governments release their deportation numbers with pride, as evidence that they are “doing something” about the “problem” of irregular migration and border control. What were once statistics buried in reports about immigration are now the cause of major press conferences and public relations efforts. In the United States, for example, the Obama administration has made a lot of fanfare about the historic level of deportations that are occurring in that country, with nearly 410,000 removals taking place in 2012. This increase has been mirrored across Western countries. In the UK, the annual number of removals has increased from 17,000 in 2001 to 37,000 in 2011. Canada has similarly experienced a 50 percent increase in the number of deportations compared to a decade ago (Macklin 2014). States mobilize many justifications for these increases in removals, including security concerns, changes in the labour market, upholding the integrity of the immigration system, and issues of procedural fairness. Famously, deportation is justified as being a deterrent to would-be irregular migrants. High levels of migrant detention and deportation supposedly send a signal that the state is not “soft” on irregular migration and will cause would-be migrants to seek alternative destinations.

But what happens to people after they are deported? Does the strategy of removal really act as a deterrent? A very interesting and dynamic sub-topic within migration studies is concerned with the phenomenon of post-deportation. While the topic of immigration controls, migration management, border policing, detention, and deportation have received a great deal of scholarly attention, relatively little is

known about what happens after deportation (Peutz 2006). One of the striking findings of a recent study by Schuster and Majidi (2013) of deportees in a village in Afghanistan is the number of people who were planning on re-migrating. An incredible 80 percent of the interviewees left Afghanistan again within two years of their return. Many more were actively planning to re-migrate, taking measures to secure funding, plan their route, and reactivate networks of support. The reasons for migrating again are often similar to the reasons for migrating in the first place: war, generalized violence, persecution, corruption, unemployment, environmental destruction, and so on. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that the desire to migrate may be even more intense post-deportation. As Schuster and Majidi (2013) explain, the reasons for this are many: “Many of the young men will have incurred debts the first time round which they will not have paid off, and which they will be unable to repay so long as they stay in Afghanistan. Others will be unable to bear the shame of failure, in particular when so many will have other relatives who have been successful and are sending back money. And finally, some of these young men will have found friends and lovers who are urging them to return.”

It is tempting to frame these findings in the classical push-pull dynamics of (forced) migration studies. After all, generalized violence, war, corruption, unemployment, and economic displacement are all classic motivators for people to move. But the focus on these “objective” or “structural” factors not only risks neglecting the subjective reasons people move, as has been well pointed out in ethnologies of migration. It is not only the subjective experience of migration that is important, but also the process of subjectification, of subject-making that comes when people move (Mezzadra 2004). This topic is the central focus of an emerging debate around the “autonomy of migration” perspective on migration. The section below outlines several common features of this perspective that, when taken together, pose some fundamental challenges to our collective understanding of migration, especially in terms of its relationship to political agency, subjectivity, and community.

AUTONOMY OF MIGRATION

The phrase “autonomy of migration” has been described as a “dazzling term, slogan, and program all at once” (Bojadžijev and Karakayali 2010). It was designed to liberate research and activism on migration from some of the prevailing frameworks (e.g. humanitarianism, securitization, migration management, labour market) of the dominant approaches in migration studies. Autonomy of migration is at once a research program with its own distinct analytical tools and conceptual frameworks, and also a political project that is connected to anti-racist social movements for refugee and migrant rights. As an activist-research nexus that has developed primarily in Europe, it crosses and connects scholarly and activist worlds. Perhaps because of its connection to migrant rights networks and movements, autonomy of migration arose as an antidote to counter some of the pessimism for thinking

about the political agency of abject migrants that has come from working with the conceptual tools and frames of Giorgio Agamben (Agamben 1998, cf. McNevin 2013, Walters 2008).

To speak of migration as autonomous is to insist that “it has the capacity to develop its own logics, its own motivation, its own trajectories” (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013, 184). Autonomy here implies the ability to actively create a new situation, a new social reality. The idea of autonomy speaks to the way migration is a force that is capable of social and political transformations. Autonomy is, of course, a central concept to many traditions of political thought, not least liberalism with its emphasis on the self-governing, rational, free-willed individual. However, the type of autonomy envisioned by the autonomy of migration perspective eschews the notion that autonomy is about independence. Rather, autonomy involves forms of self-rule that are not disconnected to larger collectivities. Autonomy becomes a principle of organization that keeps alive the tension between the desires of the individual and collective, without abandoning either to the telos of the citizen and the state, respectively. Influenced by the Italian autonomous Marxist tradition, the autonomy of migration approach reverses some of the prevailing dynamics of social analysis. Just as the former argued that class struggle determines capitalist development, the latter suggest that the human agency involved in migration precedes the attempts by states to border, exclude, and control migrating subjects (Mitropoulos 2006).

While autonomy of migration is by no means a unified “school” or “theory” of migration, the scholars and activists associated with this approach can be said to possess several shared characteristics and commitments. Taken together, they constitute an important intervention in the study of migration and challenge many of the received assumptions of more traditional approaches. As I shall outline below, the autonomist approach to migration poses some fundamental challenges to the way we perceive the causes of migration, the role of human agency, and the politics of borders and bordering. Also subject to critical debate is the concept of citizenship, which most autonomists view as another manifestation of border control and exclusion. I will outline that position and my critique in later sections of this article.

First, the autonomist approach to migration emphasizes that migration is a social fact that mobilizes a full spectrum of creativity in human agency. This is perhaps the most significant insight of the autonomy of migration perspective, which is “to see migration not simply as a response to political and economic necessities, but as a constituent force in the formation of polity and social life” (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013, 184). Often this point is made by emphasizing the “subjective” and social dimensions of migration, as opposed to the “objective” or structural push-and-pull factors like poverty, war, environmental destruction, and so on. These factors are of course important, but they are not entirely determining of the migration process. For autonomists the worry over privileging structure is that it can overshadow and even erase the creativity of human agency that is enacted

through migration. The minor desires and projects of migrants can result in political moments, events, and acts that can be central to understanding ruptures in social and political life. In this way, migration is a creative force that enables political, social, cultural, and economic transformations.

A second key argument from the autonomy of migration perspective is that more restrictive border control policies coupled with more sophisticated technologies of surveillance and control only serve to make migration more dangerous and life threatening. They do not, in themselves, represent a fundamental challenge to migration itself. Migration is, in a word, autonomous. Border controls, immigration controls, security checks – these techniques of sovereignty come afterwards and are a response to movement. This insight does not ignore or lessen the importance of the power of controls to shape, channel, and constrain movement. And migrants certainly are compelled to negotiate and struggle with these controls. The point, however, is that migration is not simply responding to controls. Rather, migration precedes its control. Migrants are creatively inventing new techniques to exercise their mobility. The forces of control are compelled to constantly respond to the creative forms in which migration takes. As Bojadžijev & Karakayali (2010: 3) argue, “The border regime does not transform of its own accord, but rather obtains its dynamics from the forms of migration movements.”

Third, the autonomy of migration approach is critical of any attempt to portray borders as impenetrable walls. The autonomist approach insists that we reimagine and rethink what is the border and its relationship to migration. Border controls no longer involve simply drawing a “line in the sand” in order to separate one sovereign state’s territory from the next (Vaughan-Williams 2009). Neither are borders simply about exclusion, keeping things out, creating hierarchies, and keeping things separate. A thorough scholarly and political accounting of the various dimensions of this “negative” account of borders is important and necessary. By itself, however, it can contribute to the “control bias” (Scheel 2013a) that characterizes much of the mainstream and critical literatures on migration. It can also miss the complex and creative ways in which borders ‘react to diverse kinds of migrant subjectivities and thereby operate to produce differential forms of access and ‘rights’” (De Genova et al. 2015: 57). In this way, the relationship between migrants and borders is not a straightforward encounter of exclusion, but involves complex and ambiguous negotiations, contestations, and refusals. Rumford’s (2006) concept of “borderwork” speaks well to the dynamics at play in these contestations. Borders are made, and unmade, through a variety of practices. Borderwork refers to those practices by state and non-state actors, citizens and non-citizens, that variously produce, reproduce, contest, and resist borders. Border controls, in other words, are always met with resistance to these controls. Migrants are capable of rendering borders porous, or finding creative go-arounds to barricades, or implementing strategies of concealment, or negotiating identities in ultra-secure documentation climates. As Anderson, Sharma, and Wright (2012, 82) argue: “Since the creation of the very first illegalized person, whenever and wherever controls have been placed on people’s movements, they have been rejected... No set of border controls has

ever worked to fully contain people's desire and need to move. In this sense, it can be argued that an everyday practice of refusing the border has existed as long as borders have."

Fourth, the emphasis on practice and contestation means that the autonomy of migration approach refuses to frame migration within either the discourse of victimage (migrants are powerless) or security (migrants are dangerous). Refugee and migration studies have long struggled with the themes of voice and agency of mobile subjects (Sigona 2014). Studies within the autonomist perspective privilege the voice and subjectivity of migrants. This includes analysing the social movements and campaigns of migrants, their claims making and rights taking, as well as their social mobilizations against deportation and detention, discriminatory labour practices, restriction of freedom of mobility, and so on. At the same time, the victim-agency binary is problematized in much of this literature in order to capture its complexity. Take, for example, the proliferation of hunger strikes, self-immolations, and other acts of self-harm that take place in the context of migrant detention. These cannot be reduced to either acts of desperation nor that a wilful, heroic agential subject (McNevin 2013, Ziarek 2008). In this way, the autonomist approach to migration also emphasizes the more mundane and everyday acts of subversion, survival, and agency (Johnson 2014). Rygiel (2011, 157) speaks to these mundane acts of resistance: "if visibility and voice are a key part of the struggles of some irregular migrant groups like the *sans-papiers* in the struggles over migration, others have found it necessary to navigate the increasingly restrictive regime of border controls through strategies of disembodiment and invisibility." So in addition to the grievances or wrongs articulated in their demands for justice, migrants also assert their agency in the routine ways that border controls are subverted and ignored through tactics such as false compliance, feigned ignorance, or what Homi Bhabha (1994) called "sly civility." As Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2013, 188) argue, "Migrants' politics develop their own codes, their own practices, their own logics which are almost imperceptible from the perspective of existing political action."

Fifth, the autonomist emphasis on migrant struggles, practices, and tactics that escape sovereign control poses a challenge to traditions of the political that are centered upon the politics of visibility. Indeed, the aim of migrant social movements has been to achieve various forms of visibility: e.g. to "come out of the shadows" and into public life; to have rights and personhood recognized in law and by society; to have a political voice and say in civic and daily life; to be included, accepted, and integrated. Bent on escaping this regime of visibility, what is distinctive about the autonomy of migration perspective is how it investigates the clandestine aspects of migration and finds vibrant, dynamic, inventive, and creative social worlds in the making. Inspired by Virno's (1996) political theory of exodus, the theme of "escape" figures prominently within this literature (Papadopoulos et al. 2008). Escape is mobilized not in the negative and reactive sense of "escape from." Escape is viewed positively as a productive practice that is generative of new modes of being in the world.

Escape routes also consist of the everyday lived experience of moving: migrants' strategic – and off-the-radar efforts at locating new paths for their journeys and for living; attempts at developing contacts for jobs, housing, healthcare; the affective responses migrants have to their denigration and exploitation; their experience of their lived spaces, of work, of the streets, of those they encounter, those they develop relationships with. It is within the rich density of their lives – lives that are of their making – that escape routes are found and traversed (Sharma 2009, 470).

Importantly, these identities, communities, and practices of escape strive to be “imperceptible” to sovereign powers and are resistive to co-optation.

Finally, there is perhaps no better evidence of the value and vitality of the autonomist approach to migration than the critical response and engagement it has provoked. There have been many criticisms of this approach. With their emphasis on migrant agency, autonomists have been criticized for downplaying the repression and violence involved in border controls and, thus, romanticizing the experience of migration. The autonomist approach has also been criticized for the way it homogenizes the border, and for failing to situate migrant struggles for mobility and rights in the context of emerging technological developments in border control, such as biometric controls. Scheel (2013a), for example, raises the concern that avoidance and evasion, key autonomist tropes, of highly sophisticated border control technologies is becoming increasingly difficult, if not impossible. The critique of homogenization is also applied to how the figure of the migrant is represented within this literature. Autonomists have been criticized for the high level of abstraction used when discussing the agency of the migrant. While any new theoretical approach must engage in conceptual work in order to establish its distinctiveness; however, the problem in this case is not with abstract thinking per se, but its paradoxical effects: namely, that for an approach that privileges migration, the figure of the migrant comes across as subjectless, disembodied, and homogeneous. In making this critique, Sharma (2009) and Scheel (2013b) argue that the experience of migration and border controls is always embodied, relational, and situated within and across various contexts, identities, and contested histories. However, to the criticism that the autonomous approach homogenizes the experience of migration into one universal category, Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2013, 185) respond: “The supposedly abstract and homogenizing category of migration does not attempt to unify all the existing multiplicity of movements under one single logic, but to signify that all these singularities contribute to an affective and generic gesture of freedom that evade the concrete violence and control of moving people.”

It should be noted that despite these wide-ranging criticisms, how autonomists approach the concept of citizenship has not been the subject of much critical debate. Indeed, there has been wide agreement with the negative portrayal of citizenship. A critical engagement with this representation is crucial, I argue, for understanding the possibilities for “migrant citizenships” today.

MIGRANT CITIZENSHIPS: BORDERED OR UNBOUNDED?

The concept of citizenship is treated with a great deal of suspicion and skepticism within the autonomy of migration literature. Put bluntly, citizenship is presented as a “wall,” as a barrier to, rather than an enabler of rights, justice, and autonomy. As Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2013, 179) assert: “whatever the definition of citizenship is, it operates as a wall when it represents the ultimate horizon of political practice and social analysis.” Citizenship is seen as “a specific form of governance” that “regulates the balance between rights and representation and renders certain populations as legitimate bearers of rights while other populations are marked as nonexistent” (ibid., 182). So while mobilizing struggles around citizenship rights is valuable as a means of creating possibilities for some migrants to be included, it is always a limited means. Citizenship’s exclusionary dimensions work to exclude the vast majority of migrants, dooming them to be outside the reach of the main categories that define people as political beings. In this way, citizenship is seen to be a hopelessly statist category. Even the critical movements of migrants, while important, suffer the limits of rights-based politics: they become implicated in, and in some ways legitimize and reproduce, the exclusionary structures, institutions, and practices of the state.

The paradox of migrant social movements is that they can at once exceed the formal confines of citizenship and at the same time reinforce them. They contest the discourse of legality and illegality, and then inadvertently reproduce the discourse when and if they gain access to rights and regularization. Tyler and Marciniak (2013, 146) speak to this paradox in their work on the politics of immigrant protests: “immigrant protests are ‘acts’ against the exclusionary technologies of citizenship, which aim to make visible the violence of citizenship as regimes of control. However, in order to effect material changes, protesters are compelled to make their demands in the idiom of the regime of citizenship they are contesting.” This paradox is especially acute in the context of multiculturalism and integration politics. While these are important means through which to mitigate against the exclusions of citizenship, they remain embedded in legal frameworks that continue to operate according to the principle of exclusion. As a result, multicultural politics can add legitimacy to regimes of exclusion that protests are ostensibly trying to contest.

The doubts, worries, and suspicions about citizenship are, therefore, well founded. Citizenship is a famously exclusionary concept, and its exclusionary force is there by design. The exclusions of citizenship are immanent to its logic, and not at all accidental. Citizenship is meant to produce successful and unsuccessful subjects. Citizenship, in other words, is “designed to fail” (Tyler 2010, 66). Indeed, its failures are a key source of dynamism to citizenship regimes.

This is the predicament of citizenship. It feeds from the power of sovereignty to erect and maintain borders – borders that it cannot ultimately fully control. Citizenship cannot be thought outside of sovereignty and control. (Tyler 2010, 83)

McNevin (2007, 670) also discusses this paradox, noting that the irregular migrants' "assertion of entitlement as right-bearing subjects despite irregular status contests the exclusivity of citizenship as a measure of political inclusion. Yet, their call for legalization simultaneously reinforces the authority of citizenship as the foremost measure of belonging."

It is from these doubts and concerns about citizenship that the autonomy of migration perspective can be situated. This perspective does not completely discount the worth of struggles for citizenship. Instead, it evaluates the potential of rights-based struggles in terms of how well they can take us to a space beyond citizenship. Instead of citizenship, autonomy is the main analytical term used to describe the struggles of migrants. Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2013) suggest one such new autonomy in the form of a "mobile commons" of migration. They argue that starting with the experiences, lives, and movements of transmigrants allows one "to cultivate an imaginary and a practical sensibility to what lies after citizenship" (*ibid.*, 179). What is the mobile commons? Building upon the renewed interest in social and political theory on reclaiming "the commons" as a way to institute more democratic forms of political community (e.g. Hardt and Negri 2011), the mobile commons describes the space-time of the social life of migrants: the "world of knowledge, of information, of tricks for survival, of mutual care, of social relations, of services exchange, of solidarity and sociability that can be shared, used and where people contribute to sustain and expand it" (*ibid.*, 190). While this is a different world than that of the rights-bearing citizen, it is not segmented from it. Rather, it is a world that is coeval and immanent to that of citizenship: "the world of transmigrants whether they are on the road, in a new country, or in a new neighbourhood, whether they are settled, clandestine, have refugee status, or are documented workers" (*ibid.*, 190).

Autonomist approaches to migration insist that the world of moving people requires a new ontology. What lies beyond the horizon of our received traditions of the political, centered around the state and citizen? The mobile commons, and concepts like it, do not presume to have the status of a new model for world order. Rather, they aim "to open, as Peter Linebaugh says, a chink in the wall and explore the possibilities that lie behind the horizon of contemporary European discourses and practices of citizenship" (*ibid.*, 179). As we saw above, many autonomists would agree that this wall is citizenship.

There is a certain irony to this criticism, however, as autonomists are critical of any representation of borders that characterizes them as impenetrable walls. And yet, citizenship is nonetheless presented as a wall. But citizenship is not only a category of governance, control, and exclusion. It is not exclusively exclusionary or about enacting strict boundaries between self and other. Citizenship can exceed the embrace of the state in ways that can provide deep challenges to the sovereignty-territory-citizenship nexus. As a concept and practice, it has not been completely captured by the state, or state philosophy. It, too, escapes from border control. In my view, the autonomist literature tends to discount too

easily the contributions of the critical citizenship studies literature. For example, in her book *Globalizing Citizenship*, Rygiel (2011) analyzes citizenship as both a global regime of population/mobility control and as a site of contestation and resistance. Drawing on Foucault's insight that "there are no relations of power without resistance" (Foucault 1980), Rygiel investigates how these countervailing forces interact within the framework of citizenship. Similarly, McNevin (2013) criticizes some of the work being produced in the autonomy of migration literature for its reliance on a reductive reading of power. To assert that either sovereign controls or human mobility is the primary power relation is to set up an either/or dynamic that sets power relations as arising from one or another primary source. The problem with such a reductive approach is that it misses out on the ways in which controls and resistance are co-constitutive, with each producing and transforming the other. In order to hold this constitutive relationship in tension, as opposed to segmenting control and resistance as separate dynamics, McNevin grounds her analysis of the political struggles of irregular migrants in ambivalence. Ambivalence, she argues, allows for an affirmation of what might otherwise come across as contradictory elements of these struggles, namely, the tension between struggles that seeks legal recognition by the state and those that seek to escape the concepts and paradigms of statism altogether. McNevin (2013, 186) argues that there is a "generative potential" to ambivalence; it is "a political resource, rather than a strategic handicap" (*ibid.*, 185). In this way, the ambivalence that animates the political struggles of migrants may itself have a transformative effect and initiate new kinds of political identity, relationships, and commonalities.

The work of both Rygiel and McNevin is illustrative of the kind of critical scholarship engaging with the theories and concepts from the "acts of citizenship" perspective (Isin and Neilson 2008; Isin 2009). Acts of citizenship approaches citizenship with a different set of questions. Instead of asking "who is a citizen?" this perspective asks how subjects constitute themselves as citizens. In other words, what makes a citizen? (Andrijasevic 2013, 50). How do subjects constitute themselves as citizens regardless of their formal status? The shift in questioning is significant because it opens up investigations of citizenship to a vast array of political processes, dynamics, and struggles. In place of the emphasis on status, institutions, and state authority emphasized in the former question, with acts of citizenship the focus is on process (not status), constitutive politics (not institutional politics), and everyday struggles of claimants (not representational politics). Subjects claim rights and perform duties and, in doing so, constitute themselves as citizens. Acts of citizenship emphasize the contingencies, ambiguities, and contestations of citizenship, as opposed to the certainties, assuredness, and formalities of legal approaches to citizenship. As Bojadžijev and Karakayali (2010) put it: "Many of the social conflicts initiated by migrants are, after all, not about becoming citizens, but about insisting that they are citizens already."

The acts of citizenship perspective fits well with many of the aims and purposes of the autonomy of migration approach. Indeed, there are scholars working within the autonomist perspective that also take a critically constructive engagement with

citizenship and are, therefore, attuned to how citizenship is simultaneously a means of governance and exclusionary rule, and also an important identity through which progressive struggles get enacted and performed. Mezzadra (2011, 121-122), for example, emphasizes the “importance of practices and claims of those who are not necessarily citizens in juridical terms for the development of an understanding of the transformation of the legal framework of citizenship itself.” Similarly, Bojadžijev and Karakayali (2010) argue that “migrants without papers should not only be thought of as objects of exclusion; rather, their appropriation of citizenship (for example, the ability to organize education and accommodation, medical care and work, despite their lack of recognized status) should be understood as challenges and redefinitions of the very limits of our understanding of citizenship.”

CONCLUSION

This article has brought together two literatures that are usually considered to be at variance with one another. Working through the tensions of the “autonomy of migration” literature with work on “migrant citizenships” has nonetheless been a productive exercise. Despite the autonomist hostility to the concept of citizenship as exclusionary and statist, I have argued that this perspective is enhanced when it engages with a reformulation of citizenship from a purely legal category to one that emphasizes acts and other performative forms of citizenship. The result is that citizenship can be remade into a potentially creative and critical concept that challenges statist ontologies, and clears ground for new ways of thinking of political subjectivity and community. Migrant citizenships demonstrate that citizenship is not only a technology of governance, exclusion, and differentiation. Migrant citizenships do not simply assume an unchanged form of state citizenship, but are illustrative of how citizenship involves a creative processes that is generative of new worlds, identities, and modes of belonging. Migrant citizenships are, therefore, not about expanding or widening of the space of citizenship and belonging. Rather, they indicate that a significant, if uncertain, transformation has already occurred with this basic political category.

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