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Feeling Like a Citizen, Living As a Denizen: Deportees' Sense of Belonging

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Abstract

The implementation of restrictive immigration laws in 1997 in the United States has led to the deportation of hundreds of thousands of legal permanent residents—denizens who had made the United States their home. Mass deportations of denizens have given renewed importance to territorial belonging and legal citizenship for theories of citizenship, a relatively neglected area of scholarship in this field. This article draws from interviews with 30 deported Jamaicans who were once legal permanent residents of the United States to argue that denizens often feel “like citizens” based on their family and community ties to the United States, yet that their allegiance and sense of belonging is primarily to their family and community—not to the state. In this sense, there is a disconnect between the law—which privileges legal citizenship—and the daily lives of denizens—in which they can experience a profound sense of belonging in their communities.

Keywords

deportation, citizenship, denizenship, belonging

I met Victor in a barbershop near downtown Kingston. He walked, talked, and dressed like a young man from Brooklyn. Victor told me, with a heavy Brooklyn accent, “I’m from Brooklyn. I grew up in Brooklyn all my life.” Although Victor considers himself to be from Brooklyn, he was born in Jamaica, in a hospital not too far from where we were sitting. When Victor was 4 years old, he and his mother took a plane from Kingston, Jamaica, to New York City.

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Victor and his mother traveled to the United States as legal permanent residents (LPRs). An LPR is a foreign national who has been granted the privilege of residing permanently in the United States, and who qualifies for citizenship by naturalization after living in the United States for 3 to 5 years. Victor and his mother qualified for U.S. citizenship when Victor was 7 years old. Had Victor's mother become a U.S. citizen herself before Victor's 18th birthday, he could have become a U.S. citizen automatically. Victor's mother never went through the naturalization process. When Victor turned 18, he could have applied for naturalization. Yet he did not.

In 1996, when Victor was 24 years old, he was caught selling marijuana. He served 2½ years in prison and was deported to Jamaica because U.S. law requires deportation for non-U.S. citizens convicted of certain drug charges. In Jamaica, Victor has no friends or family, and finds it difficult to survive. He longs to return to New York where his mother and daughter live. Victor is one of many deportees I met who qualified for citizenship, yet who never became U.S. citizens. Had Victor gone through the naturalization process, he would not have been deported from the only land he calls home. Although he had been back in Jamaica for nearly a decade, Victor still considered Brooklyn "home." It seems almost a truism to say that we feel as if we belong in our homes. However, home invokes more of a sense of where *we* feel a sense of attachment, whereas belonging is more relational—it denotes both how *we* feel about a place as well as how *others* perceive us (Anthias, 2008; Olwig, 2002).

As a legal citizen of Jamaica and not of the United States, technically, Victor does not belong in the United States. For Victor, it seems perfectly natural that he belongs in the place he considers home. However, under U.S. law, his claims to belonging have little meaning. The mere fact of being born on U.S. territory provides you with legal citizenship, which guarantees you the inalienable right to remain in the United States, and to come and go as you see fit. In contrast, those persons born outside the United States are not automatically U.S. citizens unless they meet certain conditions, and can only become U.S. citizens if they qualify for *and* seek out naturalization.

Legal citizenship is "the legal correlate of territorial belonging. It signifies official recognition of a particularly close relationship between person and country" (Bhabha, 2009, p. 191). This official relationship entails the right to participate in politics as well as the right to not be banished from one's country of citizenship (Anderson, Gibney, & Paoletti, 2011; Bhabha, 2009; Gibney, 2013; Román, 2010). This particular bundle of rights—the right to vote, hold public office, and not be deported—constitutes the total-ity of rights that U.S. citizens have that noncitizens do not.

In the United States, the Constitution guarantees a broad set of rights to all persons. Citizenship is not mentioned in the Constitution, and the U.S. Supreme Court has upheld the rights of noncitizens in this country to due process in criminal courts, to access to education, and to all of the rights guaranteed in the Constitution (Bosniak, 2006). A resident alien in the United States—officially referred to as a legal permanent resident—thus can live his or her life in the United States with the ability to exercise nearly all the rights of U.S. citizens. The line between citizen and noncitizen can thus seem blurry when we consider LPRs. The blurriness of this boundary, however, has come into focus in recent years as hundreds of thousands of LPRs have been deported.

This article thus argues that legal citizenship has taken on renewed importance in the current U.S. context of mass deportation.

In the contemporary United States, millions of LPRs live as if they were citizens—they have access to nearly all of the rights of citizens. However, due to laws implemented in 1997, it has become remarkably easy for a LPR to be deported from the United States. I argue that the passage of these laws—which rendered LPRs deportable for fairly minor convictions—has given renewed meaning to the importance of territorial belonging for theories of citizenship. Whereas the deservingness of citizens to remain within a nation's territory is hardly ever put into question, U.S. laws make it surprisingly easy to remove a noncitizen from its territory. The fact that noncitizens enjoy many of the same rights and sense of belonging as citizens makes their deportation all the harsher.

Much of the scholarship on citizenship has moved past citizenship as legal rights to focus on substantive citizenship—the ability to exercise rights (Nakano Glenn, 2002). Substantive citizenship requires that the state and local communities enable people to exercise their citizenship rights. Engin Isin (2008), for example, contends that

what is important is not only that citizenship is a legal status but that it also involves practices of making citizens—social, political, cultural, and symbolic. Many scholars now differentiate legal citizenship from substantive citizenship and consider the latter to be the condition of possibility of the former. (p. 17)

Insofar as scholarship on citizenship primarily focuses on how rights, responsibilities, and privileges are distributed within a particular polity (Bosniak, 2006), there is relatively little focus on how citizenship also functions as a barrier to territorial rights—the right to live in a particular area (Parker, 2001). This study of deported denizens indicates that scholars may have moved away from the importance of legal citizenship and territorial rights a bit too quickly.

LPRs like Victor are denizens—people who have settled within the territory of a country yet lack citizenship. Political theorist Meghan Benton (2010) argues that denizenship is problematic when it does not lead to citizenship, yet that “the question of how migrants should be treated if they choose not to acquire citizenship has not yet been answered” (p. 78). Here I pose a slightly different, but related question: Why don't denizens who qualify for citizenship apply? And, what does this tell us about the meanings of citizenship and alienage in the contemporary United States? Most scholarship that deals with the issues of citizenship, alienage, and deportation is theoretical and is not well-positioned to answer these empirical questions (Benton, 2010; Bosniak, 2006; Gibney, 2013; Schuck, 1997; Wayland, 1996). Linda Bosniak (2006) posits that studies of citizenship must focus on inclusion as well as exclusion insofar as citizenship necessarily includes both. This article engages with this call through an analysis of interviews with deported former LPRs. This analysis allows us to delve into a discussion about what makes citizenship important in people's lives and to consider how citizenship regimes affect denizens. These analyses also help elucidate the nuances of citizenship and belonging and the distinction between legal and other forms of citizenship.

Based on interviews with 30 deported Jamaicans who were once LPRs of the United States, I argue that denizens often feel “like citizens” based on their family and community ties to the United States, yet that their allegiance and sense of belonging is primarily to their family and community—not to the state. In this sense, there is a disconnect between the law—which privileges legal citizenship—and the daily lives of denizens—in which they can experience a profound sense of belonging in their communities.

Legal Citizenship, Alienage, and Belonging

Legal citizenship signifies the official recognition of a particular relationship between a person and the government and guarantees territorial rights in the country of citizenship (Román, 2010). All persons residing on U.S. territory have some relationship with the government: We pay taxes, are subject to sanction if we violate U.S. laws, attend government-sponsored schools, and benefit from government services. Only those who have legal citizenship, however, have the chance to shape the laws that govern society, and only U.S. citizens are safe from expulsion from U.S. borders.

Citizenship and alienage define one another in a dialectical fashion—alienage is only important because citizenship is. The idea of citizenship renders possible the existence of aliens. As Bosniak (2006) explains, citizenship theory needs to be able to address both the inclusionary and exclusionary dimensions of citizenship. On the one hand, citizenship is inclusionary insofar as it brings together a group of people defined as citizens. On the other hand, this definition of some people as citizens and others as aliens is exclusionary. In the United States, LPRs are not citizens, even though they do have a pathway to citizenship. However, so long as they remain LPRs, they remain outside the borders of the political community.

Although only citizens of the United States are members of the political community (Román, 2010), the United States is more than a political community: It is also a cultural, social, and economic community. Many non-U.S. citizens who reside permanently in the United States consider themselves members of these communities, despite their formal exclusion from the political community. This reality points to a contradiction: Citizenship implies a political relationship with the government. However, what is most important in our everyday lives is not our relationship with our government but that with our families and communities. This formal relationship with the government, however, is the only way to ensure that non-U.S. citizens are not removed from their families and communities. Failure to formalize one’s relationship with the United States by becoming an official member of the polity potentially has severe consequences, insofar as noncitizens can face deportation.

Scholars often frame citizenship rights in a hierarchical fashion, with civil and political rights being the most basic, followed by social and then cultural rights (Bosniak, 2006; Marshall, 1950; Nakano Glenn, 2002). However, citizenship scholars have long argued, as Bosniak (2006: 91) does, that “*enjoying* citizenship does not require *being* a citizen in any formal sense. In this understanding, citizenship status and citizenship rights are simply nonconvergent.” In the United States, noncitizens have access to social, cultural, and civil rights, and many citizens are denied these same rights.

Sarah Wayland (1996), writing a decade before Bosniak, agrees, arguing that T. H. Marshall (1950) “failed to foresee that some citizenship rights would be held by noncitizens as well” (p. 39). Wayland (1996) conceives of this convergence as a “devaluation of citizenship” (p. 39). Schuck (1997) concurs with this argument and contends that there is practically no difference between LPRs and citizens, other than the franchise.

Schuck (1997) points to the franchise, yet Bosniak (2006) reminds us that some noncitizens in the United States can vote in local elections, and in the United States, not all citizens are eligible to vote. Notably, people convicted of felonies in many states cannot vote. As it turns out, in the United States, the sole clearly marked distinction between citizens and noncitizens is that US citizens cannot be deported. As William Walters (2002) argues, deportation is a “technology of citizenship”—it actively creates a world that is divided into states. Without the possibility of deportation, states would have no authority over returning people to where they officially belong, and thus no control over who can become a member of the state’s population. The possibility of deportation endows citizenship with meaning insofar as only noncitizens (or denaturalized citizens) can be deported (Gibney, 2013). A consideration of deportation allows us to think about how citizenship can function as a barrier to territorial rights—the right to live in a particular place (Parker, 2001).

One area of scholarship on citizenship focuses on thin versus thick notions of citizenship where thin citizenship is “mere status” while thick citizenship involves the meaningful enjoyment of rights (Bosniak, 2006). A thick conception of citizenship relies on the idea that there are spaces in which we can feel a strong sense of belonging (Yuval-Davis, Anthias, & Kofman, 2005). What, then, are we to make of the fact that people can feel a strong sense of belonging to a place even when they lack status citizenship? The importance of this question is amplified in the contemporary U.S. context, where people who are not citizens can very easily lose the right to live in the place they call home because the right to remain in the United States is a right exclusive to legal citizens.

Deportation of Legal Permanent Residents From the United States

If you lack citizenship in the United States, technically, you do not have the *right* to be in the United States; remaining within the United States is a *privilege* that can be revoked at any time. Deportation simply means revoking that privilege. Non-U.S. citizens can be deported without due process, and without consideration for their social, cultural, and family ties to the United States because, in U.S. law, deportation is not punishment (Golash-Boza, 2012). Although noncitizens in the United States are given the full spectrum of rights in criminal proceedings, they are denied many of these basic rights in immigration proceedings. It is in these proceedings that the importance of citizenship comes into sharp relief.

The idea that deportation is not punishment is based on a distinction between deportation and banishment, where banishment is punishment because it involves removing a person from a country where he belongs, yet deportation is the act of returning a

person to where he belongs, and thus is not punishment. This legal idea of belonging is based exclusively on one's formal political status as a citizen or noncitizen, and leaves no room for the consideration of other forms of belonging to the polity.

Only non-U.S. citizens can be deported because U.S. citizens have territorial rights—the right to live within the borders of the United State. As U.S. citizens, this right cannot be revoked. To do so would be banishment, and banishment is not among the punishments the United States metes out to people convicted of crimes. In stark contrast, an LPR can be deported, even for minor infractions of the law. In many deportation cases, an LPR's social, cultural, and economic ties to the United States can be ignored (Golash-Boza, 2012). This has especially been the case since the passage of the 1996 laws (Kanstroom, 2000).

In 1996, Congress passed two laws that profoundly changed the rights of all foreign-born people in the United States: the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996. These laws were striking in that they eliminated judicial review of some deportation orders, required mandatory detention for many noncitizens, and introduced the potential for the use of secret evidence in certain cases.

One of the most pernicious consequences of these laws is related to the deportation of LPRs—noncitizens who have been granted legalization and have the right to remain in the United States on a permanent basis, so long as they do not violate provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act. Prior to 1996, judges were permitted to exercise discretion in deportation cases. When deciding whether or not to deport a person who had been convicted of a crime, judges could consider the immigrant's rehabilitation, remorse, family support, and ties (or lack thereof) to their country of origin. The 1996 laws took away the judge's discretionary power in aggravated felony cases. Congress created the idea of an aggravated felony as part of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 to provide harsh provisions for noncitizens convicted of murder and drugs and arms trafficking. The expansion of the definition of aggravated felonies in the 1996 laws meant that this category now includes any crime of violence or theft offense for which the term of imprisonment is at least 1 year, illicit drug offenses, as well as other violations (Kanstroom, 2000).

Since the passage of the 1996 laws, there have been several court cases where petitioners have sought to narrow the category of offenses that would qualify as an aggravated felony. A notable victory for immigrant advocates was the *Moncrieffe* case, decided in April 2013, where it was found that possession of a small amount of marijuana that does not involve distribution for remuneration is not an aggravated felony.¹ This case was decided after I had completed my fieldwork, and thus the deportees I interviewed were not able to benefit from this decision.

Case Selection

The present study is based on interviews with 30 Jamaican deportees—all of whom were LPRs in the United States. I chose Jamaica as the site for this study because the migration stream from Jamaica is long-standing, meaning that many Jamaicans are likely to have spent large portions of their lives in the United States, and the majority

of Jamaicans in the United States are LPRs. Among Jamaican deportees, 95% are men; 28% arrived in the United States before age 16; and the average period of residence in the United States is 12 years. The majority of criminal deportees were expelled on drug charges, and very few had committed violent crimes (Headley, 2005). My sample reflects these demographics.

Jamaican LPRs are particularly likely to be deported. About 10% of LPR deportees between 1997 and 2006 were Jamaican, even though Jamaicans make up less than 2% of all LPRs in the United States.² Most of the Jamaican deportees I interviewed had no intention of returning to their countries of origin prior to being deported. All of them left family members in the United States, including children, parents, and spouses. They had lived in the United States for extended periods of time: the shortest stay was 8 years and the longest 38 years.

Methodology and Site Description

In Kingston, I used snowball sampling and key informants to find interviewees. I employed two research assistants, both of whom were deportees, to help me find interviewees. As deportees, my two research assistants were ideal key informants and experts. Their insider status made it relatively easy for them to locate an otherwise hard-to-find population and gave me insight with regard to some of the deportees' experiences. In addition, having grown up in Kingston, my research assistants could explain the interviewees' backgrounds to me, such as the quality of schools they had attended and the class composition of the neighborhoods where they were raised. In addition, I interviewed three people in the Trenchtown neighborhood of Kingston through local personal contacts, and two in Ocho Rios through a deportee contact there. I also interviewed two people who introduced themselves to me, because they could tell I was from the United States and they wanted to chat with an American. Using snowball sampling and a variety of points of entry, I was able to obtain a sample that closely resembles the overall deportee population in Jamaica. Although the deportee population in Jamaica is nearly all male, I interviewed one woman. I spent a total of 6 months in Jamaica between December 2008 and July 2009. The interviews ranged in length from 30 minutes to more than 2 hours, and were all audio-recorded. I had all of the audiotapes transcribed by a Jamaican university student to ensure the correct spelling of any patois or local slang. I checked each transcription for accuracy then coded the data for specific and emergent themes. For this article, I paid particular attention to the discussion of citizenship and belonging in the interviews.

The Citizenship of Aliens

Interviews with Jamaican deportees render it clear that a sense of belonging to the United States is not limited to U.S. citizens. The Jamaican deportees I interviewed often felt as if they belonged in the United States. They built lives in the United States—many were married and most had children. Their parents and siblings became U.S. citizens. Many deportees protested their deportation on the grounds that their

family members were all U.S. citizens. Another discursive strategy deportees used was to point out that the United States is their home because of the ties they built there. These deportees appealed to notions of *jus nexi*—where citizenship would be based on authentic connections to a society, developed through social, cultural, and economic participation in society (Shachar, 2009).

Familial ties were a central reason deportees cited when arguing they belonged in the United States. Hazel was the only female former LPR I interviewed. Hazel, who had three children born in the United States, was deported after being convicted of a drug offense. Hazel told me,

I deserve to go back. I didn't kill anybody. I didn't rob anybody. I did commit a crime, but I did my time. Allow me to at least travel and see my kids. They all are American; that makes me a citizen too because they were all born there; none of my children were born here [in Jamaica].

In Hazel's account, we can see how deportation makes national borders more meaningful. When borders separate a mother from her children, their rigidity becomes heightened. Hazel provides two reasons she should be permitted to return to the United States: (1) her crime [illicit drug possession] was not serious; and 2) her children are U.S. citizens. She believes her children's U.S. citizenship "makes [her] a citizen too."

Lamar also made similar claims. Lamar was an LPR. His grandmother, both of his parents, and his four children are all U.S. citizens. He explained,

I grew up in the United States. Everything I learned was from over there. All my children, my mother and father, everyone is there. They should look into cases like that. And say, this man should be able to stay, maybe keep an eye on him or whatever, go to his parole officer or whatever. If you have your immediate family over there, you should be able to stay. Because, they are all citizens. I am like a citizen too because my parents are citizens.

Similar to Hazel, Lamar says that he is "like a citizen" because his family members are citizens. Lamar feels as though his deportation was unjust. He told me,

The ones that deserve to stay over there should stay. You know . . . you grew up over there so why should you come back to where you were born? All of your roots are over there cause your mother and father are still over there. In my case, that's what it is.

Lamar believes he deserves to stay in the United States because of his family ties there. He uses a language of deservingness, rights, belonging, and even citizenship, even though he has no legal claim to territorial belonging. When Floya Anthias (2008) writes of how our sense of belonging is heightened through strategies of exclusion, she was not referring to the literal sense of exclusion that occurs in the context of deportation. However, we can see how Lamar's discourse of belonging became salient because of his deportation. What is notable in these interviews is that deportees use the language of citizenship to make these claims. Feeling like a citizen, however, is not

sufficient grounds to contest deportation. The only sure-fire way to avoid deportation is to be a legal citizen.

Deportation was also very harsh for Victor, introduced in the beginning of the article. Victor told me he used to “sit in [his] room and stress the hell out” when he was deported. Arriving in Brooklyn at age 4 and spending his entire life there, Victor developed a deep sense of belonging to his community, even though he was not a citizen of the United States.

Victor believes he did not deserve to be deported. He feels he belongs in Brooklyn both because he grew up there and also because he perceives that the only people in the world who care about him live there. He explained,

It is not good to live in a place for so many years, to live and have family that loves you, and make sure that you all right and then to come here. You are a person that used to work and you earn your own dollar. Then you're here. . . . What are you going to do? . . . I have a woman that loves me in America. I've been with her since she was 17 and I was 18. Now, I'm 31. . . . I have my daughter. I have my mother. I have my brothers. I have my sisters. I have my uncles. What the hell am I doing here?

Victor wants to return to America. He told me he would travel to the United States clandestinely if he could, even though that would mean he would live there without papers. For Victor, what is most important is that he is able to live near people who care about him. Victor claims he belongs in the United States because of his family and social ties there. Like many other deportees, he perceives that no one in Jamaica cares if he lives or dies.

These deportees made claims to the United States based on their relationship to their families, friends, and communities there. Their lack of similar ties to Jamaica makes them feel lost and out of place in the land of their birth. Their stories show that one can experience several types of belonging without formal citizenship status. Moreover, they show how important the right to territorial belonging can be for those who feel a strong sense of belonging. Their citizenship claims are based on their contributions to society and family ties to the United States. They made claims to legal citizenship on the basis of their sense of belonging.

These data provide support for the contention that alienage is not significant in the lives of many denizens. As Schuck (1997) argues, there is little difference between LPRs and citizens. Although published just after the passage of the 1996 laws, Schuck (1997) is careful to point out that noncriminal LPRs are the only ones who are safe from deportation, not criminal LPRs. What this argument misses is that many LPRs who are deported do not consider themselves criminals. They often see themselves as victims of circumstance who happened to be convicted of breaking the law. They may know that criminal LPRs can be deported, but insofar as they view themselves as law-abiding citizens, they do not see themselves as deportable. For these deportees, formal exclusion from the polity was not important until it meant that they could be removed from the communities and families to which they felt they belonged. Even though Jamaicans in the United States have been disproportionately affected by the 1996

laws, none of the former LPRs I interviewed worried about the possibility of deportation until deportation threat became a reality.

The Significance of Citizenship and Alienage

Bosniak (2006) posits that alienage should be added to the list of key social identities that affect our lives such as race, gender, class, religion, and sexual orientation. However, my interviews with deported LPRs reveal that alienage is not always salient in the lives of non-U.S. citizens in the way that these other social identities are. Prior research with undocumented immigrants makes it clear that living without papers is a significant aspect of the identity of undocumented youth who grow up in the United States (Abrego, 2013; Enriquez, 2013; Gonzales, 2011). Living without papers presents great obstacles—youth are unable to obtain driver's licenses, enroll in university, or secure legal employment. In contrast, LPRs have papers that allow them to live legally in the United States. Alienage is clearly distinct from illegality as denizens face few obstacles to achieving a sense of belonging.

The fact that LPRs felt a strong sense of belonging to the United States raises the question of why they did not seek out legal citizenship. I find that, somewhat ironically, they did not seek out citizenship because alienage was not a salient aspect of most of their lives. The fact that they felt a sense of belonging in the United States was a disincentive in terms of seeking out legal citizenship.

Never Got Around To It

Most deportees I spoke with told me that they thought about naturalization but never got around to it. Chris, for example, moved to the United States in 1969, when he was 16 years old. Barely out of high school, Chris married and had three children. They were living together in Brooklyn in 2006 when Chris had trouble with the law. A neighbor stole a stereo system from his apartment. Chris confronted him about the theft, and they got into an altercation. The neighbor pulled out a knife. Chris wrestled the knife from him, and stabbed him. Despite his claims to self-defense, Chris was convicted of assault and was sentenced to 1 year in jail. Chris's conviction of a violent crime that carried a sentence of 1 year in jail became an aggravated felony under immigration laws. Thus, after serving 8 months of his sentence, he was released from Riker's Island Jail, only to be taken directly to immigration detention. He spent 5 months in a detention facility in Texas and was deported.

When he was deported, Chris had been in the United States for 38 years, was married to a U.S. citizen, and had three U.S.-born children. Chris had not been back to visit Jamaica the entire time he was in the United States, and had not maintained ties with the land of his birth. Chris was an LPR in the United States and had been eligible for citizenship for decades. I asked Chris why he never applied for citizenship. He told me,

I don't know. I don't even know what to say to you. Because many times, many, many a time, my wife, my friends, my cousins, my aunts, . . . told me to go and apply for citizenship. And [they] just couldn't get me there honestly.

Chris watched his family members apply for and receive naturalization. His family members suggested to him that he should seek out naturalization. However, it was not important enough to him for him to find the time and money to do it. He now regrets not naturalizing—because his failure to naturalize means he must live apart from his wife and three children. For the 38 years he lived in the United States, however, his inability to vote or participate in the formal political polity held little importance to him. While living in the United States, citizenship was not important to Chris because of the rights it would grant him; it only became important when his lack of citizenship meant he would be separated from his home and family. As Chris led a law-abiding life, he never anticipated that he could be convicted of a crime and subsequently deported.

Chris's response was similar to many other deportees who had spent years in the United States. I asked Delroy, another LPR, why he did not naturalize. He told me his green card said "permanent resident," so he thought that was sufficient. He told me, "America is home. . . . I was born in Jamaica, but that's a long time ago." According to Delroy, having a green card led to "complacency" as he did not see a need to seek out citizenship. After living in the United States for 28 years, he felt "Americanized." Delroy was later deported after being convicted of domestic violence, which made him realize that although he felt "Americanized" after decades of living in the United States, technically, he belonged in Jamaica.

I asked Lamar, introduced above, why he never applied for citizenship if he felt so attached to the United States.

At the time I thought it was okay being that I was [an LPR] 'cause I could travel. But if it were serious times like now—I would have applied for citizenship long ago. The opportunity never presented itself. I thought it was all right to be a permanent resident.

When Lamar lived in the United States, he thought it was sufficient to be an LPR. His deportation, however, made him see the importance of legal citizenship. Although he felt "like a citizen," he was not a U.S. citizen. Lamar and Hazel, like other Jamaican deportees, felt as if they belonged in the United States because of their family ties there. Lamar was deported in 2004, 31 years after he had moved to the United States and 7 years after the implementation of the 1996 laws. Nevertheless, he never made it a priority to seek out naturalization.

Other deportees gave similar reasons for never naturalizing. Elmer told me "It didn't dawn on me." Peter, like many others, was aware that you could be deported after committing a crime, but did not see himself getting on the wrong side of the law. As a law abiding "citizen," deportation seemed unlikely. As Peter said, "I worked and got along like any average person. I wasn't really worried about the fact that I might get deported one day for whatever reason. I never thought it would happen." Roy also never thought he would get deported, although, when I asked, he cited financial barriers as the primary reason he never sought citizenship.

Well, that is a big question. I don't have a reason. I ask myself that big question all the time. You see, when you are caught up with work and work, it takes away some of your time. I was the only one working and bringing in the money. The money was tight. To

apply for citizenship is costly. My wife was a stay at home mom. We were struggling financially. But, still I had enough time to get it, over 20 years.

The daily pressures of life superseded the perceived need to seek out citizenship for these men. Being a citizen of Jamaica and not the United States was not salient in their daily lives. It was only deportation that made them realize the importance of their failure to formalize their relationship with the U.S. government.

For these deported LPRs their lack of U.S. citizenship became an exclusion mechanism that prevented them from having territorial rights in the United States. This exclusion mechanism, however, was only made visible when they faced deportation. Prior to that moment, they rarely, if ever, thought about their alienage. Victor—introduced in the beginning of this article—told me, “I knew people that got deported, but I never thought I would get deported.” Even Victor, who was involved in the underground economy, did not seem himself as deportable. Thus, it is not surprising that the other LPRs discussed here, who generally led law-abiding lives, did not think they were deportable.

One deportee, O’Ryan, applied for citizenship, but his application was too late. His case is instructive because it shows that applying is not enough. To avoid deportation, you need to go through the long and expensive process of naturalization. Legally, the question of citizenship is dichotomous. Either you are a U.S. citizen or you are not. As Motomura (2006, p. 142) argues, immigration laws have also changed to make LPR status similar to other legal statuses: “The line that really matters is becoming the line that divides all citizens from all noncitizens.” This is clear in O’Ryan’s story.

O’Ryan went to the United States as a small child. He applied for citizenship when his green card expired in 1996. His mother and cousin applied at the same time. His mother’s citizenship went through, and then his cousin’s. When he heard theirs had gone through, he went to check on his citizenship. The citizenship office told him he needed to redo his fingerprints. He finally received the letter saying he should go to the swearing-in ceremony in 2001, five years later.

However, O’Ryan had been arrested a few weeks earlier on a drug charge, and was in jail when his letter arrived. Thus, at the age of 25, O’Ryan was deported to a country he barely knew. This bureaucratic delay meant O’Ryan was deported from the land he considers home. O’Ryan told me: “That’s where I grew up. That’s where I know everybody. That’s home to me.” Before being deported, O’Ryan had never considered leaving New York City. He explained,

I wasn’t thinking about ever leaving New York. . . . This was like a wakeup call to me that nothing in life is guaranteed . . . but I know that one thing is guaranteed that no matter where I go or what I do, I’m born in Jamaica. I am a Jamaican . . . and I just gotta accept that. I keep hearing from my family that you’re in Jamaica. You need to start thinking about Jamaica.

Being born in Jamaica makes O’Ryan Jamaican. This may seem obvious, but it took deportation for him to realize and accept his natural-born citizenship. And, it is not an easy realization. For O’Ryan, New York is home.

I did everything there. I went to school there. . . . Everything that happened to me for the first time happened to me in New York. I have no experiences of Jamaica. I hate saying it, but all my experiences of Jamaica so far have basically been bad. . . . Every time I try to get myself started out here, I get shut down. Every time I try to open a door, somebody slams it in my face.

In New York, O’Ryan has his daughter, his former fiancé, his mother, his cousins, and his friends. Coming to terms with the fact that the land of his birth is where he officially belongs is no easy task. In the United States, O’Ryan had access to the cultural and social rights he needed to feel like a full member of society. He did not seek U.S. citizenship so that he could feel as if he belonged; he sought it to ensure he could stay in the United States. In Jamaica, O’Ryan has the political right to vote and the legal right to territorial belonging. However, he does not feel as if he belongs in Jamaica, where he has only weak family ties and feels out of place.

For most deportees, alienage was not significant in their daily lives in the United States; instead, they often feel out of place in their land of citizenship—Jamaica. As Lamar explained, they thought being an LPR was “all right.” Despite their status as denizens of the United States and citizens of Jamaica, each of these deportees experienced cultural and social belonging to their communities in the United States, and a lack of belonging in Jamaica. A close look at their statements also reveals that their primary attachments are to their families and communities—not to the state. O’Ryan and Victor spoke about feeling home in New York or Brooklyn. Hazel spoke about wanting to be with her children. Their sense of belonging is highly localized.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article contributes to the scholarly discussion on the meanings of citizenship, alienage, and belonging through analyses of the narratives of Jamaican LPRs who have been deported. These stories render it evident that LPRs’ sense of belonging to the United States is rooted in their families and communities. The strong sense of belonging that Jamaican deportees feel to the United States makes it clear that alienage was not a significant factor in most of their daily lives. Concomitantly, their lack of legal citizenship seemed to have little importance. Remarkably, the reason that alienage was not significant is because they had access to other forms of citizenship. They had access to social citizenship—the rights and responsibilities they had in terms of providing for their families. They had access to cultural citizenship—feelings of belonging to their communities and families. With access to cultural and social citizenship, these deportees did not perceive a pressing need to seek out formal, legal citizenship. They also had access to civil and legal rights. When they faced criminal charges in the United States, they were granted access to the same rights as U.S. citizens. It was only in deportation proceedings where they felt their rights were abrogated.

Undocumented migrants encounter obstacles to full inclusion that prevent them from feeling like citizens of the United States (Abrego, 2013; Enriquez, 2013;

Gonzales, 2011) and make them more vulnerable to exploitation (de Genova, 2002). Like undocumented migrants, LPRs are also deportable. However, because LPRs do not experience the barriers associated with illegality, neither their alienage nor their deportability are significant in their daily lives.

Deportation is an exercise of state power that can be enacted exclusively on noncitizens. For LPRs to be deported, they first have to be convicted of a crime. Many of these deportees saw themselves as law-abiding “citizens” and permanent residents of the United States. For them, alienage only was a category of exclusion in the most literal sense—their alienage enabled their deportation. Prior to that moment, alienage was generally not a salient part of their lives. Ironically, had alienage been more significant, had their alienage prevented their social inclusion, they may have been more inclined to seek out legal citizenship, which, in turn, could have prevented their deportation.

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1. *Moncrieffe v. Holder*, Attorney General. Certiorari to the United States Court of Appeals for The Fifth Circuit No. 11-702. Argued October 10, 2012. Decided April 23, 2013. Retrieved from http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/12pdf/11-702_9p6b.pdf
2. International Human Rights Law Clinic, University of California, Berkeley, School of Law. (2010, March 10). *In the Child's Best Interest? The Consequences of Losing a Lawful Immigrant Parent to Deportation.* Retrieved from http://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/Human_Rights_report.pdf

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