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Making political citizens? Migrants' narratives of naturalization in the United Kingdom*

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ABSTRACT

Citizenship tests are arguably intended as moments of hailing, or interpellation, through which norms are internalized and citizen-subjects produced. We analyse the multiple political subjects revealed through migrants' narratives of the citizenship test process, drawing on 158 interviews with migrants in Leicester and London who are at different stages in the UK citizenship test process. In dialogue with three counter-figures in the critical naturalization literature – the 'neoliberal citizen'; the 'anxious citizen'; and the 'heroic citizen' – we propose the figure of the 'citizen-negotiator', a socially situated actor who attempts to assert control over their life as they navigate the test process and state power. Through the focus on negotiation, we see migrants navigating a process of differentiation founded on pre-existing inequalities rather than a journey toward transformation.

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Introduction

Citizenship tests and ceremonies provoke and fascinate. Requiring migrants to master language, knowledge of the country of naturalization and its values and laws has consistently provoked debate and controversy, particularly in European countries where they are more recent policies. For some, the question of fairness inevitably arises: how can 'we' ask 'them' to know and do things many of 'us' cannot? Observers then consider with fascination the rite of passage when, with varying degrees of pomp and circumstance, some migrants become one of 'us' in ceremonies loaded with symbolism and emotion.

Underlying these more immediate reactions are broader enquiries into the intentions and effects of naturalization processes. They do not just bestow a passport and legal status, and indeed were conceived to avoid simply doing this. These policies were born at particular historical moments – in the European context, in the early 2000s in the context of a backlash against multiculturalism (as opposed to much longer-standing processes in Australia, Canada and the USA where they consolidated white settler societies). In the UK, our focus here, citizenship tests were introduced by the New Labour government in the wake of

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so-called riots in the northern towns of Oldham, Burnley and Bradford in 2001. A lack of community cohesion was identified as the root cause, requiring a 'meaningful concept of citizenship' that would foster loyalty to the nation (see Independent Community Cohesion Review Team 2001). The citizenship test was perceived as the solution to violence between Asian and White men and the police, linking the 'problem' of longstanding minority communities to the 'problem' of migrants (Fortier 2008; Turner 2014, 337).

This 'new paradigm' in British immigration and integration policies (Joppke 2007; Ryan 2008; Vink and de Groot 2010; Van Oers 2013; Byrne 2014) was arguably initially intended by some of its architects to aid integration in the civic republican tradition (Crick 2010, Kiwan 2010). For its critics, amongst which we place ourselves, these tests function as a 'shibboleth' (McNamara and Roever 2006) that casts citizenship as something to be 'deserved' and 'earned' (Kostakopoulou 2010; Chauvin and Garcés-Mascreñas 2012; Monforte, Bassel, and Khan 2018). These instruments are inextricable from neoliberalism, nationalism and border control, operating as tools of selection rather than integration.

Making citizens?

With the citizenship test, the UK Home Office defines new criteria to grant citizenship to EU and non-EU migrants and indefinite residence rights to non-EU migrants: proven knowledge of language and of British 'history, culture and traditions' (Kostakopoulou 2010; Schinkel and Van Houdt 2010; Van Houdt, Suvarierol, and Schinkel 2011). The process begins with application for citizenship or indefinite residence permit and formally ends with receiving a British passport or Indefinite Leave to Remain. This includes preparing and passing different tests, attending a citizenship ceremony, and going through multiple administrative procedures and interviews.

The political discourse surrounding the UK test has shifted since its inception in 2005, reshaping also the kind of citizen and civic values it aims to foster and the kind of transformation it aims to effect. Since 2013, test regulations have become more stringent and restrictive (Byrne 2017, 328): both a language test and a knowledge test are required for permanent residency and naturalization. Furthermore, the content of the test has changed with the third edition of *Life in the United Kingdom*, the handbook that forms the basis of the test (Brooks 2013; Byrne 2017, 328). In contrast to the previous focus on 'practical knowledge' in the 2005 and 2007 editions, the 2013 edition, in the words Mark Harper MP, Minister for Immigration at the time, 'rightly focuses on values and principles at the heart of being British. Instead of telling people how to claim benefits, it encourages participation in British life' (BBC 2013). The practicalities and the political discourses surrounding the test – such as the statement of Mark Harper¹ – require specific activities and dispositions which make it more difficult to pass the test and demand more from those who do (Bassel et al. 2017).

This article contributes to an emerging body of work that shifts emphasis from citizenship policies and naturalization laws to investigate 'how such policies are interpreted, reacted to, and acted upon by ordinary citizens in everyday life' (Miller-Idriss, 2006, 561). We aim to contribute to a growing literature on the 'lived experience' of naturalization (Fassin and Mazouz 2007). Our concern is to explore how migrants experiencing the process are *negotiators* of this *interpellation* to 'be British'.

We use both terms deliberately. First, by ‘interpellation’ we are not suggesting, following Louis Althusser (1977), a total and unilateral grip of the subject. This is arguably one intention (or at least desire) of architects of the process.² This is the demand: ‘hey you there, be British our way!’ It is a call to be transformed into a certain type of British subject. For Althusser, ideology has this ‘function (which defines it) of “constituting” concrete individuals as subjects’ (1977, 160). People become subjects by recognizing that this hailing was addressed to them (1977, 163). The ‘Hey, you there!’ has the effect of binding the law to the one who is hailed (Butler 1993, 122). This ideal citizen indeed may be a fiction, part of the ‘imaginary relation’ of individuals to the ‘real relations’ in which they live (Althusser 1977, 155), and they may not exist in the broader population. ‘Native’ British citizens may not themselves have the requisite knowledge and ability to pass citizenship tests. This citizen is nonetheless the goal to which applicants must aspire and transform themselves.

Yet studies from a range of theoretical and empirical orientations across national contexts demonstrate the sway of these ‘imaginary relations’ to the ‘real relations’ in which migrants live to be anything but straightforward. Instead contradictions emerge (for a summary see Aptekar 2015, 65–66). Pragmatic and utilitarian concerns, such as getting a passport to be able to travel, can be articulated in unpredictable ways alongside a sense of loyalty and belonging. Normative allegiance and emotional connection can be expressed independently of legal status (Fein and Straughn 2014; see also Brettell 2006). ‘Instrumental’ motivations – such as getting a passport – do not necessarily undermine aspects of national identity or political involvement, but at times may transcend them (Bloemraad 2006; Brettell 2006).³

The ‘grip’, then, of this hailing to ‘be British’ is uncertain. Rather than a unilateral process, it is (at least) bilateral. The inter-subjectivity of interpellation is elided in Althusser’s account of how individuals are transformed into subjects (Ahmed 1998, 2000): it requires an addresser and addressee. Recognition goes (at least) two ways. The state recognizes the subject as the subject of law. It also constitutes itself as the arbiter. It is this mutual recognition which constitutes both the subject and the state as political.⁴ Migrants apply state power to themselves and participate in their own governing (Menjívar and Lakhani 2016) by demonstrating the right knowledge, values and willingness that will distinguish them from those who cannot. Knowledge of history, culture, law and language and loyalty to the nation must be demonstrated and performed through tests, ceremonies and other procedures in order to qualify and become a deserving and desirable citizen, a recognizable subject of the law (or to be ‘hailed’ as undesirable and excluded⁵). Yet in the process, migrants exercise agency in a *mutually* constitutive relationship between themselves, law and state (Menjívar and Lakhani 2016; emphasis added). This process cannot be reduced to the technical policy instrument of the citizenship test and its preparation, as it is both a social and legal process of mutual recognition that constitutes a subject to have rights. And its ‘grip’ is never total. It is fractured, incomplete and may miss its mark (Ahmed 2000). Law might be refused, ruptured, forced into a rearticulation that ‘calls into question the monotheistic force of its own unilateral operation’ (Butler 1993, 122). The legitimacy of the call to ‘be British, our way’ may be questioned through parody, repetition into hyperbole and rearticulation against the one who delivers it. A set of consequences can be produced that exceed and confound the disciplining intention (1993, 122).⁶

How, then, to theorize and explore a process which is intended to interpellate, but in fact exceeds Althusser’s notion, and the transformative aspect of this policy tool?

Here we take the first step toward theorizing this process with the focus on *negotiation*. By negotiation, we refer to making sense of the injunction to take the test and its norms. This can take the form of endorsement, reinterpretation and subversion, strategizing to manage the process and acquire citizenship without engaging with its norms and content, and direct challenge.

This is a 'political' process in the sense that it is through the experience of state power subjects are produced, rather than pre-existing individuals who step into, act and strategize within a given system.⁷ In this view, experience is not something people 'have' but the way in which subjects are produced (Scott 1992), a 'view from somewhere' which generates contradictory knowledge and a starting point for exploring the operation of power (McNay 2008, 115, 180–182).

We argue that citizenship test processes are important 'windows into the state' (Löwenheim and Gazit 2009), from which to observe the exercise and negotiation of state power. On the one hand, the experience of the test process may create certain types of political dispositions, attitudes and active participation. It may seek to transform individuals into certain types of subjects. On the other hand, there is the recognition of these dispositions as conditional and legal. We argue that it is this dual constitution that creates political subjects.

Through participants' accounts of the citizenship test process, we consider whether and how state power is internalized, resisted and the important space that lies in between. The meaning of citizenship does not come solely from external sources (state rhetoric or policy). It needs to be achieved by the individuals themselves in relation to but not separate from the social world around them. In contrast to the conventional understanding of 'negotiation' of a bargain on a level playing field, here people do not stand outside the process and negotiate or bargain for a specific outcome when embarking on the journey to citizenship. Instead they reflexively appropriate and utilize knowledge, and navigate power relations, in order to shape their lives. *Negotiation* is a reflexive engagement shaped by prior experience that in turn shapes sense-making practices, evaluation of risks and challenges and intentionality in pursuing goals. Through negotiation, migrants attempt to assert control over their lives.

We will argue in this article that migrants are hailed into this process through *regimes of difference*, whereby this call to 'be British' can serve to *differentiate* rather than transform individuals into a 'British' citizen who belongs to a socially cohesive, egalitarian national community. *Regimes of difference* (Ahmed 1998), founded on inequalities 'inside' and 'outside' of the process, are negotiated in the call to acquire language, 'British values' (including gender equality) and knowledge. Hierarchies of 'race', gender, nationality and class are navigated by the citizen-negotiator who places herself and is placed in 'colliding regimes of address which attach (asymmetrical) value and meaning to specific subject positions' (1998, 114). Hailing

might function to differentiate *between* subjects, for example, by hailing differently those who seem to belong and those who might already be assigned a place – out of place – as 'suspect' ... inter-subjective encounters in public life continually reinterpellate subjects into differentiated economies of names and signs, where they are assigned different value in social spaces. (Ahmed 2000, 23)

It is these economies of names, signs and values that are negotiated in a process that may involve (qualified) transformations but is also founded on inequalities.

In the UK case, scholars have focused on a range of inequalities associated with naturalization: the racist origins of the test process as part of a broader project of border control

(Tyler 2013); unequal pass rates by nationality (Ryan 2010); the stigmatizing representations of 'problem' groups and communities for whom the test will act as a remedy for their 'failed' integration through promoting 'British values' (Greenwood and Robins 2002; Sasse 2005; Morrice 2017; Khan 2013); the normative deficiencies of this approach to ethnic diversity (Kostakopoulou 2010); the ways in which the test materials particularly hinder the success of some – less-educated and literate – applicants and promote an inaccessible and exclusionary vision of the national community (Cooke 2009; Brooks 2013; Byrne 2014). We explore the empirical dimensions of these different forms of inequality in detail in other forthcoming work. In this article, we aim to connect some of these inequalities 'inside' and 'outside' of the process to the ways people are 'hailed' into citizenship. That is, we explore the 'regimes of difference' (Ahmed 1998, 2000) that applicants navigate and the kinds of political subjecthood they articulate in doing so.

We explore three critical counter figures: the 'neoliberal', 'anxious' and 'heroic' citizen. As we will now demonstrate, all three figures contain (implicit) notions of negotiation. We read these figures through the lens of negotiation to understand how the slippery, incomplete, and uncertain interpellation to 'be British' is managed from specific social locations. In the varied range of responses we explore, bringing together these critical interventions and our own work, there is neither simply endorsement nor resistance. Neoliberal ideologies of 'deservingness' may be reflected in through narratives of 'distinction' (Monforte, Bassel, and Khan 2018) at the same time as subversions and outright opposition. Experiences of 'heroic' rupture and resistance are intertwined with neoliberal endorsement. Anxiety is generated alongside narratives of empowerment and self-affirmation. We insist on migrants as active negotiators of state power across these three critical counter figures. This focus on negotiation reveals the differentiations of the process, founded on pre-existing inequalities, as well as the process itself and the inequalities it engenders.

In dialogue with these three counter-figures, we argue that this is a process of negotiating differentiation rather than a journey toward (possibly unattainable) transformation.

Methodological considerations⁸

We draw on 158 in-depth interviews with migrants preparing for the test or having taken the test in two diverse cities in England–Leicester and London.⁹ The participants have different migration trajectories, social backgrounds, nationalities and personal characteristics. Our sample includes 63 men and 95 women from 39 nationalities, ranging from less than a year to over 20 years in the UK (the average was 9.8 years), and a variety of legal statuses (e.g. UK citizens, EU citizens, Indefinite Leave to Remain, Applying for Indefinite Leave to Remain).¹⁰ We accessed participants primarily through migrant advocacy and community organizations, colleges providing language training and snowball sampling. The interviews were conducted from April 2014 to March 2016.

We acknowledge the inevitable role of performance and social desirability bias in the interviews. Despite our assurances to the contrary, participants may have thought we were in some way connected to the citizenship test process or made general assumptions about what they thought we wanted to hear. In our analysis, we reflect on the influence of these power dynamics to consider what participants may have decided to say, not to say, and how to present themselves and the privilege or disadvantage that may underlie silence and speech.

We now explore the different political subjects present in the literature that critiques the citizens that the test aims to ‘make’ or foster. We tease out the (implicit) notions of negotiation contained within these ‘neoliberal’, ‘anxious’ and ‘heroic’ citizens by considering migrants’ narratives of their experiences of the citizenship test process. Across them, we explore the figure of the ‘citizen-negotiator’ who navigates regimes of difference and inequalities ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of the process.

Neoliberal citizens

In the UK and more broadly, many scholars have identified the citizenship tests and associated processes as vehicles of neoliberal governmentality (Löwenheim and Gazit 2009). Joseph Turner (2014) draws on canonical work in this field (Foucault 1993; Dean 1999; Miller and Rose 2008) to consider how values of responsibility, self-improvement and empowerment are the key aspects that migrants need to display through their mastery of both knowledge of life in the UK and English language competency to prove their worth and their deservingness. This is the desired ‘active’ citizen.

Suvarierol and Kirk (2015) extend a similar line of reasoning to their analysis of Dutch civic integration courses. They argue that ‘civic integration has become a manifestation of neoliberal ideology, whereby the migrants are responsible for their own integration, and the market is the ideal tool to facilitate responsibilized integration’ (262). They find that ‘the organization of civic integration courses teaches ... submissiveness to state and market authority. Migrants learn throughout that integration is their responsibility alone, and that they should not expect more support than the bare minimum’ (2015, 236).

This submissiveness is active and individualized. The ‘neoliberal citizen’ is an individual who ‘strategizes for her/himself among various social, political and economic options, not one who strives with others to alter or organize these options’ (Brown 2003). This negotiation takes the form of making correct choices in a marketised landscape in order to acquire correct language, values and competencies.

Our analysis shows, however, that the nature of ‘submission’ to state and market authority can be further qualified. When viewed through the lens of ‘negotiation’, we can explore how this submission is experienced and how this marketised space is inhabited, beyond the observation that the onus is shifted onto individuals who must minimize risk and maximize their own interest. Many of our participants submitted to the market but were not docile in their responses to it. In the UK, migrants are forced to pay – £50 for the test and over £1000 for naturalization.¹¹ In their responses to this commodification and expense, some participants qualified the test as a way to take money from poor people and a waste of time. The ‘value’ of citizenship as a commodity to be acquired through market processes is not unthinkingly internalized and marketization is endured but not necessarily accepted. Citizenship is identified as *unjustly* marketised in a landscape where all services and assistance that assist in the journey to citizenship – e.g. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) – must increasingly be paid for.

We suggest this is the negotiation of submission rather than obedience. When asked why they thought the government had introduced the test in 2005, responses often demonstrated participants’ evaluations of the process and their stances towards the state. These stances and evaluations included the endorsement of a ‘neoliberal view of citizenship’ as just described, and of the aim to ensure that people knew language and ‘the rules of the game’ and were

able to function fully in UK society. They also comprised criticism of the test and entire process as a costly, lengthy tool of exclusion.

We can consider the experiences of two men, both from Latin America,¹² and both in the UK for approximately 10 years. One is a citizen, while the other is applying for this status from that of 'Indefinite Leave to Remain'.

The first man, the UK citizen (Interview 46), presents and endorses several of the key 'exclusionary' rationales that participants provided for the introduction of this policy. When asked why the government asks immigrants to take the test he responded:

It's all about immigration policies or restricting people to get access to citizenship ... maybe there was a bit of abuse ... People abusing the system, you know. Loopholes and things like that.... So I don't blame them [the Government] because ... in the UK every month there's more than 20,000 new immigrants coming to the UK...

The second, a man applying for Indefinite Leave to Remain (Interview 50), expressed skepticism about what the government claimed to be aiming to achieve – integration, in similar terms to the initial intentions discussed above. Instead he identifies a motive of immigration control:

To be honest, in my opinion ... the reason that they will give is because of integration. The real reason is to stop people from getting indefinite leave to remain, or getting citizenship, and ... to make people's life more difficult.

In the first example, the implication is that this exclusion is legitimate. The reasons are 'valid'. There is 'too much' immigration and some abuse of the system. In the second the implication is of bad faith, pretending to want to integrate people but really making lives more difficult and controlling the border. These differences are widely represented throughout our interviews yet are often expressed alongside statements that indicate possible or actual opposite stances, that is, endorsing *and* critical.

In our second example, people's lives may be made more difficult but, when asked if anything useful was learned: 'Yeah, yeah. A lot of things. And it was very interesting. I think it's very, it's, it's fair' (Interview 50). Having said this, he concludes his interview by saying that in a society that is 'less sympathetic every day' and a press and government who mix 'criminality with immigration', the change he would make to the test is 'I would get rid of the test.... That would be my improvement' (Interview 50).

Already we can see the ways in which the interpellation of the test process, its transformative 'pull' to 'be British our way', is slippery. Resistance to it is incomplete, as subjects negotiate its grip. They articulate evaluations of the exercise of state power that are in tension with one another whether referring to the practicalities of the citizenship test process (test requirements) or the discourses that surround it (what the government claims to do and what it actually wishes to achieve).

Rather than the disciplined and submissive neoliberal citizen who is active in the ways in which the interpellation of the test requires, in these performative utterances we begin to see negotiation: the attempt to make sense of the inequalities of the test process and their different consequences, to navigate regimes of difference (Ahmed 1998, 2000) through which they are addressed. The inequalities and restrictions of the process and the value they assign to addressees in different subject positions are perceived to be a problem or a – somewhat desirable – fact of life. These subjects are navigating *differentiation* rather than the call to be transformed into 'British' citizens.

Anxious citizens

For Anne-Marie Fortier (2017), naturalization is a site of 'anxious' rather than 'neoliberal' citizens who must negotiate the ambivalent desire/anxiety relationship that constitutes the state-citizen relationship and the state itself. This anxiety is not confined to a particular epoch or form of governance, in contrast to the neoliberal citizenship explored above, but is 'an enduring feature of the state-citizen relationship' (Fortier 2017, 8).

Through psychosocial dynamics, Fortier explores how immigrants and state agents differently negotiate anxiety in their enactments of citizenization policy (Goodman 2014) through a series of vignettes. 'Processes of projection, disavowal and internalization work ... to enact the state differently through the dynamic process of the unequal distribution of power and inequality' and show 'an anxious state, which is ambivalent about the desire for desiring and desirable citizens' (2017, 17). Her analysis centres on the different forms that anxiety takes. This is a powerful intervention, to which we wish to add the focus on migrants' negotiations from specific social locations. Here, we emphasize the differentiating function of interpellation, marking some bodies as stranger than others (Ahmed 2000, 24) and also its rearticulation and contradictory effects (Butler 1993).

Fortier rightly focuses on the 'less visible and more insidious ways in which English fluency becomes a benchmark against which applicants are assessed and assess each other' (2017, 11) rather than visible markers of identity and status such as race, gender, sexuality and class which 'certainly impact on establishing the worthiness of some immigrants over others'. We return to these specific social locations in the context of the fetishization of fluency and promise of English she identifies, whereby tuition will lead to proficiency and solve the problem of integration but the process leading to it is obscured (2013, 2017, 9). We focus here particularly on migrant women whose bodies are marked in different ways as 'stranger than others' (Ahmed 2000, 24).

As we argue elsewhere (Bassel 2016), a longstanding set of discourses and practices in the UK position Muslim migrant women (and particularly Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslim migrant women) as victims of social isolation who need English to do their job of socializing young people better. The political response to rioting in northern English cities in 2001, which linked understanding English with social cohesion, ultimately led to the 'citizenship test process' itself. English language was to act as the 'panacea' (Greenwood and Robins 2002, 507; Sasse 2005, 678) to the ills caused by a lack of integration (Khan 2013). These racialized Muslim migrant women are the vehicle for this panacea of English language because they are biological and social 'reproducers' of the nation (Yuval-Davis 1997, Anthias and Yuval Davis 1989), who will, it is argued, raise young people with the correct values (see also Yuval-Davis, Anthias, and Kofman 2005). Bangladeshi and Pakistani migrant women are, therefore, hailed as 'suspect' from the inception of the naturalization process. As citizen-negotiators they navigate regimes of difference that are constituted by inequalities 'inside' and 'outside' of the process.

Inequalities both 'inside' and 'outside' of the process that shape migrant women's experiences of naturalization have been documented and the withdrawal of state support criticized during the course of our project in the Wonder Foundation (2016) report. This work builds on a longstanding body of research demonstrating the intersections of race and gender inequality, lack of language proficiency and socioeconomic deprivation for some migrant women and the role of ESOL in this process (Ahmed 2008). Some migrant women

already face a ‘triple burden’ as female, foreign and racialized – in addition to women’s ‘double burden’ of unpaid work in the home and labour market (Pessar 1999). Integration processes can often result in an even more unequal division of ‘public’ and ‘private’ labour where gender inequalities (particularly in the form of a highly unequal division of domestic labour) are compounded by discrimination on the basis of race, class and ethnicity in the labour market.¹³ The naturalization process can exacerbate these inequalities, drawing on scarce time, energy and money (Bassel 2016). These multiple inequalities ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the process are negotiated with contradictory effects.

For women who are explicitly hailed as ‘suspect’, negotiating the ‘grip’ of the process can result in its rearticulation and contradictory effects (Butler 1993). The naturalization process can, simultaneously, be part of a broader strategy to negotiate patriarchy and the unequal division of labour in the home. For example, for one Bangladeshi woman:

if I become a citizen then I can apply for my house. I am living together with 14 people from my family. I am the oldest sister and daughter in law in their house, that’s why I need to go out on my own because I need to cooking, clean everything so I have to go (Woman, from Bangladesh, with Indefinite Leave to Remain (Interview 20)).

Such strategies reveal subjects who use the prospect of naturalization for their own personal negotiations and subvert some forms of patriarchal power and inequality while participating in the unequal test process and its fetishization of English fluency. And, in turn, the test process is instrumentalized and subverted, questioning its ‘monotheistic force’ (Butler 1993). This woman is within the process but also at a tactical, instrumental distance from it. While subjected to and constrained by the process she negotiates its transformative intent and emotional attachments (Merolli 2016). State power is negotiated through multiple regimes of difference to which all applicants are designated (Ahmed 1998, 117), called to be British within these ‘colliding regimes of address which attach asymmetrical value and meaning to specific subject positions’ (1998, 114).

New hierarchies of citizenship and unequal distributions of ‘desire and anxiety’ that Fortier critiques as (re)produced through citizenization can thus be further rooted in visible social locations and material conditions. Inequalities ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of the process can be connected, alongside the range of emotional responses, and whether they are prescribed or not, that Fortier brings to light (2017, 12). These social locations shape negotiations of state power. While an ‘enervated anxious citizen’, the citizen-negotiator simultaneously and often contends with different forms of inequality and power within and without the process.

For migrant women who are not explicitly hailed as ‘suspect’, whose nationality situates them differently in regimes of address, there can be relief and belonging alongside the recognition that this will be impossible for others who will never secure the passport or belonging. For this East European woman:

Of course, I am British ... it means I am indestructible ... I could go anywhere and an enormous sense of pride but on some level a battle especially with travelling there is a queue when you are border the EU and British and there is others, so I don’t go to others no more and people don’t give you this look! So you go on the main one maybe it’s just maybe the way you feel, if you have never had British or UK or American passport you will always like others ... I don’t know it influences you, it can affect you. (Woman, from Eastern Europe, UK Citizen (Interview 31))

She identifies multiple meanings and resources of citizenship that she benefits from, in her own individual case, while recognizing inequalities for others. ‘It can affect you’ if you’ve never been in the main queue with the EU and British who, it is implied, *belong*.

The hierarchies embedded in the process are not concealed for her despite the celebratory effects of the ceremony and being at the end of the process. Instead they are explicit and form part of her feelings of relief at having overcome the hurdles. We can further understand the unequal distribution of 'desire and anxiety' by rooting her 'gratifying optimism' (Fortier 2017, 14), pride, and emotional response, in her social location (past experience, social – including linguistic – capital, race and gender) compared to that of others. She belongs. Others do not, will not and cannot. Experiencing the hail to 'be British' requires making sense of differentiation, and the unequal ability to secure belonging premised on racial hierarchies, rather than necessarily transformation.

The address of the ceremony, which formally 'hails' applicants into citizenship, is a further negotiation of differentiation. While for many this was a positive experience and a moment of relief, for some it was experienced as being 'scary' because of its very official and formal organization and though 'it doesn't seem it, it is a test 'pure and simple' (Woman, from Latin America, UK citizen (Interview 55).

In contrast, for those with more 'privileged' nationalities, the ceremony was experienced as a 'waste of time' (Man, from Canada, UK citizen (Interview 66)):

You're sitting in a room, I guess. Forced to sing God Save The Queen or whatever it is. Get some piece of paper and I think they give you a, a ceramic mug or something like that or cup or something.

This person acknowledged that this critical attitude may be shaped by their own nationality, Canadian, meaning they might 'take for granted' having liberties and freedoms compared to others.

Experiences of the passport interview further demonstrate negotiation of differentiation. This interview is a legal requirement for all first-time passport holders, not only migrants who are naturalizing. It is experienced by some participants, such as the UK citizen from Latin America above, as 'very simple' and 'really really straightforward', a way to check identity:

[It involved a] (f)ew questions about who I was. Basically to know if that person who signed a form was requesting the passport, it's me. So question were similar to, ... 'what's your mum's name? What's your dad's name? Where do you live? How do you go from work back home? What buses are passing by near your home?' Things that ... identified that you are that person who are claiming to be. (Man, from Latin America, UK citizen (Interview 46))

For others, this is a further extension of the citizenship test process. It made them feel that the process is never-ending and that they continue to be under suspicion. Suspicion itself is embodied and negotiated through colliding regimes of difference. In this case of Latin American woman who cares for a disabled son, her son's need for protection and care is rejected. She responds with pragmatism and coping:

P: It was for security, I understood perfectly...so we have to go and ask for an appointment to get the passport so they gave me the date and the time and I went ... the woman asked me who I was, where do I live, what did I do... It was another exam

I: Did you know anyone else who had to do an interview, this interview?

P: Yes my son, I have a son ... he didn't do the Life in the UK test and he has a disability. He has some mental issues so he was excused but they couldn't excuse him from attending an interview for the passport... Ok then good. I was going to explain the situation and I was going to accompany him.... We arrived at the office, ...his name, his date of birth, some questions and I said to them, I tried and it's for him not for you. You can't speak,

oops ... so I went to speak with the lady and she said to me she can't now, because of what he understands and what he could respond so ok. But he did it ok.... He did it well.... I got through it but it's for security they say, I understand. I understand it's logical, there are many strange things. (Woman from Latin America, UK citizen (Interview 55))

We may question the extent to which this is, in fact, 'logical' that her son had to undertake the passport interview given that the young man had been excused from the test itself because of his disability. Furthermore, it is highly questionable to then have prevented his mother from assisting him in this interview particularly given the high stakes of an unclear or incorrect answer that could then appear untruthful or evasive and lead to the refusal of the passport. The participant appears to resign herself to the exercise of state power and the kinds of (able) bodies it 'hails' as citizens, and copes pragmatically. She negotiates contradictions through colliding regimes of difference. Her son's disability is recognized as grounds for exemption from the test but not the passport interview, her role as his carer does not count in this further security check that, in her view, is an extension of the citizenship test process. They are both 'out of place' (Ahmed 1998) in a practice conducted by an addresser that will not recognize these bodies in these spaces. She chooses to focus on the outcome rather than condemning the process and reconciles these dissonances but, to do so, 'many strange things' must also be 'logical'.

For others, who are 'suspect' from the outset, the intentions of the passport interview are not entirely clear, but this is yet another aspect of the process to endure, effectively another test:

They was asking, I think, really silly questions like how long you been this country and when you go home? Which will come first? Do you open a door, do you open a gate to go, to enter your home? ... Like am I the right person ... because they know I live in the basement flat. So I think they took all the information before I go to the interview. (Woman, from Bangladesh, UK Citizen (Interview 62))

Through the interview, multiple tests become possible. For other Bangladeshi women, rather than an identity test, it was perceived to be a test of English language competency, 'they want to know my English' (Woman from Bangladesh, UK citizen (Interview 69)). Bangladeshi migrants have the lowest pass rates of all nationalities – 44.3% (Ryan 2010) – reflecting particular challenges relating to language proficiency and literacy, and the greater and lesser ability of differently situated actors to negotiate the process. These are the women who are hailed as 'suspect' from the outset, motivating the creation of the test process to begin with. They negotiate differentiation and inequalities 'inside' and 'outside' of the process.

All of these participants actively interpret the exercise of state power through the passport interview, evaluate it, and position themselves vis-à-vis the state. They negotiate this process of differentiation, rather than transformation. It is an identity check that is 'straightforward' (and by implication reasonable), 'logical' and to be endured because of security (even when applied to the vulnerable), 'silly' (and effectively another test, continuing the need to prove both authenticity and worth); a further test of English language competency (also prolonging the test process and the need to earn citizenship beyond the ceremony). In each case state power is identified, evaluated and a political subject is revealed in the reaction to the exercise of power: endorsing, coping/pragmatic, potentially anxious as continuously under scrutiny. The negotiators here are simultaneously adept endorsers (in a 'deserving' neoliberal vein), pragmatic, fearful and resilient (trying again). They are addressed through multiple regimes of difference. They are hailed into citizenship through the asymmetrical

attachment of value and meaning to their different subject positions in the process itself and their unequal ability to navigate the process due to inequalities 'outside' of the process.

Heroic citizens

Finally, following the work of Engin Isin (2008), Bridget Byrne explores heroic moments of rupture and resistance (Byrne 2017). Engin Isin's concept of 'acts of citizenship' aims to develop an account for 'subjects refusing, resisting or subverting the orientations, strategies and technologies in which they find themselves implicated, and the solidaristic, agonistic and alienating relationships in which they are caught' (Isin 2008, 38). Active citizens engage in politics, 'relatively enduring and routinized ways of being' (Isin 2008, 36). In contrast, the political ruptures these routinized ways of being; activist citizenship involves the acts 'when, regardless of status or substance, subjects constitute themselves as citizens or, better still, as those to whom the right to have rights is due' (Isin and Nielsen 2008, 2).

Byrne draws on this concept to explore experiences of naturalization in the United Kingdom. She argues that 'acts' of citizenship take place through new citizens' critiques. These new citizens emphasize their already existing knowledge and claims to citizenship in contrast to the assumption that they have a low base of knowledge and have just arrived. They distinguish between themselves as knowledgeable and connected versus others who might not have sufficient knowledge. They suggest that the test is aimed at the wrong people and that it may be the citizens-by-birth in Britain who need to be educated on the histories and realities of migration rather than migrants, a theme we often see in the popular press (indicating also that the test process has multiple addressees, would-be and current citizens e.g. *The Mirror* 'Can YOU pass the UK citizenship test? Try it out here'¹⁴). 'These [claims by new citizens] assert different principles of citizenship than those suggested by the state-defined tests'. For example, in Byrne's study, for some participants learning about different waves of immigration to Britain enabled them to see themselves as newer migrants in a country that has always been characterized by migration rather than outsiders who are new to a long-established nation. This, then, is a rupture with the 'script' that the test provides, defining citizenship differently.¹⁵

Knowledge of 'Life in the UK' may well serve as a means to see oneself as part of long-standing migration rather than 'new'. Yet in our study these actions read as autonomous moments where participants generated their own meanings and definitions but to fit into and *negotiate* an existing framework. In our findings, we qualify these responses not necessarily as 'ruptures' but, rather, ways in which individuals carved out a separate definition that did not draw on the test's practicalities or the discourses surrounding it but nonetheless remained within the broader 'script'. Some participants defined their citizenship and political subjectivity in confident, independent terms but as an assertion of fitting into and belonging to the existing system in which, for example, they are more knowledgeable and connected than other migrants or even British people.

Some of our participants, as in Byrne's study, defined a citizenship that predates the formalities and recognition of the process as in the case of a Polish participant:

- I: Imagine your life now and after citizenship, does it make much difference?
- P: Status wise basically to be honest obviously it will help me out just get me past the stage of living here being classified as a Polish citizen.... In my opinion, I have lived here for

so long I count myself as UK citizen already. (Man, from Poland, EU citizen (Interview 27))

These are, we suggest, autonomous moments in which a strong statement is made that draws on participants' own terms of reference but to belong to 'the UK' and participate in this scene as already created. They are moments of confidence and self-affirmation that co-exist alongside performances of 'anxious citizenship'.

Yet some went further to explicitly reject the transformative grip of the process and its ability to make any difference to inequalities 'outside' of the process. This participant focuses on what Ahmed calls the 'inter-subjective encounters in public life [that] continually reinterpellate subjects into differentiated economies of names and signs, where they are assigned different value in social spaces' (2000, 23). At best, the process and the fact of becoming a citizen was a way of making life convenient, and did not serve to redefine membership and belonging and enable integration:

- P: When I heard all over the news they were introducing I thought it would be helping people to integrate but I find it quite different the other way because that book doesn't make you integrated in any way. I mean integration doesn't come from you sitting in your own house or in the library to read the book ... Because that's not how you become a citizen. It's not by singing the anthem, passing the Life in the UK test or having the passport even. No I don't think so. It's you feel citizen when you have a good experience with your neighbour, in your neighbourhood or wherever you live. Otherwise, all the rest is to make life easy
- I: What does it mean to be British?
- P: That's what I want to find out to be quite honest. For me to be British is to be able to live equally that will make me British not the passport and not even the exam so being British is no discrimination, you know? (Woman, from East Africa, UK citizen (Interview 4))

This affirmation sets out the importance of action rather than symbolic statements, noting the gap between performative utterances and acts by both migrants and the 'host society'. These are *moments* of negotiating state power and colliding regimes of difference that also lie beyond it. But we suggest that here, rather than breaking with existing repetitions, patterns and scripted reproduction, and 'creating a scene' through new ways of acting and reacting with others (Isin 2008, 38–39), they are ways of managing a top-down interpellation to 'good citizenship'. She identifies broader sources of power and inequality 'outside' of the process: in relations with neighbours, on the job market. These are the true sites of belonging and the way to be able to 'live equally'. The citizen-negotiator manages the contradiction between the promise of inclusion as a citizen and the realities of persistent exclusion, but not always to rupture with the script to contest its exclusionary logic (McNevin 2007). She negotiates inequalities that the 'transformative' interpellation of the test process does not counteract.

Conclusion

We contest the desired 'active citizen' (interpellated through the test's practicalities and discourses) in dialogue with the three critiques in the form of the 'anxious', 'neoliberal' or 'heroic' critiques. 'Citizen-negotiators' manage uncertainty and contradiction, and their ability to negotiate is conditioned by inequalities within and outside of the test process. Throughout their experiences of the citizenship test process, they manage anxiety, navigate neoliberal norms, and decide whether or not to act 'heroically' in a way that breaks with routinized scripts. They do so with different efficacy, ability and ease shaped by social

location and individual characteristics and circumstances but also the vagaries of the process itself that differentiates, but does not transform. They provide different responses to state power revealing multiple political subjects. These multiple subjects negotiate the 'grip' of the process and bring to light its inequalities and selections, rather than transformations.

The citizens or prospective citizens whose experiences we have explored here all manage the uncertainties and contradictions of the process and its inequalities which are often rendered invisible (Fortier 2017) or celebrated because overcome (Aptekar 2015). Some accept, and even internalize, its inequalities, while others name and denounce some of them while endorsing or accepting other aspects of the process (for example, the test is fair, but get rid of the process). Naturalization can be part of personal, political projects (for example, in the case of the woman who negotiates patriarchal norms through naturalization), or a matter of irrelevance when citizenship and sources of belonging are defined in autonomous terms beyond the reach of the process (for example, good relations with neighbours and good experiences of the job market). Resilience is demonstrated by those who endure the process, including taking the test or passport interview more than once, drawing on scarce time and resources.

We write this paper in the context of Brexit, austerity measures and multiple 'crises', with divisions between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' ruthlessly drawn across and within borders. The fiction that the UK citizenship test can transform migrants into British citizens can no longer be upheld particularly when migrants negotiate a process of differentiation founded on inequalities inside and outside the process.

Notes

1. More recently the *Casey Review on Opportunity and Integration* commissioned by then-Prime Minister David Cameron (Casey 2016) and the All Party Parliamentary Group Report on Social Integration (APPG 2017) are expressed in a similar vein.
2. See also Bishop 2017 on the 'making' of an American through the obligation to perform a particular narrative of an idealized supercitizenry.
3. See also Michael Jones-Correa and Sofya Aptekar on 'defensive naturalization' or 'citizens by intimidation' for fear of deportation (Jones-Correa 1998; Aptekar 2015, 6, 132); the desire to be 'deserving citizens' (Anderson 2013; Van Oers 2013); the individual and politically neutralizing effects of the process (Aptekar 2015, 133) in contrast to collective 'community' dimensions we explore elsewhere (see Bassel et al. 2017, 22–24).
4. 'The act of hailing or recognising some-body as a stranger serves to constitute the lawful subject, the one who has the right to dwell, and the stranger at the very same time. It is not that the "you" is or can be simply a stranger, but that to address some-body as a stranger constitutes the "you" as the stranger in relation to the one who dwells (the friend and neighbour)' (Ahmed 2000, 24).
5. This attempted 'hailing' also sends a message to those who will never be able to go through the process (see Sayad 1993), reinforcing the privilege of those who are included and 'hailing' the excluded as those to whom the law cannot be bound, and acts as a 'technology of reassurance' (Fortier 2008) to reassure those who are already citizens.
6. Interpellation is also never simply dyadic but takes place through more diffuse social and cultural practices (Butler 1993). In addition to daily interpersonal encounters these may take highly visible forms: statements by political leaders, popular media (e.g. David Letterman's interview of then Prime Minister David Cameron in which Cameron 'failed' the UK citizenship test), mainstream media coverage (e.g. newspaper articles in which British people are invited to test their own knowledge of 'Life in the UK') (Bassel et al. 2017, 4).

7. This approach to 'the political' can include but is not limited to the study of political participation within and as a result of the naturalization processes (Bloemraad 2006). We focus on the kinds of political selves that can be observed in migrants' narratives when they account for the 'grip' of the process and how they negotiate state power.
8. A full discussion of methods is included in the final research report from this project (Bassel et al. 2017). Here we highlight some important methodological considerations
9. Leicester is one of the main 'minority-majority' cities in the UK, where non-white residents are in the majority. London boroughs range in diversity, with the proportion of the White ethnic group at 59.8 per cent, in 2011 (Office of National Statistics 2012).
10. For an overview of naturalization trends in the UK see Blinder 2016.
11. See our final project report for a table summarizing fixed and variable costs. At the time of writing the minimum cost for one adult was over £1300 (Bassel et al. 2017, 19).
12. Please note that in some cases specific nationalities have not been provided to preserve anonymity. A more general geographic category is used instead.
13. See for example Kofman et al. (2000), Indra (1999), Morokvasic (1984), Morokvasic and Catarino (2007), Pessar (1999), Donato, Gabaccia, et al. (2006), and Abraham, Chow, et al. (2010).
14. See: <http://www.mirror.co.uk/play/quizzes/can-you-pass-uk-citizenship-7108104>
15. This possibility is diminished with the 2015 Life in the UK handbook which provides a history of colonialism and Empire that conveniently glosses over violent independence struggles and rebellions with a narrative of 'orderly transition' (Home Office 2015, 51, 52).

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