Citizenship Capital

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the citizenship dimension of transnational inequalities. It is clear that some citizenships offer great advantages while others are liabilities for the individual, and the aim of this present article is to develop a conceptualisation of citizenship and inequality, in order to be able to assess and compare them. For this purpose, elements of Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology are utilized. The argument is that citizenship can be thought of as a form of capital in this Bourdieusian sense – that is, as a resource with which individuals are more or less endowed, and which impacts on people’s transnational social positions, their capacities for action, their strategies and perceptions. The main contribution is to develop this idea, which is referred to as “citizenship capital”. Its usefulness is demonstrated by considering its interaction with economic capital for shaping positions in transnational social space.

KEYWORDS

Citizenship; capital; transnational; inequality; Bourdieu

1. Introduction

A few years back, Swedish Save the Children ran a fundraising campaign called The Lottery of Life. Along with advertising posters and video clips, the campaign featured an interactive internet site with a carnival wheel of all countries in the world by population size. The participant was encouraged to spin the wheel in order to imagine being born anew. When the wheel stopped, she was informed of her new country along with all the risks and hazards that faced children growing up in that country. If she for instance drew Sudan, she was informed that in Sudan millions of children die before the age of five, many are recruited as child soldiers, many grow up without learning how to read, and the risk of suffering natural disasters and famines is very high. The ambition was to make the advanced industrial country audience empathise with the poor and vulnerable of this world, by making them reflect on how consequential yet arbitrary is one’s place of birth, and marvel at their own luck at having been born in a safe and prosperous country (see Figure 1).

What I find interesting about this campaign is that it resonates with a sense that there is something deeply troubling about citizenship: that it is of such a momentous importance for the individual’s life prospects yet is so accidentally distributed. As we all know, citizenship is
overwhelmingly conferred at birth, and thus outside one’s control, merits or desert. The campaign is also fascinating in that it invites its (rich world) audience to consider their own position and relate it to that of the less fortunate, and thus connect their own private situation of privilege to the situation of destitute individuals far away. It thereby hints at the existence of a transnational system of inequalities, which stratifies individuals along the dimension of citizenship, and of which the audience is expected to be on some level aware. Membership in different states signifies sharply different levels of material benefits, political voice, legal protection, the ability to move across state borders and much more.

It is the aim of this article to explore this particular transnational and hierarchical system of inequalities and to develop a structured way of analysing it. This is something that has so far received very little scholarly attention in social theory. In contrast, there is a larger ongoing discussion on the ethics of contemporary citizenship boundaries (Carens 2016; Song 2016; Näsström 2007; Miller 2016; De Schutter and Ypi 2015). Some scholars have in this context investigated citizenship in terms of its unequal and unfair distribution, and they thereby recognise citizenship’s stratifying dimension (Shachar 2009, 2017; Carens 1987, 2013; Benhabib 2004). I have been influenced by these authors, but in contrast to them I do not in this article approach citizenship as foremost a moral problem (although I agree with them that it is). I instead address it as a politico-sociological system of stratification, a dimension of structural power which has curiously escaped attention (Guzzini 2013; Barnett and Duvall 2005). My position is that citizenship needs to be put squarely at the centre of scholarly endeavours in order for us to adequately grasp and address systems of power and inequality in a globalised world. I thereby join forces with those that recently have begun to approach the hierarchies of citizenship from a politico-sociological perspective (Castles 2005; Harpaz 2019; Bauböck 2019; Joppke 2019).

More precisely, I seek to understand the broader patterns of how state membership becomes a resource or a liability for the individual. For this purpose, I use elements of Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology. Bourdieu analysed social positionings of various kinds in analogy with economic relations. The volume and composition of different kinds of capital – economic, social, cultural and so on – determines a person’s position in social space and both enables and limits her set of possible strategies of action (Bourdieu 1986). Bourdieu himself was primarily concerned with domestic social relations, and thus never paid attention to the instrumental value of citizenship, which is the centre of attention here. My argument is that citizenship can be thought of as a form of capital in the Bourdiesian sense – that is, as a resource with which individuals are more or less endowed, and which impacts on people’s social positionings and thus on their possible spaces of action.
The main contribution of the article is to develop this idea, which I will refer to as “citizenship capital”. By so doing I want to contribute to the emerging scholarship that makes use of Bourdieu’s insights in order to make sense of matters of international relations (Bigo 2011; Adler-Nissen 2013; Leander 2011; Guiraudon 2013; Cohen 2018; Kauppi 2018; Sapiro 2018; Schmidt-Wellenburg and Bernhard 2020).2

An advantage of the concept citizenship capital is that it allows us to analyse social positionings between individuals across borders. It constitutes an independent dimension of transnational inequality, which together with the patterns of distribution of other forms of capital (economic, ethnic, social and so on) offers a forceful tool for assessing and comparing social positions between individuals and groups across state boundaries. It therefore provides one response to the question that scholars of social inequality have posed, namely: how to readjust our analyses of inequality to a globalised world so as to avoid the trap of methodological nationalism? (Beck 2007a; Fraser 2010).

I ground my argument in empirical data and make use of existing research from within sociology, international relations and economics. I also consult publications from sources that are not primarily academic – like the Quality of Nationality Index and other resources from the “residence and citizenship planning” industry (Kochenov and Lindeboom 2019; Henley & Partners 2017; Kälin 2016, 2019; Kochenov 2017). But the arguments that I develop are conceptual and theoretical rather than empirical. My intention is to identify a patterned system of inequalities at a highly generalised level – the globe – which of course precludes a meticulous attention to empirical detail.

The next section briefly introduces the topic in relation to previous research. After that, I present Bourdieu’s social theory, focusing in particular on the notions capital and social space. I then turn to citizenship capital directly: I argue that, as a rule, plural citizenship is more advantageous than mono-citizenship, and I also identify some qualitative dimensions along which citizenships can be compared. In the subsequent section I demonstrate the usefulness of the concept for mapping positions in transnational social space, and I particularly focus on the combination of citizenship capital and economic capital. A short summary concludes the article.

2. Citizenship and inequality

In what sense does citizenship constitute a type of inequality? This question requires a bit of explanation since it is not usually approached as such. One reason for this inattention is the strong tradition in citizenship studies to focus on its emotional and non-material dimensions. For instance, the linkages between citizenship and themes such as identity, attachment, loyalty and obligation have been thoroughly investigated and discussed. As important as these issues certainly are, they leave aside questions of transnational power and inequality. Another likely reason for this negligence is the strong association between citizenship and political equality, which has also left its mark on research foci. From an internal, domestic perspective, “citizen” appears as the opposite of “subject” precisely because it signals formal equality (Cruikshank 1999). After decolonisation, citizenship in this sense is now the global norm of state-citizen relations (Hindess 2002). A third

2Nationality’ is often used in international legal discourse, but I have chosen to use the term “citizenship” throughout (except for quotes).
reason is “state thought”, i.e. that the categories of thought associated with the state system have had a strong hold on our perceptions, so that we have not been able to envision this as a form of inequality (Bourdieu 1994; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1993, 40). To sum up, it seems reasonable to assume that citizenship’s emotional dimension, its formal equality and the strength of state thought have obscured its hierarchical character. The effect of this has been that country citizenships appear as merely and neutrally different, rather than also unequal (Castles 2005).

To return to the question which began the preceding paragraph, in what ways can we claim that citizenships are unequal rather than just different? In order to respond to this question, we first need to specify what we mean by inequality. Göran Therborn explains that inequality is a particular form of difference, which has three distinctive characteristics (Therborn 2009). Inequality is always vertical, he asserts, while difference may be horizontal. Inequality also violates a moral norm of equality between people, while difference may be only about taste and categorisation. Finally, inequalities are in principle abolishable while differences may not be so. “Thus, inequalities are avoidable, morally unjustified, hierarchical differences” (Therborn 2009, 20). Then, does the distribution of citizenship fulfil these criteria? In theory, that is not necessarily the case. If gross international disparities did not exist, then it would make sense to speak of citizenship in terms of horizontal difference only. But given the current situation, citizenship does indeed seem to be an inequality in Therborn’s terms. It is a manmade institution, and therefore in principle changeable. It expresses and reinforces an ordering of people which is hierarchical rather than vertical, if one compares life chances that comes with different citizenships. Moreover, citizenship is conferred at birth in a manner which challenges ideas about contract and merit as basis for social positions. Ayelet Shachar describes it as a “birthright lottery” (Shachar 2009). Given its great impact on people’s lives, along with its arbitrary mode of acquisition, it is difficult to defend ethically. Joseph H. Carens has famously written that: “Citizenship in Western liberal democracies is the modern equivalent of feudal privilege – an inherited status that greatly enhances one’s life chances”. And, therefore, “Like feudal birthright privileges, restrictive citizenship is hard to justify when one thinks about it closely” (Carens 1987, 252).

The way I approach inequality in this article can be characterised as individual and transnational. “Individual” as what interests me is the comparison between positions as it plays out on the level of persons rather than collectives (such as classes or states), while “transnational” signifies that I investigate citizenship as a dimension of inequality that extends across state boundaries.

A delimitation of the study is that I focus on between-country rather than within-country inequalities, not denying that the latter are significant, too. In a domestic population there are de jure differentiations between full citizens, denizens, undocumented migrants and so on (Bosniak 2017). Between full citizens there are also de facto differences in the extent to which groups have access to differing levels of rights and freedoms. Various forms of class-based, gender-based and ethnicity-based discrimination makes citizenship unequal in practice (cf. Castles 2005; Somers 2008). While the importance of these issues is undeniable, the aim of this article is limited to transnational comparison between the possession of different formal citizenships.

3In contrast to, for instance, age difference.
My approach is therefore quite different from the classic research on inequality, which has long been hampered by methodological nationalism in either one of two forms (cf. Beck 2007b). Sociologists of class have tended to concentrate on relations of inequality within separate nation states, although the territorial borders of the enquiry have not always been acknowledged (Goldthorpe and Hope 1974; Wright 1979). Such scholarship, prevalent in the West, “turns its attention exclusively inwards and thereby excludes transnational or global inequalities from the field of vision of the relatively privileged” (Beck 2007a, 689). International relations scholars, for their part, have studied inequalities between states in the international system, and have tended to overlook the position of classes or individuals (e.g. Donnelly 2006; Towns and Rumelili 2017). This is also the approach that undergirds the analysis creating the many varied country rankings, whether according to Gini coefficient, GDP per capita, Human Development Index or something else (Kelley 2017).

Many phenomena that we observe today – the rise of the “one-percent”, the increase of undocumented workers, the upsurge in forced and voluntary migration, the persistence of undocumented workers – expose the inadequacy of these classic approaches to inequality (Beck 2007a; Squire 2016). Scholars have therefore searched for other ways of investigating inequalities, transcending the two forms of state-centrism. World-systems theory that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s was an early attempt in this direction, as it saw states’ and elites’ roles in the capitalist world economy as the basis of international power relations (Wallerstein 1974; Dunaway 2003). The more recent literature on the “transnational capitalist class” tends to focus more specifically on economic globalisation and what types of elites that it engenders (Skair 2001; Carroll 2010). The other end of the class spectrum has been the subject for studies of the “precariat”. They find that the neoliberal restructuring of labour markets and social security systems has heightened the level of felt insecurity among broad layers of populations in many countries. Although unlikely at the moment, this shared vulnerability could in theory form the basis for identification and struggle of new and emerging classes (Standing 2011; Fraser 2010; Näström and Kalm 2014; Masquelier 2019). Yet other researchers have investigated different dimensions of domination. Intersectionality scholars have explored how vulnerabilities are created through the co-existence of power structures related to, among other things, class, race, gender and sexual orientation (Ackerly and True 2008; Krizsan, Skjeie, and Squires 2012). Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have theorised the relationship of domination and resistance between what they describe as the decentred categories “empire” and “multitude” (Hardt and Negri 2000). Mark Duffield has argued that access to social security constitutes the mail biopolitical dividing line between the haves and the have-nots, which he conceives of as insured and non-insured populations (Duffield 2008). And, finally, many scholars claim that the freedom to move across borders is a crucial stratifying dimension, particularly important in an era of globalisation (Bauman 1998; Weiss 2005; Mau 2010; Hobolth 2014; Neumayer 2006; Papadopoulos, Stephenson, and Tsianos 2008; Kalm 2012).4

4The residence and citizenship planning firm Henley & Partners publishes The Henley Passport Index, an annual ranking of countries according to the number of countries their citizens can travel to without a visa. See https://www.henleypassportindex.com.
My research ambition is to understand the relative value of citizenships. From this follows that it is the instrumental aspect of citizenship that concerns me here, and not the sentimental and emotional significance which has so far dominated citizenship studies (see also Harpaz 2019; Bauböck 2019; Joppke 2019; Castles 2005). It also means that I turn the traditional research on state, power and population in international relations upside-down. Classic IR realist writers saw the population as a core power resource *for the state*, and discussed its relative value in terms of population size, level of education and strength of national loyalty (Morgenthau 1948). In contrast, what concerns me here is how state membership becomes a resource (or a liability) *for its citizens*.

### 3. Bourdieu on capital forms and social space

In developing my idea of citizenship capital, my main theoretical source of inspiration is Pierre Bourdieu’s social theory. Instead of trying to do justice to that theoretical universe in its entirety, I choose to draw on two particular concepts in my empirical analysis – capital and social space – that are of particular relevance for my purposes. This strategy is mimetic rather than exegetic in its relation to the theoretical originator, as has proven fruitful in other contexts as well (Wacquant 2018, 12).

Bourdieu referred to his own position as “constructivist structuralism”. He thereby wanted to distance himself from objectivism, which tends to deduce all actions from structure, as well as from subjectivism, which reduces structures to observable interactions. His research focus was on relations between positions, where the positions were defined by the distribution of relevant resources. It is relations that shape the room of maneuver for the agents that occupy these positions, that impacts their perceptions of themselves and the world, that form their cultural tastes and preferences, and that makes their actions intelligible (Bourdieu 1989). It is hence these objective structures that social science should strive to grasp, and these “are irreducible to the interactions in which they manifest themselves” (Bourdieu 1989, 17). Research should strive to account both for the materiality of these relations and for people’s perceptions thereof, including their embodied and unconscious dimensions – the habitus (Bourdieu 1989). In Bourdieu’s version, constructivism is thus something different and more encompassing than in most IR constructivism.

Bourdieu strongly opposed the distinction between economic and non-economic spheres of actions (or fields). This fundamental social and intellectual construction emerged with modernity and the gradual differentiation of societies, and it has resulted in an incomplete understanding of how societies function and how domination occurs. The very idea that there exists a delimited economic sphere, in which self-interest and profit maximisation reign, implicitly defines the other, “non-economic”, spheres as disinterested and driven by totally different agent motives. We have therefore been prevented from grasping power struggles in the spheres where purportedly disinterested goals – “art for art’s sake” and “pure theory” – are the utmost markers of power and status (Bourdieu

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5Hans J. Morgenthau explained that without a large population, a state could not achieve success in war-making nor industrial production. But the population needed not only to be large in number, a successful state also required that its “national character” and “morale” was supportive of its foreign policy ambitions (Morgenthau 1948, 91–104).

6Bourdieu’s widening of constructivist thought, away from intellectual reductionism, has been important for the “practice turn” in recent IR (Bigo 2011; Cohen 2018).
But Bourdieu’s analysis was very different from Gary Becker and others in the same vein, who extended a narrow economic analysis of human motives to the spheres of education, marriage and so on. When Bourdieu talks of a “general science of the economy of practices” (of which “the economic sphere” is but one example), it is not economic reductionism but a full sociological account that he strives toward (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 118). When he makes use of an economic vocabulary, as in “capital”, “stakes” and “investments” he therefore means something quite different than we are accustomed to. His theory provides tools for a power analysis of citizenship. More precisely, it enables us to grasp citizenship as a resource (capital) which is enclosed into a system of global social stratification (social space), and hence to capture power both at the micro and macro levels (Guzzini 2013). The two levels are inseparable, since what we seek to grasp is relations of domination between positions that are defined by their varying endowment of capital. Here, I present the theoretical concepts one after the other.

*Capital* can be defined as “different sorts of resources that social agents can mobilize in pursuit of their projects and which, on account of their value, agents will tend to seek to pursue and accumulate” (Crossley 2005, 29). In contrast with Marxist theory, economic capital is here seen as merely one among many types of capital, and we need to understand them all in order to comprehend social relations and dynamics (Bourdieu 1986, 242). The generic forms are – besides economic capital – cultural and social. They are transmitted in different ways and with differing levels of visibility (Bourdieu 1986, 253). All individuals have a “portfolio” composed by a combination of different capital forms (economic, cultural etc.) at varying levels. Cultural capital has to do with education, but also with the tastes and cultural refinement that are inculcated in high society families. Social capital refers to durable networks and connections, and the recognition that comes with it (Bourdieu 1986, 243–250). There is also a nearly endless set of specialised capitals that are valued within the respective sub-fields that distinguish differentiated societies. Academic capital is of high currency in the academic field, religious capital in the religious field, artistic capital in the artistic field, and so on (Bourdieu 1993). Symbolic capital has a special status, as it has to do with others’ perceptions. It can be attached to any other form of capital when it is recognised as legitimate (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 119; Bourdieu 1992, 112–121). The different forms of capital can to some extent be converted into each other, as occurs when, for instance, one’s cultural capital proves advantageous in the academic field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 118). A particular process is when some form of capital, for instance economic, is transformed into symbolic capital and hence accepted as legitimate. This “social alchemy” secures recognition and enables further accumulation (Bourdieu 1992, 125–133).

Researchers inspired by Bourdieu have often focused their attention on identifying new fields in which bearers of different kinds of capital compete. This has been the case in IR as well (Kauppi 2018; Sapiro 2018; Go 2008; Schmidt-Wellenburg and Bernhard 2020). Authors writing within the context of the EU have identified several transnational fields, for instance a “field of in-security” (Bigo 2008) and a “field of Eurocracy” (Georgakakis and Rowell 2013). Then, one may ask, what is the field to which citizenship capital

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7In his later work, Bourdieu discussed a set of new capitals and fields when he explored the state (see Bourdieu 2014, 1994; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1993).
corresponds? The answer is that there is no such field. A field is not just any social configuration, but a very distinct one, identifiable by its level of autonomy, its entry costs, its particular doxa, and a whole range of other properties that citizenship lacks (Wacquant 2018, 10; Bourdieu 1993). Citizenship is not the kind of capital that only gets its value through a particular field, but a form of capital that appears absolutely decisive once we start comparing agent positions across borders. And as will be elaborated below, it has a crucial independent impact on people’s life chances, as well as on the perceptions that people have of their “place”, and what alternatives that are open to them.

This is to say that citizenship capital is a crucial asset in a transnational social space. Social space is the “mother category” in Bourdieu’s topological analysis of power – the primary category of which the field is only one, relatively rare, subtype (Wacquant 2018, 11). To Bourdieu, “the social world can be represented as a space (with several dimensions) constructed on the basis of principles of differentiation or distribution constituted by the set of properties active within the social universe in question, i.e. capable of conferring strength, power within that universe, on their holder” (1985, 723–724; Hardy 2012). Citizenship emerges as one of those “active properties” that confer power on agents when we focus on transnational social space, along with economic and other capital forms. In general terms, positions within social space are differentiated on basis of capital volume as well as capital combination. Each agent only occupies one position at the time, and this position is of varying distances from others (Bourdieu 1985).

Social spaces have several important dynamics. One is that it tends to correspond to objective, physical space. The agents that occupy positions close to each other do not constitute a “class” in the sense of shared consciousness, but they may live and work in physical proximity to each other, and are likely to have a similar conception of the world and their place within it. This is because, while “social space is not a physical space, it tends to realize itself in a more or less complete and accurate fashion in that space” (Bourdieu 2018, 108, emphasis in original; 2000, 134–135). At the domestic level, this can be observed in segregated housing and consumption patterns, at the transnational level in the citizenries inhabiting differently positioned states.

Another is that “The categories of perception of the social world are [...] the product of the internalization, the incorporation, of the objective structures of social space”. This in turn make people more likely to accept their place rather than protest against it. “The sense of one’s place, as a sense of what one can or cannot “permit oneself,” implies a tacit acceptance of one’s place, a sense of limits [...], or, which amounts to the same thing, a sense of distances, to be marked and kept, respected or expected” (Bourdieu 1985, 728). This is one of the reasons that hierarchies in social space tend to be regarded as self-evident and legitimate. Objective hierarchies are often turned into symbolic ones, which enables the continuation of relations of dominance (Bourdieu 1985, 731). And, in Bourdieu’s words, “All these traits contribute to increasing the specific weight of the place of birth” (2018, 112, emphasis in original) The spatial consequences of unequal capital endowment may indeed be huge:

Capital—in its various fundamental forms [...]—allows one to keep at a distance undesirable persons and things as well as to bring in closer desirable ones, thereby minimizing the expense (especially in time) necessary to appropriate them. Conversely, those who are deprived of capital are pushed away and held at a remove, either physically (relegated to distant locales or to places difficult to reach) or symbolically [...]. Lack of capital brings the experience of social finitude to a climax: it chains one, ties one down to a despised locale. At the other end,
possession of large amounts of capital ensures not only physical propinquity to scarce goods (through residence) but also the quasi-ubiquity made possible by access to advanced means of transportation and communication (Bourdieu 2018, 110).

4. Citizenship capital

It is no secret that our nationalities have a direct impact on our lifestyles and on our freedom to think independently, do business, and live longer, healthier, and more rewarding lives. Having a substandard nationality is thus a significant liability, with long-lasting implications for the whole life-project of the holder (Kochenov 2017, 3).

The quote above is from a text produced from within the residence and citizenship planning industry. I argue in this article that citizenship is a form of capital, through which people are positioned differently in transnational social space. It is deeply implicated in shaping transnational inequalities, and its material manifestations are experienced very differently if one’s level of citizenship capital is high or low. We may think of the different levels of ease through which one passes through border controls or take up residence in a foreign country, for instance. It also affects how a person is treated by state authorities, in her own country as well as when travelling abroad.

Moreover, it shapes habitus, for instance in the sense of attitudes towards one’s own position and that of others, such as refugees, migrants, and natives that one meet on holidays abroad. In those that are “rich” in citizenship capital, it may breed a certain arrogance towards those that are not. But it is equally possible that it leads to a form of paternalistic kindness in meetings with the other. A third possible reaction is a sense of guilt and uneasiness when one suddenly becomes aware of one’s privilege, and this may lead to a preference for socialising with others with the same level of citizenship capital. All these reactions are observable in tourist groups and expat communities. For those whose level of citizenship capital is lower, the attitudes towards the more fortunate (in this sense) may range from subservience and a sense of inferiority to revanchist resentment. For a select few of them, it becomes something that one can aspire to acquire, by entering the market in which citizenships are for sale (Dzankic 2019).

The capital forms that Bourdieu was concerned with are not ahistorical but gained importance with the emergence of modern differentiated societies, the rise of the modern state and the bourgeoisie. Citizenship capital is likewise bounded in time. A necessary condition was that the nation state form of governance was universalised across the globe. After the dissolution of empires and the end of colonialism, modern citizenship has become the reigning form of political membership (Hindess 2002). The relative value of citizenship for one’s life chances varies over time and between states, as we will see further below. One factor that makes citizenship capital a more important form of capital today than in earlier periods is its consequence for one’s ability to move across state borders. By way of contrast, we can consider the 1860–1914 period when borders were essentially open and passports usually not required (Strikwerda 1999). At that time, one’s particular citizenship was therefore less consequential for one’s ability to escape from a dire situation. Remembering Hirschman’s typology of choices of

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8For a qualification of the argument that the pre-World War I period was open to the mobility of people, see Fahrmeir, Faron, and Weil (2003), Hirota (2017) and Kalm and Lindvall (2019).
action in failing organisations – exit, loyalty and voice – it is the ability to exit that is crucial here (Hirschman 1970). Today, when borders are jealously guarded and different citizenships allow very different levels of cross-border mobility, citizenship capital has become increasingly important for one’s life chances.

4.1. Dimensions of citizenship capital

This section teases out what citizenship capital is composed by. I first propose that plural citizenship is more advantageous than mono-citizenship, and next explore the qualitative differences between citizenships in terms of their bundles of rights.

The great majority of the world’s population acquire their citizenship at birth, either through parentage (ius sanguinis) or place of birth (ius soli). Most do not change it, and many probably do not even think much about their citizenship status except when passing through passport controls at airports. But as migration has increased, it has become more common to acquire citizenship later in life through naturalisation (Orgad 2017; Janoski 2013). In naturalisation processes, the state – which is the greatest reserve of symbolic power – performs the act of consecrating the new citizen (cf. Bourdieu and Wacquant 1993, 39). She is then either required to give up her old citizenship or is allowed to keep it and thus get in possession of plural citizenship. The latter has become more common, as we will see below.

Not so terribly long ago, it was unthinkable to have plural citizenship. The Hague Convention of 1930 emphasised that single citizenship was crucial for interstate relations: “it is in the general interest of the international community to secure that all its members should recognize that every person should have a nationality and should have one nationality.” (quoted in Adler and Rubenstein 2000, 16, emphasis added). Competing claims over persons was a source of tension in a war-torn era, as were competing claims to territory (Spiro 2019, 3). Long into the post-1945 era was plural citizenship regarded with suspicion and associated with dubious loyalties and unreliability. Winds have changed, however, and it is a clear trend of the past decades that more and more states now permit plural citizenship (Harpaz and Mateos 2017).9 This is a striking norm change that deeply affect the organisation of states and the state system (Joppke 2019).

How can we explain this norm change? To some extent, plural citizenship has been the effect of states’ legal innovations to address the problem of statelessness (Weil 2011). But states have also found it economically advantageous to permit plural citizenship (Spiro 2017). It can be a way to attract investments by opening up routes for wealthy people to investor citizenship. Through such programmes, wealthy people can obtain an additional citizenship status in exchange for large donations (Dzankic 2019; Surak 2016; Shachar 2017). However, the largest share of people with dual citizenship are not among the extremely wealthy. Most come in possession of their second citizenship through marriage or long-time residence. Others enjoy privileged access to a certain citizenship due to ancestry (Orgad 2017; Spiro 2017; Kim 2019). In any case, at this point of the argument, it is the fact of plural citizenship that counts – not its reasons.

9Most countries in the Global North now permit dual citizenship, while most of those that do not are in the Global South. The pattern is however not absolute. A number of countries in Europe, for instance, only permit it with restrictions. For a visualization, see https://matadornetwork.com/read/mapped-countries-permit-forbid-multiple-citizenship/.
The possession of plural citizenships is an important factor for grasping the inequalities of citizenship (Spiro 2019; Harpaz 2019). Its utility does not increase indefinitely, but to have two or three substantially increases a person’s position compared to mono-citizenship. There are several reasons as to why this is relevant for citizenship capital, and they all have to do with increasing the individual’s options. In general, it holds that having more than one citizenship expands your options, compared to having only one, or, certainly, to not have anyone at all. Plural citizenship allows you to go venue-shopping when you plan your career, when you decide where to set up a business or where to go to university. You may use either one of your citizenships in order to get advantageous taxation or tuition fees, for instance (Spiro 2017). But a second citizenship may also increase your sense of security. Should there be an outbreak of war in one of your countries of citizenship, should the political institutions collapse, a pandemic break out or the national economy crash – then, having a second passport surely enables you to escape (Joppke 2019). Therefore, as is argued in the residence and citizenship planning industry: “The benefits are numerous but ultimately, possessing a second passport is equivalent to holding an insurance policy.” (Kälin 2016, 892). This insurance comes in the form of a guaranteed possibility to exit (Hirschman 1970).

Plural citizenship status therefore increase citizenship capital relative to mono-citizenship status. At the bottom end are stateless people, whose juridical status is defined through the absence of state membership. The Convention on Statelessness from 1954 reads “For the purpose of this Convention, the term “stateless person” means a person who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law” (Article 1.1). The stateless lack the fundamental protection by the state that its citizens enjoy (or, are supposed to enjoy), and this is the reason for their extreme vulnerability (Lori 2017; Kerber 2007; Foster and Lambert 2016).

So far, we have seen that ceteris paribus, plural citizenship is more advantageous than mono-citizenship. But to have one citizenship is better than to have none, i.e. to be stateless. ¹⁰ This statement holds in general.¹¹ We will now turn to the quality of the citizenship(s) that one holds. If we conceive of citizenship as a bundle of rights, we are theoretically able to compare their quality (cf. Macklin 2007). The different bundles of rights, that come with different citizenships, are clearly of varying instrumental value to the individual. I will discuss the rights one by one, along with some existing measurements.

We will begin by looking at the rights that are domestically relevant, that regulate the relationship between an individual and her state. The civil rights component includes individuals’ freedom of thought, religion, speech etcetera, as well as basic protection and safety. Political rights include the right to vote and hold public office, along with the right to participate freely in civil society. There are several international indexes that measure civil and political rights, so as to allow comparisons between countries and over time. Freedom House is the most influential one when it comes to freedoms, while

¹⁰ I am mainly thinking of de jure statelessness here, since it seems to be the utter end point when we consider the number of citizenships one may possess. One should remember, though, that there are also people that live in a de facto statelessness situation of extreme precariousness – undocumented migrants are certainly among them (Lori 2017; Somers 2008).

¹¹ There are a few exceptions to this general rule. Some states, Australia and Denmark among them, denationalize plural citizens who have been found guilty of terror-related activities. In contrast, those who are found guilty of the same crimes, but that only possess, e.g. Australian or Danish citizenship are not denationalized (Spiro 2019; Macklin and Bauböck 2015). In such cases, plural citizenship increase vulnerability compared to mono-citizenship.
others measure levels of democracy and political rights – the most encompassing one is probably V-Dem. Peacefulness is measured by, for instance, the Uppsala Conflict Data Set and the Global Peace Index. *Social and economic rights* include the right to an adequate standard of living, to education, to housing, to health, to employment, to social security and so on. The economic component is measured in various ways, for instance in the World Bank figures on GDP. The Social Citizenship Indicator Program compares levels of social security, but is limited to the Global North. In contrast, the Human Development Index includes all countries in its measurement of life expectancy, education and per capita living.

We will now turn to the rights that are transnationally relevant, that accrue to the individual when she operates across borders. In a globalised world, the extent to which one’s citizenship allows one to move across borders is an important dimension of its value. *Mobility rights* is usually measured by the number of countries to which one can travel visa-free. This should be distinguished from *settlement rights*, which refers to the number of countries in which one can freely work and live. Measurements include the Henley Passport Index, the Arton Capital’s Global Passport Power Rank, and the Quality of Nationality Index (more about this below).

A sufficient measurement would have to include at least all the above-mentioned rights. At the moment no such measurement exists. The closest that we come is probably the just-mentioned Quality of Nationality Index (QNI) (Kochenov and Lindeboom 2019). The QNI comprises several elements: mobility rights and settlement rights, economic strength, human development and peace and stability. It is still a limited measurement, as it excludes many of the social and economic rights, like the right to health, employment and social security. Keeping these limitations in mind, I will use it here as a proxy.\(^\text{12}\)

The QNI combines all parameters, and assigns to all countries a percentage where the highest percentage point is the strongest. Countries are then sorted into quality tiers: very low quality; low quality; medium quality; high quality and very high quality. At the top position we find France with 83.5% and at the lowest position Somalia with 13.8%. *Table 1* shows the top-four in each quality tier.

5. Mapping positions in transnational social space

We have so far considered citizenship capital in isolation. This is useful for specifying the concept, but does not help us much in grasping individuals’ and groups’ strategies or propensities. Remember that an agent’s position in social space is determined by her volume of capital, but also of by combination of different sorts of capital (Bourdieu 1985). It is for instance likely that agents with a high level of citizenship capital will be unable to enjoy its benefits if their level of economic capital is very low (Bourdieu 2018, 109). We must therefore consider citizenship in conjunction with other capital forms.

\(^{12}\) Henley & Partners’ objectives are different from mine. Their business is to provide advice to the global economic elite on where it is most profitable to take up residence and citizenship. They also consult states on how to develop investor citizenship programmes in order to attract members of this elite. Residence and citizenship planning is a recently added dimension to what the industry calls “wealth planning and management” which assists the global “top one-percent” and the states that want to cater to their interests. While Henley & Partners (along with other such consultancy firms) are thus implicated in the global citizenship business with a view to make profit, some of the tools that they develop to assist their customers can also be of great interest for critical social science.
Ideally, we would include an array of different capital forms. For instance, an individual’s level of social capital could to some extent offset the consequences of her citizenship capital. And for someone whose level of ethnic capital (Kim 2019) is low – as is the case with the discriminated Roma population, for instance – it will be difficult to take advantage of citizenship capital as well as economic capital even when these are in place (cf. Martin, Scullion, and Brown 2018). We could think of many such instances of when other forms of capital are relevant for the individual’s practiced state membership. But in order to keep the argument as clear as possible, and taking into consideration space limitations, I have chosen to concentrate on citizenship capital in conjunction with economic capital only – acknowledging that this is not exhaustive.

### Table 1. The quality of nationality index, some examples.

| Quality tier                  | Country                      | Ranking (%) | Quality tier                  | Country                      | Ranking (%) |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------|
| Very high quality             | France                       | 1 (83.5)    | Antigua and Barbuda           | 45 (47.7)                    |
|                               | Germany                      | 2 (82.8)    | Saint Kitts and Nevis         | 46 (47.5)                    |
|                               | Netherlands                  | 2 (82.8)    | Belarus                       | 86 (34.8)                    |
|                               | Croatia                      | 3 (81.7)    | Cape Verde                    | 87 (34.2)                    |
|                               | United States                | 25 (70.0)   | Belize                        | 88 (34.1)                    |
|                               | Japan                        | 26 (58.4)   | Ghana                         | 89 (33.9)                    |
|                               | Gibraltar (British Overseas  | 27 (56.0)   | Iraq                          | 149 (19.4)                   |
|                               | Territory)                   |             |                               |                              |
| High quality                  | Brunei Darussalam            | 43 (49.2)   | Pakistan                      | 150 (19.0)                   |
|                               | Hong Kong (China, SAR)       | 44 (48.9)   | Sudan                         | 151 (18.9)                   |
| Medium quality                |                              |             |                               |                              |
|                               |                               |             |                               |                              |

Source: Kochenov and Lindeboom 2019.

When we introduce economic capital into the analysis, we consider the varied material positions that exists within any one country. One may be poor, rich or in-between in a rich country, and one may be so in a poor, and it means something very different.

We need to say something very general about the trends as regards economic inequalities – across countries and within them – over the past few decades. Recent research has shown that inequality within Western societies has expanded, and according to some measures is now on par with pre-World War I levels (Therborn 2017, 10). The level of economic equality that was created with the expansion of the welfare state and various government policies after the disasters of the world wars, is now largely lost (Piketty 2014). The Western working class and lower-middle class are also those that have lost most in terms of relative position over the past three decades, in global comparison. Among those that have gained is the emerging middle class in the quickly growing economies in Asia. Their income is still lower than that of the Western working class, but it has increased by around 70% since the late 1980s. The other winners are the “top-one-percent” of the global population. This group, which

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13I am talking about the general development in Western countries, but there are of course divergences and differences between them.
overwhelmingly come from USA, Western Europe, Japan and Oceania, has increased its income by 65% during the same period. An even more select group, the hyper-wealthy (whose net worth exceeds $ 2 billion) have in the same period increased five time in size and doubled its total wealth. Today’s global inequalities are hence overwhelmingly driven by the distillation of the group of very rich, more than by any other mechanism (Therborn 2009; Milanovic 2016, chapter 1; Piketty 2014, 334–335, 432–439).

Milanovic demonstrates that the relative importance of within-country inequalities (e.g. class) and between-country inequalities has varied over time. This means that in some periods class of birth has accounted for more of global inequalities than place of birth, and in other period the reverse has been true. In the 19th century within-country inequality was the main cleavage, while in the post-World War II period between-countries counted for more. Between-country inequalities reached a peak in the early 1970s and has since slowed down, mainly because of the income expansion of the Asian middle-classes. Milanovic shows that within-country inequalities are growing and argues that in the future they may return to dominance. But so far, country of birth is still the main decisive factor for a person’s life income (Milanovic 2016, 125–132).

Milanovic calls the birth-country effect “citizenship premium” and “citizenship penalty”, respectively, depending on whether it works to one’s advantage or not. It is compounded by subtracting the effect of all other main factors from one’s life incomes (education, class, profession, etc), so that one can isolate the birthplace effect.

The citizenship premium that one gets from being born in a richer country is in essence a rent, or … an ‘exogeneous circumstance’ (as is the citizenship penalty) that is independent of a person’s individual effort and their episodic (that is, not birth-related) luck. (Milanovic 2016, 132)

Its exact rate depends on what countries that one compares. One example begins with Congo. The average income benefit that only accrues from place of birth other than Congo is 9,200% for the USA, 7,100% for Sweden, and 300% for Yemen (Milanovic 2016, 133).

At this point it may be pertinent to clarify the differences between economic capital and citizenship capital. The reader may ask whether Milanovic’s concepts citizenship premium/penalty do not in fact empty out the meaning of citizenship capital, and in that case whether this suggested additional capital form really adds anything new. But then we must remember that while Milanovic’s measure is only concerned with effects on income, citizenship capital captures much more. Its qualitative aspects include GDP but also the level of peacefulness, human development and the possibility to travel and settle abroad. All these factors are important for the general satisfaction with one’s citizenship, and it goes beyond immediate material considerations. Moreover, Milanovic’s measures are at the level of a country as a whole, while citizenship capital allows for individual differentiation in terms of the varying number of citizenships people hold. Two co-citizens have different levels of citizenship capital if one of them is a carrier of plural citizenships while the other is not. The first then has the possibility to relocate when times get rough, and the second does not.14

14Moreover, two co-workers are differently positioned if their citizenship capitals differ – if, for instance, one is a citizen and the other an irregular migrant (Bauder 2008).
5.2. Combining economic and citizenship capital

As has been mentioned above, an agent’s endowment of capital is measured in total volume as well as in the specific combinations of capital and their different levels (Bourdieu 1986). Here I want to approach citizenship and economic capital together, in order to locate differentiated positions, but also to be able to discuss the agent strategies that may follow from this. Here, “strategies” has a particular meaning which is distinct from ordinary conceptions (Mérand and Forget 2013). Strategies may be unconscious as well as conscious, individual or collective. They are not random but “objectively oriented lines of action” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 129) and they stem from agents’ position in the field, that is, in the distribution of the specific capital, and on the perception that they have of the field depending on the point of view they take on the field as a view taken from a point of view in the field. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 101)

Figure 2 is a simple depiction of a transnational social space made up of the two dimensions economic capital and citizenship capital. The citizenship capital axis runs horizontally from low to high. The economic capital dimension similarly runs from low to high, along the vertical axis. The terms of comparison refer to the global distribution, and the end points of the economic capital dimension thus correspond to the top and bottom percentiles of world economic capital distribution.

The privileged position is the northeast of the figure. There, both citizenship capital and economic capital are high, which means that the individual has a greater range of options and a greater level of security. The more one travels in the direction of southwest, the lower the levels of economic and citizenship capital, which in general means fewer options and a greater risk of precarity.

Seven positions are marked out in the transnational social space composed by the two dimensions. There are many possible combinations of citizenship and economic capital for ending up in either of them, and here I do not attempt to cover them all but only discuss one possible example of each.

A and B have a very high amount of economic capital, but they vary in citizenship capital, A’s being much higher than B. They are both superrich, but B probably holds just one citizenship of low quality, while A’s citizenship is in a very high-quality country. The position of B is an important case of potential conversion between capital forms. B’s very high economic capital enables her to buy herself out of the constraints of her low-quality citizenship. As mentioned, a number of countries now offer preferential treatment for the superrich through citizenship and residence programmes (Dzankic 2019; Surak 2016; Shachar 2017). With her great economic means, B can buy a citizenship in a country like Malta or Cyprus and get access to the whole of the EU. Such new possibilities enable her to live an extremely global and mobile life, and whether she retains citizenship and residence in her origin country is a matter of choice and not of necessity. Thus, she approaches the level of citizenship capital of A, which is what the arrow shows.

One may here stop and reflect on whether citizenship capital is autonomous enough to count as a particular capital form. Since it is now possible to buy it (although this is still a marginal practice), and thus turn economic capital into citizenship capital, it would seem that it is not. There are other similar potential objections. For instance, immigrant
scientists from poorer countries are often offered preferential access to residence and citizenship in richer countries, and in that case it is scientific capital that is turned into citizenship capital (Shachar 2011). But this does not signify that the capital forms themselves are insufficiently autonomous to be analytically separate. Instead it turns our attention to the mode of acquisition, and the fact that one form of capital often can be exchanged for another. This is in no way unique for citizenship capital. Bourdieu wrote extensively about the “conversion rates” between capital forms, and how this was established in continual transactions between actors and against the background of the state and its institutions (Bourdieu 1986, 1992; Guzzini 2013).

Figure 2. The transnational social space of economic and citizenship capital.
If we focus on the north-east of the pictured social space, it is clear that the combination of high levels of economic and citizenship capital brings unprecedented levels of freedom to their holders. This position depicts what Linda Kerber has referred to as “statefullness” (in contrast to statelessness):

For these people, a destabilized citizenship is an enriched citizenship. Such people may speak cheerfully of multiplied citizenships, a comfortable cosmopolitanism, being a citizen of the world. If citizenship is about what may be called statefullness, then some people are rich in it. (Kerber 2007, 7, emphasis in original)

C could, for instance, be the position of most plural citizenship holders that do not belong to the economic elite. With increased migration, plural citizenship has become increasingly common. It can occur at birth, when a new-born acquires one citizenship by descent and one by place of birth. It can also occur when someone naturalises in a new country and keeps her old citizenship. To become a plural citizen has several advantages, as we have seen, both in terms of expanding opportunities and gaining another exit option when needs be. C’s position is much below A and B. Someone in that position might not ever make use of her second citizenship, but her level of means may allow her to activate this resource if necessary. In case of war and insecurity it offers an escape route. Under normal circumstances, it may enable tourism, study, and work permits. It has been shown that it is mainly citizens of mid-ranging countries that engage in “strategic citizenship” behaviour by applying for a second citizenship for these reasons. Those from the top in the citizenship hierarchy will normally not have as much incentive to apply for a second citizenship, since their first one grants them what they need in terms of security and options (Harpaz 2019; Harpaz and Mateos 2019; Kim 2019). But uncertainty and fear about one’s country’s political and economic developments sometimes incentivise people in top ranking countries, too. One may here think of the great numbers of British citizens that have applied for second citizenships in the wake of Brexit (O’Carroll 2020).

D also holds a very high amount of citizenship capital but the amount of economic capital is below average in a global comparison. This could be the position of being extremely poor in a rich country. Remember that class-based inequalities in the Western world have increased in the past few decades (Milanovic 2016). In this position, one benefits from living in a well-functioning country, as some parameters (such as the absence of war) benefits all. But one’s situation within that society may be miserable and one has no possibility of availing oneself of the international benefits that one’s passport brings as travelling is very unlikely for someone without economic means (Castles 2005; Somers 2008).

Position E is one of low citizenship and relatively low economic capital. It might be the situation of being citizen in a low-quality country. Although the level of economic capital is lower than D’s, E’s domestic situation is different and she probably has some means. She obviously does not have the riches to buy herself a new citizenship. Within her country, she is not rich, but neither is she abjectly poor in comparison to her co-patriots. This is a position from which many try their luck as migrants. But since their low citizenship capital gives them access to very few countries, they are likely to migrate in an unauthorised manner, and end up in a slightly more prosperous country as
undocumented migrants, which makes them vulnerable to exploitation from human smugglers and employers (Lori 2017).

Position F is low on both citizenship and economic capital, which is the situation for someone who lives in poverty in a poor country. From this position one does not have access to the escape routes that many others have. One cannot migrate, because one cannot amass the resources that this would require. One would neither have the economic means nor the knowledge and connections necessary. Besides, there are very few countries where one would be welcome. This is a vulnerable position because one’s citizenship is in a low-quality country which is quite likely plagued by corruption, security problems and material want. Making things worse, one does not have recourse to escape. One’s fate has been aggravated by the increased mobility of others, who may cause political and economic difficulties but do not have to live with the consequences. F is bound to her location and is therefore vulnerable to the irresponsibility of others (Weiss 2005; Papadopoulos, Stephenson, and Tsianos 2008).

G is the position of the stateless. It is the absence of citizenship capital which defines this position, and not a particular level of economic capital. The majority of stateless people today live in poverty, which may result from and/or exacerbate their already vulnerable position (Foster and Lambert 2016). But is not in principle impossible to be a stateless person of some means. One may recall that Albert Einstein was stateless for part of his life.

The figure above demonstrates the inequalities in life conditions as seen from a transnational perspective. It shows that inequalities stem both from citizenship and economic factors. Each individual has a portfolio of different forms of capital, among them citizenship and economic capital, and its exact composition has quite decisive consequences for one’s position in the system of transnational inequalities. A finding from the analysis is that having an escape option is as important as it is unevenly distributed. If we again recollect Hirschman’s conceptualisation of possible actions in failing organisations – exit, voice and loyalty– it is the exit possibility that strikes us here as particularly important (Hirschman 1970). B above can convert her economic capital into citizenship capital, taking up residence or even citizenship in a safer, richer or in some other aspect better country, leaving her on part with A. This option is not open the others. E may have the resources to exit but if so in an unauthorised and dangerous manner. D, F and G can only stay put.

We need to reflect on the consequences of this. Many people have no choice but to endure the violent society, the corrupt government and/or the poverty into which they were born. Moreover, their situation may be worsened by the increased mobility of the top layers of the elite. If natural resources are exploited, oil companies with little respect for human rights are allowed to operate and if land is sold as dump for radioactive waste, it is people in the position of B or A who are likely to be responsible for it and who also stand to gain from it. But they are not forced to suffer from the consequences of these decisions, as they can leave at any time. Piketty talks in this context of the “secession of wealth”, that obscures “the very idea of nationality, since the wealthiest individuals can to some extent take their money and change their nationality, cutting all ties to their original community” (Piketty 2014, 464–465). Their ever more tenuous bond to a particular location is likely to make their actions more careless and irresponsible. In this way, the mobility of the elites makes the situation of the immobile others even more precarious (Bauman 1998).
6. Conclusions

The aim of this text has been to develop a structured way of analysing citizenship as a particular system of inequality. I have done so by elaborating on the notion of “citizenship capital” as a capital form in Pierre Bourdieu’s sense of the term. I argue that as a capital form, citizenship has an autonomous force and impact, but it also shapes transnational positions in combination with other capital forms. In this text I have exemplified by looking at the interaction of citizenship capital and economic capital.

Citizenship capital provides us with a new tool for considering transnational inequalities, and it cannot be subsumed under economic capital or any other capital form. I argue that it is imperative that we take on board the effects of people’s citizenship, that the lottery of life has provided them with, in order to grasp inequalities today. Because of the greater cross-border mobility of people, of cultural images, of finance and of traded goods, citizenship capital is of increasing importance in this historical period. The fact that citizenship so decidedly affects one’s life prospects incentivises people use it strategically and instrumentally where they can (Joppke 2019; Harpaz and Mateos 2019). Those who can may buy a second citizenship. Others may apply for it with the intention to relocate when the political tendency of their country scares them. Yet others may migrate in either documented or undocumented ways.

Some, however, will not have much choice but to remain where they are. Their lack of exit options, the importance of which is a recurrent theme in this article, puts them in a situation of great vulnerability. They will have no possibility of escaping the poverty, the violence, the corrupt political system and/or the ecological degradation of the societies into which they were born. Moreover, we have seen that their situation may actually be aggravated by the mobility of the elites, who now have even less emotional commitment and sense of obligation to a particular location. This seems to confirm what Zygmunt Bauman suggested more than twenty years ago:

To put it in a nutshell: rather than homogenizing the human condition, the technological annulment of temporal/spatial distances tends to polarize it. […] For some people it augurs an unprecedented freedom from physical obstacles and unheard-of ability to move and act from a distance. For others, it portends the impossibility of appropriating and domesticating the locality from which they have little chance of cutting themselves free in order to move elsewhere […] Some can now move out of the locality – any locality – at will. Others watch helplessly the sole locality they inhabit moving away from under their feet (Bauman 1998, 18, emphasis in original).

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