When we contemplate deportation, it is revealing, in the spirit of Michel Foucault, to excavate a genealogy of the actual practices. ‘We have to analyse [power],’ as Foucault remarks concisely, ‘by beginning with the techniques and tactics of domination.’ Elsewhere, Foucault credits Marx with having provided him with ‘the fundamental elements of an analysis’ concerned with ‘not just the representation of power, but of the real functioning of power ... power in its positive mechanisms.’ Deportation must be approached precisely as a technique or tactic of domination, a ‘positive mechanism’ of ‘the real functioning of power.’ So how, we may ask, has deportation emerged as an actual ‘mechanism’ of power, and what is its genealogy?

Various forms of expulsion long predated deportation as we know it today, as William Walters has so insightfully demonstrated, and the targets of such tactics were often citizens. As a specific, juridically inscribed, and ordinarily individualised mode of immigration enforcement, deportation really only comes about in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Prior to that, migration had been largely unregulated and state borders were relatively open for the transnational mobility of labour. In the United States, for instance, provisions for the deportation of ‘undesirable’ migrants were only enacted as a means of enforcing the explicitly racist Page Act of 1875, specifically targeting Chinese migrants, whereupon the denial of admission at a US port of entry would trigger a deportation. Then, with the subsequent Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the purview of deportation was broadened to become a penalty for lacking a certificate of legal residence, and thus a form of interior immigration enforcement rather than just a pragmatic remedy to the inadmissibility of a migrant interdicted at a border. Immigration law itself was virtually non-existent until this era, which introduced a panoply of racial, religious, moral, criminological, public health and political exclusions, prominently distinguished by the sorts of overtly racist laws, enacted across the Americas and beyond, which specifically sought to bar the migration of Chinese labour. In this regard, it is instructive that deportation was first enacted not against all non-citizens and therefore not primarily as a way to enact a partition between citizenship and non-citizenship, but rather as a technique for the exclusion of a particular, expressly racialised, and racially denigrated category of transnational human mobility. In a sense, the primacy of this racial obsession preceded and importantly prefigured what were still relatively inchoate notions of national identity and even citizenship. The service that deportation thereby did for hardening and clarifying the boundaries of nation-state space and citizenship is evident, but perhaps becomes much more stark only in retrospect. Maybe the ‘deportation creep’ that eventually comes to contaminate the presumptive security of citizenship can thus be seen to have started even sooner, beginning with a rather specific and circumscribed...
target among the full spectrum of non-citizen ‘foreigners’ and advancing inexorably to encompass them all – to the point that now, on an effectively global scale, there is virtually no non-citizen (including the ostensibly ‘legal’ ‘permanent resident’) who is not potentially deportable, given the right combination of circumstances and triggering contingencies.  

Daniel Kanstroom demonstrates how the mounting use of deportation law as a form of ‘extended border control’ also came to serve the ends of ‘post-entry social control.’ Little surprise, then, that deportation increasingly sweeps up into its purview putatively ‘suspect’ categories of citizens, again prominently featuring those who are racially affiliated with ‘foreignness’.

If today we have come customarily to understand the susceptibility to deportation as a principal and defining distinction that separates citizenship and non-citizenship, we need to remain vigilant against ever imagining that citizenship can be assumed to be somehow equated with any presumable ‘safety’ from various forms of coercive expulsion. After all, the other conventional association with the term ‘deportation’ – especially in many European contexts – is Nazism’s herding of Jews and other ‘enemies’ into prison labour camps, which of course were eventually converted into death camps. So, it seems perilous to become complacent about the idea that deportation could ever be exclusively reserved only for non-citizens. If nothing else, the meticulously legalistic proclivities of the Nazis demonstrate precisely that citizens can always be stripped of their legal personhood and subjected to any and every atrocity otherwise more routinely reserved for non-citizens. Indeed, over recent years, and still today, we have witnessed reactionary statist campaigns against the spectral threat of ‘migration’ even in contexts where those who are made to stand in as the ‘foreign’ object of nativist contempt and suspicion are not in fact migrants or refugees at all. In particular, there have been an escalation of nativist convulsions against ‘illegal immigrants’ targeting native-born (racialised ‘minority’) fellow citizens. In the eastern borderlands of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, native-born Congolese citizens who are the descendants of Hutu and Tutsi people resident for generations on the Congolese side of the border have been derisively labeled ‘Rwandans’ and targeted for expulsion. Similarly, in the Dominican Republic, the native-born descendants of migrant workers who were recruited generations earlier from neighbouring Haiti have been recast as ‘Haitians’, legally stripped of their birthright citizenship, and rendered stateless, denigrated as ‘illegal immigrants’ in the only land where they have ever lived. Meanwhile, in Myanmar (Burma), Rohingya Muslim native-born citizens have similarly been legally stripped of their citizenship, castigated as ‘illegal immigrants’ from Bangladesh, and subjected to vicious pogroms, confined in virtual concentration camps, massacred and driven across the border in the hundreds of thousands. Indeed, these examples are but a few of the more extraordinary among a proliferation on a global scale of new formations of nativism directed not merely at migrant ‘foreigners’ but towards minoritised fellow citizens who may be re-purposed as virtual or de facto ‘foreigners’ – indeed, often as outright ‘enemies’ – within the space of the nation-state.

None of this is to deny or dispute the basic truth that deportation today pervasively serves as a defining feature of the sociopolitical difference between citizenship and non-citizenship, which is to say, in other words, the functionality of deportation in our contemporary sociopolitical scene for enacting in a very blunt and deeply consequential way the divide between the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of the space of the state. But, as I have often argued, while deportation is obviously devastating for many people who are actually deported as well as for their loved ones and so many others directly connected to them, the most productive power of deportation operates for the great majority of people who are susceptible to deportation but who do not get deported. This is how deportation contributes to the precaritisation of migrants. Importantly, this means that deportation, perhaps more than anything else, does a crucial work of subordination on the ‘inside’ of the space of the state. And then, on the ‘other’ side of the border, ‘outside’ the space of the deporting state – as Nathalie Peutz, Clara Lecadet, Tanya Golash-Boza, Shahram Khosravi and other contributors to the growing ethnographic literature on the aftermaths of deportation have shown – there is life after deportation.
even if the deporting state imagines deportation to be a kind of closure, a seemingly conclusive act of dumping ‘undesirable’ migrants onto the ordinarily poor countries to which they are juridically affiliated by their (sometimes only apparent) citizenship. Furthermore, life after deportation frequently involves the re-mobilisation of the deported migrants, the re-initiation of their migratory projects, often against all odds and under circumstances that may look more than ever like the flight of refugees from conditions in which life is truly inviable. But this reminds us that even under the worst of circumstances, and within the very asphyxiating constraints of various regimes for governing human mobility, there are persistent manifestations of autonomy, which I have called the ‘autonomy of deportation’.¹⁴

The moral economies of ‘deservingness’ that are often invoked to defend some migrants against deportation frequently become complicit with upholding the supposed appropriateness of deportation for others. Meanwhile, the internationalisation of an effectively global regime of deportation depends ever more comprehensively on the infrastructures that undergird and facilitate it. What partly fascinates me is how these two concerns may be linked – how the infrastructures and apparatuses and other technologies of power that allow for people to be disposed of (the dispositifs, if you will) are inseparable from the discourses and logics and rationalities that render something as appalling and violent as deportation into something so apparently mundane, so seemingly ‘normal’. This has much to do with the ways that bureaucracy is implicated with the proverbial ‘banality of evil’, as Arendt called it, but, more specifically, it is centrally concerned with the configuration of migration as a purely and merely ‘administrative’ affair, generally constructed so as to be ‘outside’ of the purview of politics proper.¹⁵ This is why every question

Image: Shahram Khosravi, Elliniko (2017)
of migration and borders has to be rescued from the normalisations of technocratic discourses and rationalities, and rendered apprehensible as a question of struggle.

The observation that there are always those who demand more deportation rather than less is crucial. It recalls to mind that the larger economy of deportation – by which I mean its economy of power, and specifically the uneven distribution of deportation – tends to operate in a context where there are always many more illegalised and deportable migrants than the number who are actually deported. And those who are hostile to migrants know this perfectly well, because the social fact of ‘illegal’ migration is a more or less public secret. It is also in this respect that the highly visible spectacles of migrant illegality not only stage border enforcement as a grand act of ostensibly exclusion but also tend simultaneously to expose such border policing efforts as always inherently beleaguered and insufficient. In this way, they serve to authorise the incessant demand for more control, more enforcement, more border reinforcement, and thus serve nonetheless as reminders of the permanent presence of still more ‘illegal’ migrants and the incorrigible versatility of ‘irregular’ or ‘unauthorised’ migrations. The border spectacle, which presents itself as a scene of exclusion, in fact also reveals its own obscene underbelly of subordinate inclusion.\textsuperscript{16}

Here, we must recognise the remarkable systematicity with which deportation ever increasingly supplies capital with the ever-renewable resource of routinely disposable labour, in the exquisite form of illegalised (hence, deportable) migrant labour. As I have long argued, even in the face of escalating deportations (in the United States and across the world), it is usually still the case that only a minority are actually deported while the great majority of those who are susceptible to deportation remain in a protracted condition of vulnerability to this profoundly punitive repercussion of the law. What emerges then, in a still more stark way, is the pivotal role of deportation in producing the conditions of possibility for sustaining the casual and callous disposability not only of migrant labour \textit{per se}, but also the outright and abject disposability of human life. Whole categories of people are simply treated as superfluous and, although their illegalised (hence, ‘cheap’ and tractable) labour is plainly in great demand and truly desirable to many employers, their (racialised) bodies, their persons, their lives and the wider communities in which they participate are branded as ‘undesirable’ and rendered virtual ‘waste’, human ‘garbage’ to be simply disposed of. It is in this sense, perhaps, that deportation has assumed a paradigmatic quality in our era of neoliberal global capitalism.\textsuperscript{17}

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Notes


5. See, for example, Julie A. Dowling and Jonathan Xavier Inda, eds., \textit{Governing Immigration Through Crime: A Reader}


