

**On denationalization as neoliberalization:
Biopolitics, class interest and the incompleteness of citizenship**

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How is the global embedded in the national? How do national institutions enable global relations? And how in turn is citizenship being transformed as a social, political and legal institution amidst these two-way ties? These are some of the important questions at the heart of Saskia Sassen's paper examining the "denationalization" of citizenship. Drawing on a wide diversity of theoretical literatures, and complicating simple sound bites with her sensitivity to the contested character of key concepts, Sassen here offers inspiration and provocation in equal amounts. Her approach is inspiring in part because of the insistence from the start that it is the always incomplete nature of citizenship that allows for it to be both developed and studied as an outcome of diverse insurgencies against the exclusion and marginalization of the non-citizen or sub-citizen. Sassen thus models a way of theorizing citizenship that problematizes its enclosure as a fixed and finalized socio-legal institution. Instead, she shows how it can be explored as a congeries of ongoing and open-ended citizenship struggles or projects. These ongoing processes of redefinition, she suggests, have a tendential trajectory, and it is with Sassen's attempt to chart this trajectory that her paper makes its particular provocation: namely the argument, that today, in the context of globalization, we are seeing citizenship becoming increasingly denationalized.

Sassen explains that she prefers the term denationalization to the alternatives of postnationalization and transnationalization because for her the 'de' does not fall prey to the tendency of implying that the nation-state and national norms of citizenship have been utterly eclipsed amidst increasing and intensifying global interdependencies. I am not convinced myself that evocations of the postnational and transnational always do this, nor that the 'de' in denationalization really delivers us from the 'death of the nation-state' discursive denouement. Indeed, in some senses denationalization, with its allusions to deregulation and privatization, seems at odds with the arguments about the ongoing salience of the national-state, particularly when one considers how the term's semiotic denotation of deterritorialization seems to point in a

destructive, one-way ‘end of the nation-state’ direction compared to the more double-edged implications of the ‘post’ – *coming after* but also *incorporating and building on* – in postnational. That said, as I have argued in a critique of Arjun Appadurai’s paen to the postnational (Sparke, 2005: chapter 2), upbeat accounts of postnational consciousness also risk being reduced to ‘end of the nation-state’ sloganeering too. What matters most, it seems, is not the term so much as the explanation that comes with it, and here Sassen’s opening definition is clear. “With the term ‘denationalization’,” she says, “I seek to capture something that remains connected to the ‘national’ as constructed historically, and is indeed profoundly imbricated with it but is so on historically new terms of engagement.”

Sassen’s definition of denationalization leads thus to questions about what phenomena define the “historically new terms of engagement”. With its rhetorical resonance with deregulation and deterritorialization, one might suppose that denationalization would be tied by Sassen to neoliberalization. Instead, though, she prefers to appeal to ‘globalization’ in the abstract, and she thereby delinks her account of denationalization from any direct description of neoliberalism as either a policy-making orthodoxy or a dominant pattern of governmental practices. Neoliberalization is never used to name the “historically new terms of engagement,” and neoliberal norms are rarely addressed except to mention that “the changes bundled under the notion of the competitive state and the quasi-privatized executive [have] reduced the likelihood that state institutions will do the type of legislative and judiciary work that in the past led to expanded formal [citizenship] inclusions.” This latter point is an important one, I think, because it hints at the historical irony of pro-market innovations in one aspect of citizenship (*i.e.* the restructuring of governance to make it more responsive to a defiantly denationalized class of corporate citizens) leading to the inhibition of insurgent innovations in alternative aspects of citizenship (*e.g.* the organizing of social movements by those dispossessed through inter-state competition or so-called emergency executive action). In other words, this particular historical irony points to the ways in which what Sassen calls “incompleteness” has today been appropriated in the interests of expanding and entrenching an increasingly denationalized form of neoliberal hegemony. Sassen herself, however, does not use such other words, and, because she does not therefore address the connective imperatives running between denationalization and neoliberalization, her paper does not explore the class interests that seem to be structuring so many of today’s most influential, albeit incomplete, recodifications of citizenship.

In the rest of this response I want to point to some of the developments in citizenship that disappear from view when we delink an account of denationalization from an explicit concern with neoliberalization. I do so with great respect for Sassen's already expansive theoretical repertoire, and with nothing like her extraordinary record of world-renowned research into the diverse topics of citizenship, migration, global cities and globalization. I have written a little on the global geographies of neoliberalism, and I cite some of this work here in order to indicate that my comments have some substantive study behind them. However, I do not want to pretend to any special personal or disciplinary insight into neoliberalism and class. It should be noted too that throughout her more extensive and interdisciplinary work, Sassen hardly ignores questions of class herself. Indeed, having first read her work as an undergraduate I still remember finding it useful for making points about the class-divided spatiality of global cities in a tutorial. And much more recently I have found her new book on global assemblages of territory, authority and rights (Sassen, 2006) especially helpful for highlighting the links between class and trade law for a textbook I am writing on globalization.

As well as respecting Sassen's work, I here make my points about neoliberalization knowing too that there are many good reasons to be cautious about invoking neoliberalism as a catch-all category for describing the political-economic arrangements and orthodoxies associated with contemporary globalization. For one thing, it is an 'ism' that tends to run together the arrangements and orthodoxies by being used to describe both pro-market *practices* of governance and free-market fundamentalist *ideologies* at the same time. It is also a term which while being somewhat overused by critics on the Left remains counter-intuitive and confusing for those on the Right who – especially in the US – tend to rail against all things “liberal” even when they do so in the name of liberalizing markets and citizens from state control. Meanwhile, at a theoretical level, the term can be confusing too, drawing sometimes on Foucauldian arguments about citizenship projects of individualized responsabilization (Lemke, 2001), while at other times invoking more Marxian theories of post-Fordist restructuring, the roll-back of welfare-state citizenship in rich countries, and the entrenchment of accumulation by dispossession (and the associated abridgement of democratic citizenship rights) more globally (*e.g.* Harvey, 2005).

Rather than see the theoretical twists and turns as a basis for abandoning the term, I have elsewhere argued that theories of neoliberalism remain remarkably useful for exploring how top down market-based reforms in governance (*à la* Marxian accounts) and bottom up innovations in economic governmentality (*à la* Foucauldian accounts) come together in context-contingent ways in the world at large (Sparke 2006a; see also Li, 2007, for an inspiring illustration of how to do this in ethnographic research). Moreover, as I have sought to show with related empirical work on the biopolitics of border regimes in free trade areas, this sort of approach to neoliberalism also provides a fruitful framework for thinking about how the denationalization of citizenship is actually worked out at and across international borders (Sparke 2006b, Sparke et al, 2004, Sparke 2000; see also Amoore and De Goede, 2008). Such empirical work corroborates Sassen's crucial point that national institutions are deeply involved in enabling processes of denationalization (although for a compelling account of how inter-national analysis can come to terms with global dispossession too, see Hardt, 2006). Customs and border patrol agencies, for instance, are key to facilitating the expedited cross-border movement of frequent travelers who have paid for membership in pre-cleared passport-control fast tracks. These travelers may remain national citizens of diverse foreign countries, but, as long as they can pay for the necessary applications, they can avail themselves of fast cross-border passage from national border control agencies in the same way as they can avail themselves of investment and property rights from national trade and patent offices. As prudential, risk-managing entrepreneurial subjects, they can thereby bring their individual internalization of neoliberal norms into profitable alignment with the more macro neoliberal imperatives and incentives involved in their management of (and hence their need for mobility within) transnational business networks. At the level of citizenship theory, these sorts of observations lead me to concur with others who argue that we are seeing a neoliberalization of citizenship in which what Marshall once called 'social citizenship' and 'political citizenship' are being abridged and undermined at the same time as the liberal 'civil citizenship' once historically associated with economic contracts and their national legal infrastructure has become neoliberally denationalized; which is to say, opened to the transnational business class thanks to the transnational legal infrastructure of free trade regulations and related neoliberal policies set at and across national, regional and personal scales (see also Hindess, 2002; Mitchell, 2004; and Mitchell, Marston, and Katz, 2004).

Such arguments about neoliberalization seem to coincide with Sassen's own points about the business class interest in denationalization, an interest in what she calls "the granting by national states of multiple 'rights' to foreign actors, largely and especially economic actors--foreign firms, foreign investors, international markets, and foreign business people." In this respect she acknowledges that the incompleteness of citizenship renders it susceptible to appropriation and innovation by a denationalizing business class, a class, in other words, that is able to instrumentalize incompleteness in the interests of expanding its rights and freedoms across transnational space. My concern, though, is that if we only consider such developments in the terms of denationalization we risk ignoring how the relationship to the national for other classes becomes increasingly disempowering precisely because it territorializes politics and disciplines agency in the interest of entrenching neoliberal hegemony. Sassen alludes to the political challenge "for citizens, still largely confined to national institutions" of making the denationalizing business class democratically accountable in the absence of a global state. She also underlines the importance of this challenge vis-à-vis the future of democracy: "For me," she stresses, "the question as to how citizens should handle these new concentrations of power and 'legitimacy' that attach to global firms and markets is a key to the future of democracy." However, by suggesting too that "detecting" denationalizing developments in sites such as global cities might provide citizens with a "possibility... to demand accountability" of the global business class, she sounds rather too similar to the sorts of sanguine sages of civil society who soften the rough edges of Davos-type business meetings with idealistic accounts of cosmopolitan communion. While Sassen's detective work does not descend into quite such depoliticized discussion, the result is that she still downplays the degree to which all sorts of demands of a more radically resistant sort have been developed already by critics of neoliberalism (for a literature review, see Sparke, 2008; for a closer examination of global city insurgency in particular see Leitner, Peck and Sheppard, 2007). Indeed, had she addressed the discourses of anti-neoliberal resistance at any length they themselves would have underlined the importance of understanding neoliberal hegemony as a transnational target of protest and, as such, as a working name for the "historically new" upon which and with which diverse citizenship projects around the world are now actively engaged.

Critics in global cities ranging from Seattle to Porto Alegre to Mumbai have made these points against neoliberalism repeatedly (Sen *et al*, 2006; Sparke *et al*, 2005). Their slogans -

“No Globalization Without Representation” and “Another World Is Possible” – clearly make bold global demands, but at the same time they make them well aware of the asymmetrical advantages in influence and authority of the neoliberal institutions – the World Trade Organization and the World Economic Forum – against which their protests have been deliberately organized. The problem from the protestors’ and organizers’ perspectives is not one of detection or of finding places and possibilities to make demands as global citizens, but rather of overcoming the ways in which such resistance is repeatedly disciplined and reterritorialized in the interests of maintaining neoliberal hegemony. And this in turn means noticing the class-selective operationalization of denationalization: on the one hand involving national agencies and authority in the expansion of transnational rights and freedoms for the business class, while, on the other hand, involving national agencies and authority in the domestication and disciplining of demands for democracy and regulatory rights by less privileged classes. I am not saying that class is the only axis of marginalization in such situations. Those who demand new global protections for the environment, for women, and for human rights and health, are all equally disciplined and dismissed as ‘protectionists’ by business elites (who all ironically but tellingly never hesitate to ‘protect’ national sovereignty when global anti-neoliberal regulations are proposed). My suggestion is simply that noticing neoliberalism makes noticing the class-selective divergences in denationalization much easier to examine and explain, especially when we want to understand the reining in of resistance movements within the borders of nation-states. Sassen’s own suggestions that we “develop forms of participatory politics that decenter and sometimes transcend national political life,” that we “learn how to practice democracy across borders,” and that we also “engage the global from within the national” all remain vitally salient in this regard. But noticing the class-selective divergences in denationalization also underlines the need to be aware that the “we” of decentered democracy and postnational participation remains far from equally open to all.

At a more micrological level another advantage of linking an account of denationalization to the study of neoliberalization is that it brings to the forefront some of the dominant biopolitical technologies through which contemporary citizenship projects operate. For example, at the very same time as they have developed expedited crossing lanes for denationalized business class citizens, US agencies have been enforcing policies of so-called expedited removal and extraordinary rendition in ways that radically reimpose national territory (and terror) on the

bodies of those deemed dangerous to the security of citizens of a defensively-defined national homeland. The danger of examining such dynamics simply in terms of denationalization is that they either just seem contradictory – inclusive denationalization for some and brutally exclusive denationalization for others – or that the radically divergent directions in denationalization are explained by divergent and theoretically contradictory mappings of biopolitics – for example, Hardt and Negri’s smooth space for the business class versus Agamben’s spaces of sovereignty’s exceptions for the excluded (for a brilliant examination of these theoretical contradictions see Coleman and Grove, 2009). To be sure, neoliberalism hardly accounts for or theoretically encapsulates all these contradictions. Other ‘neo’s ranging from American neoconservatism to religious neofundamentalism are also part of the picture, and, if we follow the analysis of Wendy Brown (2006), they in turn help account for why denationalization can be coincident with the nightmarish eclipse of political citizenship she calls “de-democratization”. But these context-contingent complexities noted, it also seems clear that an expansive set of neoliberal norms and practices *connect* the soft cosmopolitanism of the business class with the carceral cosmopolitanism of those subject to expedited removal and extraordinary rendition (Sparke, 2006). Private prisons are used by ICE for purposes of expedited removal in the same way as the national government outsources software and hardware development for expedited crossing lanes to private sector businesses. Similarly, the CIA has used private corporate jets for extraordinary rendition and for the outsourcing of torture in the same way as TNCs use the very same corporate jets to organize transnational commodity chains and the outsourcing of sweatshop labor to unaccountable factories. The latter parallel gives new meaning to Sassen’s points about increasing executive privilege, of course, but the larger point here is that some of the more obvious examples seen in recent years of appropriated and instrumentalized incompleteness reflect a neoliberalization that ensures in turn that the denationalization of citizenship is not only class-selective, but also operates at a biopolitical level to construct modes of being and modes of movement through space deeply mediated by market capitalism.

Sassen’s account of emergent aspects of citizenship is itself highly heterogeneous and is thus attuned at moments to market mediations. And while she does not theorize these mediations in the terms of biopolitics, she also escapes some of the limits of the governmentality and citizenship literature: her enduring interest in the networks of both migrants and NGOs leading her to be cognizant of plural cross-border solidarities and diverse articulations of global

responsibility that are often missing in Foucauldian accounts of responsabilized citizenship. Since the latter represents such a significant theoretical influence in contemporary accounts of citizenship, let us consider Nikolas Rose's recent book *The Politics of Life Itself* as a case in point (Rose, 2007). I would argue that Rose's arguments about the molecularization of biomedicine and the rise of ethopolitics as the core code of conduct of contemporary citizenship could be usefully supplemented by Sassen's more heterogeneous and global analysis of denationalization. Nevertheless, there is a way in which her delinking of denationalization from neoliberalization also leads to some of the same blind spots one finds in Rose's account of twenty-first century biological citizenship (see also Rose and Novas, 2005). Just as Rose addresses the emergence of risk-managing biomedical citizen subjects in a way that ignores how their calculating biopolitics are related to harsh life and death body counts in less privileged parts of the world (see Braun, 2007), Sassen's complex calculus of denationalization does not address as directly as it might the ways in which the expansion of citizenship rights for one class of bodies is directly related to the exploitation and diminished rights of others. However, by connecting Rose's interest in the biopolitics of health citizenship, and Sassen's interest in global networks, with a critical awareness about the neoliberalization of denationalization, another much more integrated, albeit uneven, picture of twenty-first century citizenship comes into view, a picture of exploitative asymmetry amidst global interdependency. For me some of the most exciting new work on global citizenship has been focused on making sense of the structural violence and exclusionary implications of this picture. Given that so many important historical reterritorializations of citizenship have been made and marked through the changing scales of health citizenship— from the sanitation systems of the Roman empire through the quarantines of medieval cities to the development of modern national-state healthcare systems in the twentieth century – and given too that so many of the contemporary denationalizing dynamics that interest Sassen impinge on this most unevenly embodied aspect of biopolitics, I will conclude these remarks by briefly pointing to work on health citizenship that seems especially exemplary in terms of acknowledging the links between its denationalization and neoliberalization.

Kaushik Sunder Rajan, for example, shows that today's privileged 'patients in waiting' (whose denationalized biological citizenship through individualized risk management preoccupies Rose) are materially related to 'experimental subjects' who are denationalized by biocapital but who inhabit other less privileged places in the global economy. "[T]he tendential

axes of global asymmetry on which biocapital plays out,” he highlights, “imply that the more likely subject position for Indian populations with respect to genomics is not that of a *consumer* as much as that of *experimental subject*” (Rajan, 2007: 149). This is also an argument made with attention to neoliberalism by Adriana Petryna in an account of ‘biological citizenship’ that is much more asymmetry-aware than that of Rose. The globalized offshoring and outsourcing of drug trials, she shows, raise vital “questions about the unequal social contexts in which research is being performed and about how conditions of inequality remake a global geography of human experimentation” (Petryna, 2008: 33). Such processes of exploitation that give biological citizenship to some by taking it away from others connect in turn to the sorts of commodified ‘medical citizenship’ that scholars have found in the consumption of globally traded organs and tissues (Scheper-Hughes, 2005; and Waldby and Mitchell, 2006), as well as to the more complex kinds of ‘therapeutic citizenship’ that Vinh-Kim Nguyen analyses as “a form of stateless citizenship, whereby claims are made on a global order on the basis of one’s biomedical condition, and responsibilities worked out in the context of local moral economies” (Nguyen, 2005: 142).

One important insight emerging from these studies is that while the different populations are biopolitically connected, the biopolitical connections create a privileged and empowering kind of denationalized citizenship to those who can afford new drugs while systematically depending on the outcasting into sub-citizenship and non-citizenship of those from and on whose ‘treatment naïve’ bodies the drugs are first developed and tested. Such experimental subjects may thereby be bound-in biopolitically into the lives of the world’s biological and therapeutic citizens, but, to adapt Sassen’s terms, with brutal incompleteness in terms of protections and rights. Incompleteness is in this sense completely skewed by the interests of a global class hierarchy, an incompleteness that biopolitically embodies neoliberal violence in the form of class-selective distributions of sickness and health (Nguyen and Peschard, 2003). Moreover, all the while vulnerability to border-crossing diseases such as AIDS is commonly cited as a basis of a shared global citizenship of human beings in the face of a common biological threat (and as such, as a basis for the sort of “shared global responsibility” cited by Sassen), studies alert to uneven health citizenship show that biomedical research itself reproduces the same narrowed neoliberal interest in finding surplus value in what is coded as surplus human life (Cooper, 2008). Susan Craddock’s (2007) study of HIV vaccine development illustrates thus that where

such capitalist value cannot be found the research is suspended, the viral clades of HIV found in the Global South receiving far less experimental attention even as they kill far more people. And even biomedical interventions that are actually supposed to include the excluded through aid (as opposed to corporate experimentation), are now being shown to be profoundly uneven and innovatively neoliberal in terms of enrollment into health citizenship. Thus Nguyen has shown that the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) represents a remarkable innovation in the sorts of citizenship constructed by what Foucault once called pastoral power (Nguyen, 2009). In short, he shows how the Bush administration's promotion and projection of PEPFAR in Africa came not only as a sort of foreign policy compensation for the violent creation of non-citizens in Iraq and Guantanamo but also with the simultaneous advancement of faith-based organizations as agents of therapy and the attendant development of new confessional-*cum*-cost-benefit-calculation rites for the wouldbe biological citizens seeking their aid.

I will end here with one last example of the neoliberal sorting of health citizenship in denationalization that returns us to the complex figure of a citizen-subject on who Sassen suggests we need to conduct more research: the housewife. Go to the website of the *New York Times*, search under "hospital deportation" and you will find a photograph that captures on the very margins of the frame the face and outstretched caring hand of Petrona Gervacio Gaspar (http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2008/08/01/us/20080803DEPORT_18.html). The focus of the accompanying story is her son who was deported from a US hospital in a private air ambulance. The main point of the article is that, because he was an uninsured and undocumented immigrant, Ms. Gaspar's son represented such a large unreimbursable cost to the hospital that it was prepared to pay \$30,000 for the private jet to return him forcibly to Guatemala. This privatization of a practice over which the national-state traditionally has had monopoly control is on the rise under conditions of neoliberalization. In the case of hospital deportations, moreover, such developments clearly point to the ways in which neoliberal sorting systems structure access to health citizenship and its unhealthy alternatives both in and outside America. After all, the same private jet air ambulances are also being used more and more by the privileged patients of commodified medical citizenship too: the denationalized consumer-citizens of so-called medical travel that a recent corporate consulting report advertises is the new frontier in for-profit healthcare (McKinsey, 2008). But in the perverse pattern of US hospital

deportations the same neoliberal technology of medical travel is being used to transport patients with severe life threatening injuries away from medical care and into the homes of housewife carers such as Ms. Gaspar who can only offer Alka Seltzer and prayer alongside their love. Feminist geographers have mapped such private spaces of care and belonging showing that they remain intimately intertwined with the ongoing and incomplete rescaling of citizenship (Fannin, 2006; Fluri and Dowler, 2003; Marston, 2000; Lawson, 2007). However, these and related studies also show that we need to track the ways in which projects of expanding citizenship rights frequently involve or inspire authoritarian backlashes and exclusions too (Mitchell, Marston, and Katz, 2004; Sparke, 1996). Notwithstanding all her home care, Ms. Gaspar's experience (especially when reflected upon alongside the hateful comments of xenophobic website readers frustrated by their own diminishing entitlements as American citizens) reveals that such exclusion is especially acute in a cross-border context shaped at both ends by neoliberalism.

Here again we see class coming together with nation to structure processes of outcasting from citizenship; or, as website comment 630 from Albuquerque puts it: "American citizens are not the caretakers of the world. We can't even afford to care for all of our citizens! Keep the illegals out." We may also see denationalization too, or, as Sassen puts it, "citizenship identities that arise out of networks, activities, and ideologies that span the home and the host society." However, here they are identities structured by a starkly asymmetric incompleteness that expands citizenship for some with technologies that make denationalization dangerous and deadly for others. The resulting decline into sub-citizenship and non-citizenship was all too clear to the Guatemalan housewife watching her son's continuing convulsions and worsening bouts of blood vomiting and unconsciousness. "Every time," she told the reporter, "he loses a little more of himself." For some readers this assessment, uttered in the Kanjobal Indian dialect that the reporter characterized as "an otherworldly squeak," may only seem to mark the final eclipse of citizenship altogether (from bare life, as the Agamben authorities would want to call it, to barely any life at all). However, for others, including a number of more caring commentators on the *New York Times* website, the same housewife assessment served it seems as a sort of calling to cross-border solidarity, a kind of denationalized revisioning of health citizenship by citizens seeing the linked ravages of neoliberalization in both the US and Guatemala. Though these critics may never have read Judith Butler on scenes of suffering provoking denationalized

feelings of citizenship (Butler, 2004), and though they might not therefore have been able to articulate their own senses of fellow-feeling in terms of how a mother's grief enabled a form of affective self-undoing in themselves, their comments still illustrate an ethical responsiveness to the precariousness of another's situation. Provoking also an awareness of denationalized suffering due to neoliberalism, the loss of self reported by Ms. Gaspar might further be interpreted in this way as leading to calls for denationalized democratic citizenship in the same sort of dialectical fashion as was once outlined by Marx in his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*: "I am nothing and I should be everything" (translated as basis of an "infinitely demanding" ethics of citizenship in Critchley, 2007: 104). It seems to me that this is also a message of the housewife's care for her sick son. It is obviously a very long distance message which has to travel and be translated, but we still might learn from it, I am suggesting here, in the manner of fieldworkers learning from volunteer care-givers and thereby follow Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her own sympathetically critical suggestion that such North-South urban-rural-routed recodings of responsibility amidst globalization offer a way to "revise and enhance the brilliant work of Saskia Sassen" (Spivak, 2007: pages 9 and 166). To this end, I would argue, Sassen's own insistence on the incompleteness of citizenship remains invaluable.

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