

Irregular Citizenship, Immigration, and Deportation. By Peter Nyers. Routledge, 2018, pp. 172

Bahar Banaei

Volume 37, Number 2, 2021

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1091291ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.40955>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Centre for Refugee Studies, York University

ISSN

0229-5113 (print)

1920-7336 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Banaei, B. (2021). Review of [Irregular Citizenship, Immigration, and Deportation. By Peter Nyers. Routledge, 2018, pp. 172]. *Refuge*, 37(2), 170–172. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.40955>

© Bahar Banaei, 2021



This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>



Book Review

Bahar Banaei

REFERENCE

Nyers, P. (2018). *Irregular Citizenship, Immigration, and Deportation*. Routledge. pp. 172. ISBN (hard cover): 9781138337008

Peter Nyers's compelling *Irregular Citizenship, Immigration, and Deportation* appeals to readers to critically examine citizenship as a fluid concept. He discusses issues that are of increasing concern with the rise of state hostility toward migrants, deportations, and detentions, and the austerity enacted in care for migrants globally. Nyers looks beyond formal definitions of citizenship to understand it as a kinetic "social position" (p.1) that coexists with "irregularity." According to Nyers, the stable citizenship of some depends on the precarious citizenship of others. In addition to groups whose precarious status is more readily understood, such as asylum seekers and migrant workers, Nyers shows how citizens are pushed into irregularity, including through citizenship revocation, deportation, and detention, and how these processes reify state sovereignty.

Nyers's book is structured into six chapters, which contain eleven "acts": stories on irregularity. Through them, Nyers illustrates how irregular citizenship is produced through

racialization, externalization, exceptionalism, accidents, and contestation. The irregular citizens Nyers discusses include racialized people and those who do not conform with normative conceptions of citizenship. However, he shifts our focus away from who are the irregular citizens and what they have done and centres his analysis on the discursive and political processes that create irregularity.

In the first chapter, Nyers examines the case of Deepan Budlakoti, who was left stateless when his birthright citizenship was revoked by the Canadian state after he served a three-year prison sentence. Budlakoti's case demonstrates one of Nyers's central arguments: citizenship is not static. Budlakoti's race, the nationality of his parents, and the mishaps made in his citizenship application pushed him into irregularity. Nyers argues that such irregularity benefits the state. The state guards membership in society against irregular citizens, such as those convicted of criminal offences who are

CONTACT

^a (Corresponding author) ✉ bbanaei1@yorku.ca

York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

deemed “unwanted, not-normal, and therefore alarming and potentially dangerous” (p.11).

In chapter 2, Nyers explores how irregularity is created through state “abandonment,” which makes an individual’s citizenship “unworkable.” In act 2, which tells the story of Abousfian Abdelrazik, Nyers highlights the racist and exclusionary practices that became prevalent after 9/11. In 2003, Abdelrazik, a dual citizen, was arrested, detained, and tortured by the Sudanese government at the request of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service. He was denied protections he should have been granted as a Canadian citizen and was even prohibited from returning to Canada. The term “Kafkaesque” often describes cases such as Abdelrazik’s to illustrate the terrifying moments when rights-bearing individuals are confronted with the legal exceptions that abandon them (p.49). Nyers argues that such “Kafkaesque” practices are necessary to reproduce state sovereignty, because the state’s interest in protecting “regular” subjects necessitates the maintenance of legal exceptions through which citizens are abandoned. Nyers also discusses contestation as a method of asserting one’s political subjectivity and reclaiming rights denied by the state, and points to the successful solidarity campaigns through which Abdelrazik challenged the abandonment of his citizenship. However, Nyers asks, if “regular” citizenship is more than a formal status and is instead a political, moral, and cultural one that involves affective ties to the nation-state, do contestation and protest become self-irregularization ?

In the third and fourth chapters, Nyers discusses externalization, which occurs when the state offloads its responsibilities or deports people to another state, making it easier to shirk its responsibilities to citizens.

In chapter 3, Nyers provides the reader with two “acts,” narrating cases of birthright citizenship that the state perceived as “accidental.” Despite their legal status as citizens, these individuals were scrutinized for their perceived lack of ties to the state of their birth. Nyers turns to theories of risk to show how accidents are built into birthright citizenship and leave some vulnerable to irregularity, despite their valid citizenship. As opposed to desirable and “essential” citizens, accidental citizens are seen as dangerous, particularly when accused of criminal or national security offences. Externalization of their citizenship through deportation or termination of citizenship are extreme examples of irregularization.

In chapter 4 the concept of externalization is applied to dual citizens. Nyers argues that citizenship is tiered and classed (p. 99) and that dual citizens are often marked as disposable. He uses the case of the 2006 Israeli Invasion of Lebanon to explore this idea (p. 89). Although states were responsible for providing safety to their nationals isolated in Lebanon, they were reluctant to assist dual citizens, who are judged on their perceived worthiness and affective ties to the country against which citizenship rights are asserted. This was also apparent in the popular conception of “Canadians of convenience” (p. 99), which emerged during the 2006 crisis and implied that dual citizens were using citizenship as a form of insurance, without permanently living in the country or paying taxes. Nyers argues that this debate over worthiness opens pathways for people to be pushed into irregularity and have citizenship protections revoked.

The final two chapters of the book discuss methods of contesting citizenship and challenging irregularization. Chapter 5 provides a historical outline of “repatriation from below” (p. 116) with a particular focus

on the collective act of petitioning. Repatriation from below involves grassroots efforts by community members to challenge bureaucratic processes that push people into irregularity, such as deportations and detentions, and demand for irregular citizens' repatriation. These actions challenge the assumption that irregularization only affects irregular subjects and not their wider communities. Rather, irregular citizens are situated in larger networks of people with varying privileges of status and citizenship who may collectively seek to repatriate irregular citizens and reinstate rights that have been forcibly removed.

The final chapter imagines a world beyond border zones through a discussion of "Status for All" and open borders campaigns. Nyers argues against the common critique of no-border theories as hopelessly "utopian" and points to current practices of democratizing borders, such as sanctuary cities. By highlighting processes through which popular movements have sought to protect the rights of irregular citizens, this chapter offers powerful insight for academics and activists thinking about how to mount effective challenges to irregularity.

The conclusion presents the case of Sister Juliana Eligwe, a rejected asylum seeker

made member of the Sandy Bay Ojibway First Nation in an attempt to prevent her deportation. Although Nyers briefly explores the dynamics between the Canadian state and First Nation communities, the reader is left wondering about the relationship between theories of irregularity and settler-colonialism, particularly since the book's acts take place in settler states like Canada.

Irregular Citizenship, Immigration, and Deportation provides excellent insights into the often oversimplified issue of irregular citizenship and shows how irregularity and citizenship are not mutually exclusive but rather fluid categories. Their volatility reproduces the state's authority and challenges it through political mobilization. This is a must-read text for academics, students, and researchers in the fields of citizenship and migration studies.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bahar Banaei is a PhD student at York University. She can be reached at bbanaei1@yorku.ca.



This open access work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

This license allows for non-commercial use, reproduction and adaptation of the material in any medium or format, with proper attribution.