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Published online: 01 Jun 2021.

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Migrant women becoming British citizens: care and coloniality

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the different experiences of migrant women who are at various stages in the UK naturalisation process, drawing on interviews in Leicester and London, United Kingdom. We consider how care and coloniality shape migrant women's experiences in the context of the neoliberal test process and what Nancy Fraser has called a 'crisis of care' (Fraser 2016). We argue that migrant women claim their own citizenship despite rather than because of the naturalisation process, and in so doing resist colonial relations of citizenship.

Introduction[1]

Migrant women are often positioned at the forefront of debates on immigration and integration (Farris 2017). We consider how care and coloniality shape migrant women's[2] experiences of naturalisation in England. First, we interrogate the connections between care, coloniality and citizenship and we delineate the ways in which different migrant women are constructed as obstacles to integration in the United Kingdom. We position citizenship in the context of austerity and the 'crisis of care' which underpin forms of 'becoming' a citizen (Khan 2019). We then explore migrant women's experiences of the naturalisation process. Negotiation and contestation of the inequalities and exclusions they and others face on a day-to-day basis open the possibilities of citizenship and what they can become for themselves and for others.

In the case of the UK, the role of English language demonstrates the ways in which coloniality continues to play a role in shaping the lives of individuals and their access, whether illusory or otherwise, to education and equality (Pennycook 2007). The English language then serves connected roles in citizenship test processes in former colonies. The study of language and citizenship tests can be further integrated into the colonial genealogy of the modern state and its construction of who is a migrant, who is a citizen (Mongia 2018) and who, as in the case of the Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke, refuses 'the "gifts" of American and Canadian citizenship to insist on the integrity of Haudenosaunee[3] governance' (Simpson 2014, 7).

Furthermore, the role of connecting similar discourses, policy and practice on introducing citizenship requirements has been evident in the legitimisation of citizenship

testing (see Blackledge 2005; Van Avermaet 2009). This can have a profound impact for migrants when governments follow the lead of other countries. For example, Spain too has demonstrated similar political impulses with the introduction of its citizenship test in 2016 (see Bruzos, Erdocia, and Khan 2018) and thus demonstrates how languages of empire can contract borders to the national level in the context of immigration and settlement. Tests can vary in their demands ranging from the most common form through multiple choice, as is the case with the UK, to exams which have separate language (reading, writing, listening and speaking) and a separate civic exam, as is the case with Spain (Bruzos, Erdocia, and Khan 2018).

The citizenship process, coloniality and care

Our starting point is a re-reading of the UK citizenship process and how this stigmatises migrant women, notably women of colour[4]. We then discuss how coloniality shapes discourses around citizenship and care.

I. The citizenship process: re-reading the 'life in the UK' test

In 2005, following intense debates on diversity and integration in the UK, the Labour government changed the process through which migrants become British citizens. In order to 'foster the "right kind" of integration' (MacGregor and Bailey 2012, 366), it required migrants to demonstrate their ability to speak and read English, to take a citizenship test (called 'Life in the UK'), and to attend a ceremony.[5] Migrants who want to become British citizens have to undertake a 'journey' (Home Office 2011)[6] that begins with the application for citizenship and ends with receiving the British passport. At the core of the 'journey' were, and remain, the citizenship test, which satisfies the language requirement, in which candidates have to answer a set of questions in order to prove their knowledge of British 'history, culture and traditions' (Kostakopoulou 2010; Schinkel and Van Houdt 2010).

This 'new' policy instrument is part of a longer process of producing citizenship through different treatments for different subjects. In her path-breaking study of Indian migration and empire, Radhika Mongia argues that 'if the chief characteristic of colonial rule is a set of legal differentiations, which entail differential entitlements and different treatment for different subjects, then today *all* states embody a *historically produced* colonial dimension, with the citizen/migrant distinction as a, perhaps *the*, primary axis of such differentiation' (Mongia 2018, 150). While it is beyond the scope of this article to trace the entirety of this process, we begin with the British Nationality Act 1981 which created a legally defined national British citizenship and contained within it an English language requirement. The legislation sought to delink privileges granted to Commonwealth subjects by moving from subjecthood with its direct colonial ties to a newly formed category of citizenship. Nadine El-Enany's work captures the longer timeline and legacy of Empire in citizenship and naturalisation policy in the UK by arguing 'Immigration law . . . is the modality through which Britain transitioned from being a colonial power in the traditional overseas extractive sense, to a space of domestic colonialism masquerading as a post-colonial nation' (2020: 130–31).

El-Enany argues that the 1981 Immigration Act and previous post-war immigration controls:

> crafted as white supremacist a Britain as possible, short of introducing an explicit 'White Britain policy'. Through the 1981 Act racialised colony and Commonwealth citizens were told that their present or historical connections to the British Empire neither entitled them to Britishness as an identity nor access to Britain as a place. Much more than merely the right to cross a border is at stake in the enactment of immigration controls. Depriving colonised populations of the right to enter Britain simultaneously deprives them of access to stolen colonial wealth as it manifests in Britain, in the form of infrastructure, employment, healthcare, welfare, safety and opportunity. (2020:130-31)

Thus, citizenship was linked closely to colonial legacies which would be reanimated 20 years later. The 2001 'riots' in three northern cities in England involving British Asian youths, far right extremists and the police led to calls for both citizenship testing for naturalisation requirements and a 'community cohesion' agenda to fuse together a splintered society. This led to the 2005 reform described above, with its instatement of the citizenship and English language proficiency tests.

The focus on English language also brings an element of coloniality within 21st century British citizenship (Fortier 2018; Khan 2019; Motha 2014). English as a language was spread through conquest and empire historically but was now used in defining national citizenship through a test which is one trial of the wider citizenship process (Khan 2019). Furthermore, the implementation of the test can be viewed as a matter of justice, or specifically injustice by placing English as an imposition via language testing that provides conditionality as to whether an individual can access equal rights, as has been the consensus among several language testing scholars (see Shohamy 2001, 2006; McNamara and Roever 2006; McNamara and Ryan 2011).

Through the aftermath of the 2001 'riots', there was implicit blame placed on migrant communities. Within these communities, there was a gendered dimension which apportioned fault among migrant Muslim women in particular. Anne Cryer, a Labour MP, argued that the arrival of spouses through family reunification was a cause for the disturbances. She stated in 2001 that newly arrived spouses, who lacked English, were in her view ill-equipped to support the linguistic development of their children, rendering them unable to develop at the same rate as other (presumably native English speaking) children. As a result, their academic development would suffer, leading to an increased propensity to criminality. Since mothers are often positioned as primary transmitters of language, Cryer implicitly blamed migrant women (see Blackledge 2006; Khan 2019).

This characteristic of a) blaming migrant women and b) proposing stringent measures has been a consistent theme in political discourse on social cohesion, integration and citizenship. Two examples illustrate this point. First, in 2006 Michael Gove MP argued that 'community leaders' in Muslim communities refused access to English classes (Gove 2006). The notion of 'community leaders' evokes a highly masculine image which thereby defines those who are 'following'. As Gargi Bhattacharyya (2008) argues, by defining Muslim men as hyper-patriarchal, Muslim women are dichotomised as passive and meek. Thus, intervention is required in the face of such imported gender and racialised dynamics, that always come from elsewhere rather than within European modernity (Tudor 2018). This therefore evokes images of more passive women who are denied access to English and

integration and revives broader colonial tropes of Other femininities and masculinities (Boatcă and Roth 2016; Farris 2017). Umut Erel (2017) argues that this 'racialised migrant family' unit serves as a figure which threatens the 'reproductive society' of the nation.

In the United Kingdom, Muslim migrant women (particularly Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslim migrant women) are presented as victims of social isolation who need English to do their job of socialising young people better (see also Luibhéid 2006; Tyler 2013). These Muslim migrant women of colour are the vehicle for this panacea of English language because they are biological and social 'reproducers' of the nation (Anthias and Yuval Davis 1989; Yuval Davis 1997), who will, it is argued, raise young people with the correct values to cohere with the national project (see also Yuval-Davis, Anthias, and Kofman 2005). Exclusionary discourses and practices are directed in different ways towards other migrant women through processes of racialisation (Erel 2017). While not equivalent or identical, these processes of exclusion are thus observed here to affect migrant women of diverse backgrounds in our study who are not imbricated in the same colonial legacies, e.g. East European women, particularly Polish migrants (see Erel 2011 for Polish mothers' responses). We consider these experiences to be shaped by shifting hierarchies iincluding race, class and gender.

Many have pointed out the problem of this kind of visibility, when women of colour inform discussions of policy only when interpellated as social problems (Phoenix and Phoenix 2012). Women of colour (including but not exclusively migrant women) are caught between what Ann Phoenix has termed 'normative absence and pathological presence' (Phoenix 1987). They are victims of discrimination and isolation, but are also dangers to society because they are failing to transmit the correct language (and values) to their children. Yet, this 'pathological presence', and its colonial roots, conceal migrant women's struggles to navigate the increasingly demanding process to learn English and pass the Life in the UK test within the wider process of becoming a citizen (Emejulu and Bassel 2018).

We acknowledge intersections such as those of gender, race and class as the culminations of long histories, that shape different possibilities of what we explore as 'forms of becoming' in the context of naturalisation (Khan 2019). Löwenheim and Gazit (2009) underline how citizenship tests offer an insight into the national psyche through the self-narratives that nations explicitly produce about themselves (see also Byrne 2014, 2017). Thus, while citizenship denotes a changing of legal status to full membership of a national community, becoming is a process of how one negotiates various trials in order to do so (Khan 2019). In focusing on becoming, we seek to underline multiple processes at work within the singularity of the bounded citizenship process itself. That is to say, while there is a clear endpoint and materiality to becoming a citizen, namely a certificate and a passport, other processes are ongoing and may continue beyond the finality of acquiring citizenship. Consequently, personal trajectories at play may require citizenship but are not achieved through it. This may mean security through stability for work, family and access to education, for example, which may not be otherwise possible without British citizenship.

II. Coloniality and citizenship

We add to the key body of work which identifies neoliberal and neo-national trends specifically in the context of naturalisation (see, for example, Badenhoop 2017) by addressing the lacuna in this citizenship scholarship with an explicit *perspective* on

race, racism, and colonialism. This article positions migrant women's citizenship with a multifaceted focus on colonialism (see Farris 2017; Fortier 2018) and class formation and struggle (see also Virdee 2019; Valdez 2021). These perspectives on naturalisation foreground racialisation processes embedded in colonial foundations (see El-Enany 2020; Erel 2017; Fortier 2018). Specifically, scholars in the United Kingdom explore the portrayals of Muslim South Asian women, in France Maghrebi women, in the Netherlands Surinamese women, Moroccan and other Muslim women and the implications for how the nation is presented and understood (see Farris 2017; Guénif-Souilamas 2010; Wekker 2016). This work enables us to consider the endurance and invisibility of colonial formations in shaping our policies, politics and social worlds. Citizenship and naturalisation policies – and the constitutive hierarchies and formations of race, class, gender sexuality – are shaped directly by these broader histories. Citizenship tests and language requirements have been extensively analysed as a new paradigm in British immigration and integration policies (Joppke 2007; Monforte, Bassel, and Khan 2019; Ryan 2008; Vink and De Groot 2010). They are understood to crystallise a perceived failure of multiculturalism (Modood 2012) and a move towards a more assimilationist model that takes the form of a 'culturalisation of citizenship' (Tonkens, Hurenkamp, and Duyvendak 2010), implying that access to citizenship should be based on cultural dimensions such as language or the knowledge of 'British values' (and through similar tests and ceremonies introduced across European countries in the 2000s). However, we argue that what is considered to be the 'new' European turn in civic integration policies, in which UK naturalisation and citizenship tests are often located, is 'animated by an older colonial anxiety' (Farris 2016, n.p.). We privilege literature that focuses on the continuation of this older anxiety rather than the 'new-ness' of tests and ceremonies. This requires instead a focus on the processes through which colonial subjects and citizens were reframed as 'migrants' to be integrated, and the implications for naturalisation today which may otherwise not be emphasised.

Gender, revealed by many scholars as a colonial construction, is understood to have informed 'the modern/colonial institution of citizenship from its emergence' (Boatcă and Roth 2016).

> 'Gender and citizenship have been embedded in highly complex ways with other dimensions of stratification and inequality such as racialisation and enslavement, placing men, women and transgender persons at very different positions in racialized colonial hierarchies . . . .To this unequal and gendered mode of organization corresponded a structural distribution of unequal and gendered citizenship rights that shaped the modern/colonial institution of citizenship from its inception and that gets continuously rearticulated in new forms and understandings of citizenship today' (Boatcă and Roth 2016).

In a similar vein, Alyosxa Tudor argues 'Racial and religious categorisation systems, misogyny, homophobia and a compulsory gender binary have come into existence through modernist ideas of Europeanness and can therefore not be displaced to an elsewhere' (Tudor 2018, 1069).[7] The Life in the UK Test and naturalisation process, however, require demonstrating 'British' values with the implication that these forms of discrimination come from elsewhere and need improvement and correction through the test process to allow membership and inclusion. While these processes have been amply critiqued on this basis (see Morrice 2017a, 2017b), we propose instead the wider

perspective provided by postcolonial and decolonial scholarship. We question the legitimacy of the demand to 'integrate' itself. Women's experiences challenge the legitimacy of integration because of the contradiction that their care responsibilities coupled with exclusion from national body preclude their actual integration. The nature of this exclusion cannot simply be adjusted through 'better' integration policies, because the historical and socio-political forces that discursively construct them would remain intact. Instead, the sovereignty of nation-states to determine belonging and borders is questioned through recognition of imperial interconnection, and of borders i as a colonial legacy (Achiume 2019).

III. Coloniality and care

From this vantage point, we focus specifically on the combination of the 'crisis of care' and the increasingly neoliberal test process (Van Houdt, Suvarierol, and Schinkel 2011) in migrant women's experiences. Nancy Fraser refers to a 'crisis of care' as follows: alongside state and corporate disinvestment from social welfare (particularly but not exclusively since the economic crisis of 2008), women are recruited into the paid workforce, externalising care work onto families and communities while diminishing their capacity to perform it. The result is a dualised organisation of social reproduction, commodified for those who can pay for it and privatised for those who cannot, as some in the second category provide care work in return for (low) wages for those in the first (Fraser 2016, 112). However, this is not new for women of colour. Instead, what changes is how the crisis is resolved for some and made worse for others, which always has intersected with race, class, gender and other systems and processes (Bassel and Emejulu 2017; Emejulu and Bassel 2020). For instance, racialisation 'precedes and structures neoliberal times. It has structured abolition, imperialism, eugenics, colonial development, even the welfare state and its national compact, as well Thatcherism, workfare and our austerity era' (Shilliam 2018, 178). Here we emphasise this specific crisis of care because of the ways in which it interacts in the UK context with austerity measures following the 2008 economic crisis and gendered migration,[8] which is then visible in our participants' narratives about their experiences of becoming UK citizens in the naturalisation process.

In England specifically, the implications of the 2008 economic crisis and subsequent austerity measures – such as the Bedroom Tax on 'extra' bedrooms, changes to disability and child benefits – for migrant women have been documented in a number of areas. Public services, particularly childcare, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes (see also (Lonergan 2015, 138)) and sports activities for children, had been the key way in which some migrant women could participate in everyday life alongside caring responsibilities. Cuts to these services, particularly at the local level, may further isolate women who are already in a precarious social and economic position. Many of these effects of austerity have been documented in broader studies, also noting the disproportionate impact on lone mothers (Lonergan 2015).[9] Exclusions from welfare 'feed back to discourses on what counts as a normative family life worthy of care and protection' (Erel 2017, 176). Thus, families and, indeed, the migrant women in this study may remain on the outskirts of care and the racialised body of the nation as they undergo their form of

becoming through citizenship in trying circumstances and nonetheless claim their own citizenship rights despite and against these colonial relations of citizenship.

In this respect, notions of care and coloniality – the ways in which after the 'end' of colonialism instruments of social domination survived and continue to shape Eurocentric forms of rationality and modernity (Quijano 2007) – are connected to citizenship's function as a form of racialised membership by migrant women. Umut Erel, Tracey Reynolds, and Erene Kaptani (2018b) argue that 'racialised citizenship' is an insightful concept as it refers to 'processes of constructing citizenship which deploy a social constructionist approach to "race". This argument recognizes racialization as a political project rooted in colonialism and imperialism drawing on biological and cultural difference and hierarchies' (Erel, Reynolds, and Kaptani 2018b, 56). Migrant women may face the challenge of a form of citizenship that reproduces coloniality and in so doing, does not recognise their rights to give and receive care due to their marginalisation from the racialised body of the nation. Yet these experiences are shaped by a range of social characteristics and past experiences and should not be presented a historically or homogeneously (Zentgraf 2002).[10] This heterogeneity of experience intersects with the crisis of care – which is resolved for some women and exacerbated for others – and shapes different possibilities of becoming a citizen.

Methods

We draw on 94 in-depth interviews with migrant women[11] preparing for or having taken the citizenship test in two highly diverse cities in England, London and Leicester. Both cities have histories of migration and in particular have long-established migrant communities as well as more recently arrived migrant communities. We interviewed people at different stages of the citizenship process – those who were considering entering the test process; had gone through the process and passed or failed the test; were preparing through colleges, migrant advocacy organisations or private providers; or had just taken the test. Our sample includes migrant women with different migration trajectories, social backgrounds, nationalities, and personal characteristics. We read the experiences of these women-identified participants as part of a wider range of gender identities, which are shaped by and resistant to the colonial construction of gender binaries and heteronormativity. Participants spanned 34 nationalities, had spent between a matter of weeks to over 20 years in the UK (the average was 9.4 years), and had a variety of legal statuses (e.g. UK citizenship, EU citizenship, Indefinite Leave to Remain, Applying for Indefinite Leave to remain). We accessed participants primarily through migrant advocacy and community organisations, colleges providing language training and snowball sampling, aiming to build trust through sustained interaction and exchange. Data were collected in two waves: the first sampling across nationalities, the second focusing on specific 'communities' in the two cities.[12] Interviews were conducted from April 2014 to March 2016. Data were analysed using NVivo, initially using open code analytical categories derived from our theoretical framework. Following a 'two-step approach' (Silverman 2006), these categories were then further specified to enable new findings to emerge from our analysis to recast the theoretical framework. To ensure intercoder reliability, research team members coded (and double-coded) transcripts in close collaboration.

We note here the difficulty of imposing a quantitative logic on this qualitative study when presenting our findings. Interview quotes have been chosen because of the way participants clearly discuss key themes and reveal challenges. We reflect on social characteristics of participants who are quoted and include the stage of the naturalisation process they were at when interviewed. These characteristics reveal the nature of individualised and pluralised becoming in these cases (see also Bassel, Monforte, and Khan 2017).[13]

Individualised becoming

We differentiate between two broad forms of becoming in relation to our data: individualised and pluralised becoming. Individualised becoming is positioned through personal advancement for each individual. Pluralised becoming, as we will reflect upon later, relates individual becoming through the acquisition of citizenship to generating possibilities -of becoming for others. To build on these differences we will first expand on the notion of individualised becoming.

The citizenship test process appears to be gender neutral but, in fact, interacts with gendered social structures and ideologies (Salcido and Menjivar 2012), such as the division of labour and of caring responsibilities. While this woman was participating in the test process, she described the challenge of maintaining social connections and juggling domestic caring responsibilities that in her 'crisis of care' she is not able to outsource:

> I know quite a lot of people. They are some people, most of the people really they are living in London because I can contact them because I don't have time and maybe I am learning so I have to come to college and cooking, cleaning. My father in law and mother in law are old. I have to take care of them and I have one child 7 years old and also take care and I think, I don't know, these countries time is going so fast. Sometimes one week I can talk to my mother and father in [her country] because I don't have time and at night I don't . . . because I have to sleep and in the morning they have night time so I can't (LN,[14] South Asian[15] woman, with Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR), in the UK 4 years)

This is one form of the actual struggle that lies behind the 'pathological' representation of isolated Muslim women in 'separate' communities who supposedly do not want/are not allowed to venture beyond them.

The 'pathological' representation of social isolation, inspired by colonial tropes of 'submissive subaltern women',[16] masks the gendered division of labour at home and in the labour market in combination with a process that it is difficult to understand. The same participant added:

> Some people they are not coming to college they are just stay at home cooking, cleaning, like that. They told me they don't want to do Life in the UK test, it is very hard for them, because they don't understand the question (LN, South Asian woman, in UK 4 years, ILR)

Isolation can act as a double-edged sword, both a consequence of not speaking English but also a barrier to learning the language, particularly when women lack information about where to learn, how to get to classes and a lack of support (Wonder Foundation 2016). This isolation can be overcome to an extent through co-ethnic/linguistic networks and personal initiative but this possibility varies considerably according to other

characteristics (level of education, ability to leave the home without caring responsibilities). The retrenchment of state support, in the form of withdrawing free language training, means that co-ethnic/linguistic networks become more important for this Latin American woman who had to negotiate the process while pregnant:

> It makes me emotional . . . because when I arrived in London, I was pregnant . . . I had never thought I would come to here pregnant so all the joy and feelings that I bring they were in chaos . . . The first thing was to see a doctor and see if everything was ok . . . I didn't understand anything, there was no one to serve as a translator who could accompany me . . . so it was anguish, a need to learn English however I could . . . I really went to those colleges where everyone knows each other. I remember there was one that everyone recommended which was very good and called [name] but in the moment I asked how much, it was too expensive . . . I was desperate and I wanted to learn however I could and one day I went to one place here in [place] and it's well known because they do a lot of Latin things like Latino food and I went to this market for some shopping and ahead of me were some people who were speaking in Spanish. . . . Later when I could speak to them, I asked them how does all of this work and they explained to me so from there I received a letter from the college and I went only for this, I mean it was something I had to, I wanted to learn and I followed these people and I ended up in this college here and this college brought me everything (LN, Latin American woman, in UK 17 years, Citizen)

In her case, a combination of luck, solidarity among Spanish speakers, and personal initiative enabled her to access language training. But she is also highly educated (university level) with previous training in a job from which her skills were transferrable. These forms of social capital – as well as her own drive and initiative – offset the inequalities of the process in ways that are not available to all migrant women.

Later in the interview she highlighted the importance of strong, supportive relationships with female teachers at the college who then helped her to access appropriate training and employment. This is another form of care and emotional labour, which is also in crisis in a third sector that is under threat of constant cuts and competition. As the Wonder Foundation notes in their report, these personal relationships were invaluable to women and motivated them but could be overwhelming for overstretched staff (Wonder Foundation 2016).

Women in our study described the challenges of the process in ways that indicate how the broader 'crisis of care' shapes their experiences. They identified the cost of the process as a key challenge: a minimum of £1000 per adult (£50 for the test, over £1000 for naturalisation, plus any preparation courses, solicitor fees etc.). When asked how much the process cost her, this West African woman notes the competing cost of childcare:

> Recently I asked and they said £150, I said £150! If I don't do it now, before you know it again it's £200. You know, how do you want us to get it? One charging us each time and I have children here and I can't leave my children (LN, West African woman, in UK almost 2.5 years, applying for ILR).

For other women, lack of access to the labour market and living in a single income household effectively bars them from participating:

> It's hard for the people who are poor or only one person working in the family. It's easier for the people who has money or are working, both of them are working . . . It's quite

> expensive . . . My husband was only person who was working and it was really too expensive for us (LN, South Asian woman, in UK 5 years, ILR).

These findings echo studies on legalisation processes in the United States which document how 'gender and class intersect to make the legalization process unaffordable – and eventual legalization unachievable – for the poorest women' (Salcido and Menjívar 2012, 353).

The gendered division of labour in the household makes participation in the process, and preparation, even more challenging for some women:

> Because you know woman she has a lot of things to do to look after the house, not for me but for other people they have a lot of children . . . [they] don't have time to prepare for the exam but the man he has, even if he has a job, he comes back and he doesn't have to do anything just to be [laughs] (LN, North African woman, in UK 5 years, citizen)

Lack of childcare and childcare responsibilities act as a barrier to preparation that has become more acute under austerity and the 'crisis of care' Fraser identifies:

> Here at [name of college] they offer [name of course – English] . . . My husband he works full time so every time when I want to go to study and no, you need to pay. It's a really big, high fee for the child minder asked £8 or £9 an hour so depends on how many hour I need, so it's hard (LN, East African woman in UK 6 years, ILR)

Preparation strategies themselves are highly gendered in the broader context of 'time crunch':

> For me as a mum was quite busy, school plus two kids. I do everyday 30 minutes reading the book, I feel myself a bit tired and I didn't understand anymore and I just leave it (LN, Asian woman, in UK 7 years, ILR)

Some migrant women described negotiating multiple systems of inequality and power through the citizenship test process. The process can be instrumentalised as part of a broader strategy to negotiate patriarchy and the unequal division of labour in the home. When asked if becoming a citizen makes a big difference to her and to her family, this woman agrees:

> 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
>
> (LN, South Asian woman, in UK 4 years, ILR)

Here, naturalization is a tool for personal negotiation, to get away from extended family responsibilities and subvert some forms of patriarchal power and inequality, while participating in the unequal test process. While subjected to and constrained by the process some women also instrumentalise it, in a kind of 'patriarchal bargain' (Kandiyoti 1988) where individual strategies and aims are advanced within unequal structural conditions informed by the colonial legacies that continue to shape and condition naturalisation policies.

For others, this is part of a survival strategy and a path to independence as single mothers:

> If I become British, the reason why it will make a difference is because to make difference to my family is because I haven't got anyone, any support, anywhere. So I become British I'll be

able to complete my study, like go to university and then be a professional and then be there for this my two children somewhere . . . Life will be different (LN, West African woman, in UK 7 years, Leave to Remain)

These strategies were often framed as 'for the children': to secure their future or, in the case of British children with non-British EU parents, to secure family unity in case Britain left the EU (our interviews were conducted before the June 2016 referendum).

Individual becoming and surviving violence

Citizenship status was also a key strategy to surviving violence in the home, a way to break free of the past with legal protection.[17] Becoming in this sense meant both independence as person and independence from highly difficult moments from the past. Thus, becoming functions through a path to safety through obtaining citizenship. This is crucial step since threats of deportation or unsuccessful applications can disappear and the other possibilities open for the future.

In one case a woman with Indefinite Leave to Remain who was returning to the UK was asked at customs where her husband lived, and she described being shocked and wanting to be able to travelwith a passport and not asked any further questions about her past. As a citizen this would be possible, rather than having to provide documents and explanations required when travelling with Indefinite Leave to Remain. 'I don't need, I don't want to ask past questions because now I am separate' (LC, South Asian woman, ILR). Gaining citizenship was a way of individualised becoming in separating from past traumas by no longer reliving them during highly vulnerable moments of travelling alone.

Citizenship was identified as a way to escape situations of violence, echoing the broader literature that explores dependence on men for legal status , and the importance of acquiring independent legal status in order to be able to leave abusive relationships (Amanor-Boadu et al. 2001; Côté et al. 2001; Erez et al. 2009; Menjívar and Salcido 2002; Reina, Lohman, and Maldonado 2014). But in the broader context of austerity, survivors lack information about the right to become British. As one participant working with survivors described this 'I know a lot of people, but they have the right to become British but they don't have any information at all about this' (LN, Latin American woman, in UK 10 years, Citizen). Drastic cuts to legal aid provision are recognised by the Ministry of Justice's own Equality Impact Assessments as disproportionately affecting women and minority ethnic groups (Sommerlad and Sanderson 2013), potentially thwarting individual strategies due to a lack of information.[18]

While claiming to save women of colour from their communities, often presented as 'backward' and patriarchal, in reality scarce resources – time, money, information, advice – can prevent meaningful access to naturalisation particularly for survivors of violence who are purportedly the 'brown women' being saved from 'brown men' (Spivak 1988; see also Farris 2017) in the eye of the storm. Care for survivors of violence is constructed discursively following colonial tropes, but material and practical means to provide care and to access care are highly compromised.

Pluralised possibilities of becoming citizens

In contrast to the focus on the individual, the following pluralised possibilities of becoming emerged from the data in relation to reproduction. While the individual's becoming was central, it quite often connected directly to possibilities and opportunities for others, often family members. Collectively oriented strategies counter the individualised nature of the process and the vision of the 'model neo-liberal citizen' who strategizes for themself 'among various social, political and economic options, not one who strives with others to alter or organize these options' (Brown 2003). Quite often, these strategies aligned with motherhood and the possibilities for the next generation of British citizens within the family.

In many instances, women described 'helping' for example, new migrants in the community to learn English and access services for children. Many women drew on their own experiences and traditions to motivate other women and insist on the importance of learning in and of itself and to overcome isolation:

> Special for new people I try to push them to go to learn. Don't say I have child and, yes, you have child helpful for living with your family but try your best … try to go to the class because at least you will speak or you learn one word … and about going out and trying to going to Surestart [government-funded children's centre] for you child, and happy and good time, and you will knew people and you will go (LN, East African woman, in UK 6 years, ILR)

An Eastern European woman who volunteers at her daughter's school and helps children in nursery two days a week explains the challenges of language she helps people overcome:

> Three maybe four years I was volunteer in [nationality's] play group … I started my volunteer, I am trying to change my life you know. I am started in [her native language] group, now I am volunteer in English play group and then my daughter's school (LN, Eastern European Woman, in UK 8 years, EU citizen)

This is a collectively-oriented strategy with a personal dimension, to 'change my life' and overcome the isolation that is pathologised in public debate, discussed above. Instead, the same woman then asserts normative presence (Phoenix 1987), in ways that are not equally available to South Asian and Black migrant women. For her, this is part of a personal self-help strategy:

> First year in UK for me was horrible because my husband work all day, all of the time. I was in home with my daughter, two years old daughter, and it was horrible time. Now I am volunteer in [organisation] because [organisation] helped me, now I would like to help [organisation], maybe are another people who needs my help. Sometimes are [nationality] mothers with children and they aren't speaking English

These forms of engagement – getting involved in parents' committees at school, housing committees in the neighbourhood, organising street parties, acting as a bridge for linguistic repertoires if multilingual, as well as working in one's own cultural community – all indicate the ways in which migrant women are active contributors to public life, regardless of their formal legal status (see also Erel 2011). Erel and Reynolds (2018a) position children as a key site of struggle for rights and participation. They argue 'While the nation-state continues to be an important actor in allowing migrants access to the

territory, conferring legal, social and political rights, migrant women also contribute to producing notions of rights, community and participation on these other levels, in the process becoming political subjects' (Erel and Reynolds 2018a, 3). Mothers may play a strategic role in preparing future citizens while at the same time confronting racial subordination (Erel and Reynolds 2018a).

In the course of what is an individualised and neoliberal process that demands compliance and active citizenship along prescribed lines (Bassel, Monforte, and Khan 2021), these migrant women carve out individual and collective possibilities of becoming citizens. The naturalisation process can therefore also be a space of agency, strategy and new forms of action . These actions are undertaken despite being embedded in a 'crisis of care' and political climate in which migrant women have been and continue to be 'pathologically present' (Phoenix 1987) through processes of racialisation that are the legacy of colonialism.

Forms of solidarity emerge within and against the ideologies of gender, race and class expressed in these policy instruments. Care is, itself, a site of multiple dilemmas (Raijman, Schammah-Gesser, and Kemp 2003) and threats to migrant women's identity (Hoang 2016). As Ruth Lister has argued, an ethic of care is a contradictory political resource: care can be a citizenship practice; yet caring responsibilities can also impede women's citizenship (Lister 2008). Migrant mothers' politics of care can challenge the dichotomy between private caring and public citizenship practices (Erel 2011) in ways that we see in our own study. Viewed through the lens of care and coloniality that we propose above, we go a step further to suggest that this critique can extend to questioning the legitimacy of integration itself, rather than exploring the ways in which groups and individuals 'pass' or 'fail' tests to then make incremental changes to integration policies.

The social transformations that result from migratory processes are open-ended and uncertain and the effects of austerity measures challenging. Yet the ways in which women negotiate these activities, however 'private' or 'small', are political and form the backdrop of a shifting terrain from which new subjects and social relations emerge. New forms of action and identity are generalised, that are both individual and plural. This is sometimes *despite* rather than because of the citizenship test process, sometimes a result of its unintended consequences in generating new networks, forms of social capital and social relations from which women reinvent practices and understandings of who belongs that challenge colonial relations of citizenship and the legitimacy of integration.

Conclusion

In this article, we have foregrounded individualised and pluralised modes of becoming a citizen in the United Kingdom. There are connections to be made across borders, as the colonial entanglements, such as those of race, gender and class, are unfolded in and across national contexts. Here we focus on the UK context by way of an invitation to extend this analysis elsewhere through connection, rather than comparison (see Bhambra 2014 on 'connected sociologies'). While the UK is unique in some ways in terms of the history and power of the English language, the role of gender, care and the possibilities of becoming through citizenship will resonate and connect with other contexts.

The UK naturalisation process is embedded in broader social, economic and political relations in which reproductive labour is privatised or commodified, along lines

including race, class, gender, sexuality that stem from colonial formations. This article focuses on a specific moment at which austerity measures and experiences of the migratory process intersected in ways that continue longer historical processes through which these relations were formed.

Viewed through a broader lens, experiences of 'the journey to citizenship' reveal migrant women's more general negotiations, and even contestations, of the inequalities and exclusions they and others face on a day-to-day basis. The possibilities of citizenship relate to their circumstances, and what they can become for themselves and for others. The legitimacy of integration agendas themselves can thus be questioned: women's experiences challenge the legitimacy of integration because of the contradiction that their care responsibilities coupled with exclusion from national body preclude their actual integration.

However, this in turn requires challenging the historical and socio-political forces that discursively construct them as *migrant* women. As E. Tendayi Achiume has argued, because they are not 'political strangers ... First World nation-states have no right to exclude Third World peoples, and creating a world that reflects this fact requires a complete reimagining of national borders and the institutions of political inclusion' (Achiume 2019: 1573). This reimagining includes citizenship and naturalisation policies to recognise 'cosovereign status and correct an unethical set of power relations by redistributing the power to achieve greater prospects of equality. There is a corrective justice dimension to this, in the sense that redistribution is made necessary by a historical wrong and its continuing, present-day legacy' (Achiume 2019: 1553). This reimagining is a far cry from the realities of naturalisation and the violence of border control in Europe today. The possibilities beyond this can be shaped alone and together with consequences not only for the individual but also for generations to come. Thus, while colonial histories shape present day citizenship, forms of becoming disclose new futures.

Notes

1. We are equal co-authors of this article. This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (grant number ES/K010174/1). The research material can be accessed on the UK Data Service ReShare website, persistent identifier: 10.5255/UKDA-SN-852967.
2. In this article, we use the category women to refer to women-identified individuals, and we recognize the expansive and fluid nature of gender identity.
3. 'The Mohawks of Kahnawà: ke are nationals of a precontact Indigenous polity that simply refuse to stop being themselves. In other words, they insist on being and acting as peoples who belong to a nation other than the United States or Canada...Their genealogical and political connectedness is part of a covenant – the decision-making Iroquois Confederacy called Haudenosaunee – which is made up of clans that spread across territory' (Simpson 2014, 2).
4. We define 'women of colour' as those who experience the effects of processes of racialisation, class and gender dominations as well as other sources of inequality, particularly hierarchies of legal status. This includes cis and trans women and non-binary folks (Bassel and Emejulu 2017; Emejulu and Bassel 2020).
5. These requirements were then extended to those who applied to Indefinite Leave to Remain.
6. In the 2015 edition, the idea of a 'journey' was removed, with the new title '*Life in the United Kingdom. A guide for new residents*' (Home Office 2015).

7. See also the study of the homonationalist paradigm of sexual citizenship in asylum determination processes, that is, the 'Pink Agenda' in nation states and international human rights institutions to grant asylum for persecution on these grounds, which strengthens the divide between tolerant and intolerant member states and suggests the existence of a difference between a *queer-friendly* 'West' and homophobic and transphobic non-western countries (Ammaturo 2015; Puar 2007).

8. See also (Morokvasic 1983); (Hugo 2000); (Pessar 1999); (Foner 2001).

9. See also Bassel and Emejulu (2017).

10. See for example Donato and Gabaccia 2006); (Abraham, E. N. Chow Maratou-Alipranti, and Tastoglou 2010).

11. The total sample comprises 158 interviews with men and women. On gender, naturalization and deservingness more generally see (Bassel 2021).

12. London: Chinese, Bangladeshi, Latin American; Leicester: Indian, Polish.

13. We note the effect of the wider context on our data collection. During our project, Prime Minister David Cameron made public statements linking lack of integration to radicalisation and ISIS, and proposing more stringent language requirements for visas(The Guardian 2016). . We were told informally that this generated concerns for some Muslim women about participating in research projects.

14. Participants from London are indicated with 'LN' and from Leicester with 'LC'.

15. Please note that specific nationalities have not been provided to preserve anonymity. A more general geographic category is used instead.

16. See also (Byrne 2014, 116–18).

17. Domestic violence can also act as a personal barrier that makes it difficult to learn at the pace required by immigration regulations (Wonder Foundation 2016).

18. violence is these issues are caught up within border control regimes. As Southall Black Sisters, the not-for-profit organization established in 1979 to meet the needs of Asian and African-Caribbean women, explains, they are not willing to pursue deportation as a means of protecting a woman experiencing domestic violence (in some cases a man's right to reside is dependent on his marriage to a woman, and if the marriage breaks down, he is liable to deportation). '[I]n our view it would amount to legitimising racist immigration rules and practices, and the physical and mental brutality that often accompanies the implementation of these rules' (Patel 2002).

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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