‘They look into our lips’

Negotiation of the citizenship ceremony as authoritative discourse

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The British citizenship ceremony marks the legal endpoint of the naturalisation process. While the citizenship ceremony may be a celebration, it can also be a final examination. Using an ethnographically-informed case study, this article follows one candidate, ‘W’, through the naturalisation process in the UK. W is a migrant Yemeni at the end of the naturalisation process. Bakhtin’s notion of “ideological becoming” offers an analytic orientation into how competing discourses may operate. This article focuses on the role of what Bakhtin describes as “authoritative discourse” in the citizenship ceremony, in particular the Oath/Affirmation of Allegiance which citizenship candidates are required to recite. Success in the ceremony is dependent on how individuals negotiate authoritative discourse. This study follows W and highlights the complexities and negotiations of authoritative discourse in a citizenship ceremony.

Keywords: citizenship; citizenship ceremony; authoritative discourse; ideological becoming; Bakhtin

1. Introduction

This article follows a Yemeni migrant to the United Kingdom (referred to hereafter as W) on his journey to British citizenship. This study is situated in the context of the last eleven months of the naturalisation (used interchangeably in this article with citizenship) process, as W makes his application for citizenship. It begins prior to W completing his final naturalisation application forms and ends at the legal endpoint of the naturalisation process: the British citizenship ceremony.

While politicians such as the former Home Secretary, David Blunkett (2002) have represented the British citizenship ceremony as a celebration of belonging, this study will argue that it is both a final linguistic trial and also a celebration of a new status. The citizenship ceremony has been lauded as adding significance to

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the acquisition of British citizenship (Blunkett 2002; Home Office 2002a). However, by scrutinizing how one arrives at the British citizenship ceremony itself, and how the ceremony is performed, this study analyses de facto language testing in a moment of celebration.

The study adopts Bakhtin's (1981) notion of "authoritative discourse" to view a migrant's negotiation of the citizenship ceremony as the intersection of ideological becoming, national belonging, and citizenship. In order to offer a critical understanding of the British citizenship ceremony, we first consider historical and legislative conceptions of British citizenship.

2. The historical context of British citizenship

British citizenship was created with the introduction of the British Nationality Act (BNA) 1981. Until the inception of this Act of Parliament, the term "British subject" was in use to indicate national and Commonwealth belonging, rather than "citizen" (Home Office 2002b). As such, British citizenship is a relatively new concept. The development of British citizenship in BNA 1981 may be viewed as a response to more than thirty years of immigration legislation in which Britain had evolved from a post-war nation intent on maintaining its global status, through inclusive Commonwealth citizenship, to a more exclusive concept of national citizenship (Hansen 2000; Karatani 2003; Hampshire 2005). Following World War II, Britain bestowed British subjecthood on all those born within the colonial territories and Commonwealth, through the Nationality Act 1948. This legislation acted as a catalyst to immigration, as members of Commonwealth countries began entering Britain in large numbers.

Immigration increasingly became a political issue from the post-war period onwards (Layton-Henry 1992; Paul 1997). With the arrival of large numbers of colonial migrants, following the Nationality Act 1948 (Hansen 2000), legislative measures were created to limit immigration. Hampshire refers to the Commonwealth Immigration Act (CIA) 1962 as the dawn of "an exclusionary phase in the politics of immigration" (Hampshire 2005, 25). Further legislation would attempt to restrict entrance to Britain (Commonwealth Immigration Act 1968; Immigration Act 1971). BNA 1981 created a clear line in the sand between belonging to Britain via its colonial past, and a national rather than Commonwealth citizenship.

Citizenship design allowed government to determine who can enter the UK, as "the nation-state is architect and guarantor of a number of distinctively modern forms of closure" (Brubaker 1992, 23). One of these forms of closure is through naturalisation for those who have not been ascribed citizenship at birth (Brubaker 1992). BNA 1981 was the culmination of a "complex relationship which has been

developed in Britain between a political unit and its formal membership" (Karatani 2003, 3) and became "little more than a transposition of immigration law" (Joppke 1999, 113). British citizenship did not emerge independently of immigration but *because* of immigration. Hence, British citizenship defined itself as much by who did not 'belong' as by who did. Joppke describes the "historically weak sense and late institutionalization of British citizenship" (2010, 129). Karatani (2003) points out that British citizenship under the BNA 1981 was only a legal status, and there was little interest at government level in defining the substantive aspects of citizenship. BNA 1981 remained silent about what "Britishness" meant: "While the term British citizenship was used, it was unclear what this represented and how exactly one could be a 'good citizen'" (Karatani 2003, 185).

Following civil unrest in the north of England in 2001, in which predominantly young, British-Pakistani men were involved in fighting the police, Cantle (2001) in an independent review reported that "parallel lives" were being led, and that these were caused by segregation along cultural and racial lines of segregation (McGhee 2008). The proposed solution to this situation was a reinvigoration of British citizenship which could promote shared values and language (Home Office 2002a).

The year after the civil unrest, the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act (NIAA) 2002 was introduced to the statute books. Despite the fact that many of those involved in the riots were British-born citizens, immigrants wishing to become naturalized as British citizens would now need to demonstrate "a sufficient knowledge of English" and "a sufficient knowledge of life in the United Kingdom" (Home Office 2002b). Consequently, "Citizenship reform is clearly linked to strengthened border protection and a reformed immigration system" (Kostakopoulou 2011, 2). British citizenship was once again infused with immigration legislation which would now more actively differentiate on the grounds of English language proficiency.

The language requirement of British citizenship had formed a part of the BNA 1981. However, the Crick Commission, which had been tasked with advising on 21st Century British citizenship, acknowledged that the implementation of this requirement was "often perfunctory and sometimes uselessly minimal" (Crick Commission 2003, 4). This language requirement was transformed in the 2002 legislation to become a standardized English language test. The Life in the UK (LUK) test, together with an alternative route of ESOL with citizenship classes, now represented the language requirement for citizenship applicants. In 2005 a computer-based test was introduced, requiring that candidates demonstrate both their English language proficiency and their knowledge of life in the UK, by answering 24 computer-based, multiple-choice questions. In April 2007 the test was extended as a requirement for applicants for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) in the U.K.

Introducing an extended English language requirement for citizenship applicants fulfilled a symbolic function, in that there was a reimagining of Britain as a monolingual nation which views multilingualism and therefore multilingual speakers as problematic (Blackledge 2005). In this regime, earning British citizenship through demonstration of English language proficiency was "essential in constructing a very particular and exclusive version of British nationhood" (Sales 2010, 137). Kostakopoulou (2003, 89) proposes that naturalisation functions as an "assimilative device" through which migrants are expected "to assimilate into the dominant culture, to think and act like a national". One way of doing this is to demand allegiance to the nation-state. This act is not mandatory for natives, but is required of migrants (Pitcher 2009).

Löwenheim and Gazit (2009, 148) position citizenship tests as "the open window into the 'mind' of the state". In a similar vein, Shohamy (2006) describes citizenship testing as a mechanism that enacts language ideologies – in this case a monolingual ideology. Woolard (1998, 3) points out that language ideologies "envision and enact ties of language to identity, to aesthetics, to morality and epistemology. Through such linkages they underpin not only linguistic form and use but also the very definition of the person and the social group". The "Life in the UK" (LUK) citizenship test and the citizenship ceremony have been positioned as fulfilling symbolic functions within the naturalisation process (Pitcher 2009). Since 2005 the LUK test has represented a fulfillment of the language requirement for new citizens. By the time migrants arrive at the citizenship ceremony they have fulfilled the language requirement to become a citizen.

Britain followed the lead of other traditional immigration countries such as Canada, Australia and the United States of America by introducing citizenship ceremonies (Sales 2010). The rationale that drove the introduction of these rituals was to imbue the acquisition of British citizenship with greater significance and to "end the 'mail-order' approach to the acquisition of British nationality" (Kostakopoulou 2010, 833). The ceremony was to become a way of making the endpoint of naturalisation less instrumental and more meaningful and symbolic. Home Secretary David Blunkett wrote:

> When people become British citizens I want it to be something to celebrate, not just a piece of paper arriving in a brown envelope alongside the gas bill… I want a formal ceremony to celebrate, just like when we are baptised, get married or graduate from university…at the heart will be a modern 21st Century Oath of Allegiance. We already have an oath which people must swear.
>
> (Blunkett 2002)

It is noteworthy that Blunkett compared becoming British to becoming a Christian, a spouse or a graduate. Each example is indicative of a transformational change in

status which is marked by a celebratory ceremony. Of course, attitudes and feelings may vary towards how such ceremonies are experienced and presented. Pitcher (2009, 71) describes the ceremony as "a mildly humiliating ritual, to be endured for the sake of a quicker passage to passport control". Prime Minister Cameron (Cabinet Office 2011) explained:

> Citizenship should be a big deal for them and for us. I've been to the citizenship ceremonies, they are moving, they do work, but here too changes are needed. So let me say one more thing about this journey to becoming a British citizen. We're going to change the British citizenship test.

Cameron refers to citizenship candidates as 'them', in opposition to 'us'. He also makes reference to the emotional pull of such ceremonies which may be more meaningful for some than others. The Prime Minister also makes a direct correlation between the LUK test and the citizenship ceremony as he demonstrates the symbolic nature of both events during the naturalisation process.

Not only did the British government introduce a citizenship ceremony, but it also insisted that attendance was compulsory, and it is now a legal requirement to attend the ceremony. Following successful application for citizenship (including fulfilment of the language requirement), the Home Office United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) guide for naturalisation states: "We expect you to arrange to attend a ceremony within 3 months of receiving your invitation otherwise it will expire and you will have to reapply for naturalisation and pay a further processing fee" (Home Office 2010, 20).

3. Citizenship ceremonies

British citizenship ceremonies are carried out in many cities in the UK. The ceremonies involve the new citizens taking the Oath or Affirmation of Allegiance, and the Pledge of Loyalty, and the national anthem is played to signal the end of the ceremony. Citizens also collect a certificate. Each locality will often present new citizens with a gift which is linked to the local area or industry.

The difference between the Oath and the Affirmation is that the Affirmation does not refer to God, although both require a statement of allegiance to the reigning monarch:

> **Oath of Allegiance**
>
> I (name) swear by Almighty God that on becoming a British citizen, I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, her Heirs and Successors, according to law.

> **Affirmation of Allegiance**
>
> I (name) do solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm that on becoming a British citizen, I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, her Heirs and Successors, according to law.

The citizens must choose between taking either the Oath or the Affirmation. The Oath or Affirmation is spoken publicly, but not individually. All of the candidates recite the Oath or Affirmation. They are also required to recite the Pledge of Loyalty:

> **Pledge of Loyalty**
>
> I will give my loyalty to the United Kingdom and respect its rights and freedoms. I will uphold its democratic values. I will observe its laws faithfully and fulfil my duties and obligations as a British citizen.

The new citizens are normally separated from their guests for the duration of the ceremony. Each local authority has sufficient freedom to enrich the ceremony with a particular regional flavour. Some local authorities in England require that the Oath/Affirmation is taken individually, and the Pledge as a group, although this is not a legal requirement. Local dignitaries (such as the Lord Mayor/Lady Mayoress or local politicians) usually attend to lead the ceremony and each new citizen receives a welcome pack and a certificate of British citizenship.

Chapter 6 of the UK Border Agency caseworking instructions for staff conducting citizenship ceremonies makes the following statement about attendance at the ceremonies for new citizens:

> Attendance is consistent with the Government's aim that ceremonies should encourage cohesion and facilitate integration into the local community. Applicants whose ability in English is poor should be encouraged to practice repeating the words of the citizenship oath (or affirmation) and pledge prior to the ceremony.
>
> (UK Border Agency 2011)

Here attendance at the citizenship ceremony is officially associated with "cohesion" and "integration". This conflation of becoming a citizen with political discourse associated with the management of migration demonstrates the position of the ceremony within a broader sociopolitical context. Notions such as "cohesion" have become prominent in government discourse, particularly during the time that citizenship and language proficiency have been so closely associated (Blackledge 2005; McGhee 2008; Robinson 2009). Thus, the ceremony plays a role in fostering a sense of national community. It is a ritual to be played out which crosses the point of liminality between migrant and citizen.

It is also notable that official discourse accepts that applicants whose "ability in English is poor" will be among the new citizens attending the ceremony. There is

no clear indication of how candidates' proficiency will be determined at this point. However, even having fulfilled citizenship language requirements, there is still an assessment of language, whether ultimately decisive or not. That is to say, even though migrants have fulfilled almost all of the requirements to become citizens, including the demonstration of English language proficiency, their level of English is still being evaluated until the very end.

Hagelund and Reegård (2010) conducted research on Norwegian citizenship ceremonies. They asked whether citizenship ceremonies represent "inclusion or new assimilation" (Hagelund & Reegård 2010, 736). They found that "the meanings and effects of the ceremonies may be different for the participants themselves than were the policy-makers and ceremony organisers' intentions" (Hagelund & Reegård 2010, 737–738). Examining the inner workings of the ceremony and what it means to those involved allows us to view everyday realities both in correlation with, and in contrast to, the ideological and political reasons that prompted their inception.

Not only do Hagelund and Reegård (2010) focus on symbolic aspects of the citizenship ceremony, but they also focus on physical aspects. They note that the separation of guests from new citizens is symbolic of a classic rite of passage. That is to say, ceremonies, like many rites of passage, organize people in particular ways to elicit specific performances.

Like Hagelund and Reegård (2010), Verkaaik also investigates the physical aspects of the ceremony. At times, Verkaaik compares the ceremony to a wedding and also a graduation, as the new citizens collect their certificates. Whereas Hagelund and Reegård (2010) focused on the participants involved in citizenship ceremonies, Verkaaik (2010) examines the role of local bureaucrats, who are expected to prepare and perform the ceremony. Verkaaik goes as far as saying that "it [the citizenship ceremony] does have a significant effect, but not on the new citizens or on the general public. The new ritual primarily has a profound impact on the local civil servants who organize and perform it" (Verkaaik 2010, 70). The study highlights the intersection of the real lives of those wishing to become citizens and the ideological and political policies which are expected to be implemented.

Although both participants and officials are involved in the ceremony, this does not guarantee that they are in sympathy with its intentions. Verkaaik explains that "people perform state rituals not because they agree with their ideological meaning but because the rituals create possibilities: to belong to a group, to do a job, and so on" (Verkaaik 2010, 77). This is further highlighted when an organizer admits: "most of them [the immigrants] don't mind the ceremony. They simply want their passport" (Verkaaik 2010, 79). Such comments from the frontline of citizenship would question whether this ritual does indeed enhance its significance. Furthermore, it evidences the local negotiations in such a symbolic arena of nationalism.

Returning to the British case, the introduction of British citizenship ceremonies, and the inclusion of rituals of the Oath/Affirmation and Pledge, are intended to demonstrate that "Becoming a British citizen is a significant event and should be celebrated in a meaningful way" (UK Border Agency 2012a). The requirement of the Oath, together with a pre-defined ceremonial arrangement, ensures that the citizen is organized and pre-disposed to provide a particular performance, both orally and physically. Rappaport (1999, 143) explains that "Whereas a performative utterance achieves a purely conventional informative procedure, posture and movement, adding physical dimension to the procedure may seem to add physical dimension to the effect as well". The Oath or Affirmation, and the Pledge, therefore have both a performative and ritualistic quality. Ritual "is concerned with the process of either binding people's feelings into the existing organization of society, or with aiding them to become critical and independent of it" (Bocock 1974, 10). The ceremony represents a physical space where the symbolic ritual of becoming British takes place.

4. Becoming

> Becoming a British citizen is a significant life event. Apart from allowing you to apply for a British citizen passport, British citizenship gives you the opportunity to participate more fully in the life of your local community.
>
> (UK Border Agency 2012, 3)

The guide to naturalisation as a British citizen produced by the Home Office UK Border Agency (UK Border Agency 2012) views naturalisation as a "significant life event" and signals the legal dimensions and demands of citizenship. This "life event" is the culmination of naturalisation which is a "politics of becoming" (Kostakopoulou 2003, 89). The introductory statement to the guide implies that citizenship is a process of "becoming". However, it should not be uncritically assumed that the legal aspect of becoming British is accompanied by a more intrinsic sense of belonging. In order to interrogate this tension between the legal and personal dimensions of citizenship we turn to the work of Bakhtin, and his notion of "ideological becoming" as a point of departure.

Bakhtin characterised "ideological becoming" as follows:

> The tendency to assimilate others' discourse takes on an even deeper and more basic significance in an individual's ideological becoming, in the most fundamental sense. Another's discourse performs here no longer as information, directions, rules, models and so forth – but strives rather to determine the very bases of our ideological interrelations with the world; the very basis of our behaviour; it performs here as *authoritative discourse*, and *internally persuasive discourse*. Thus *authoritative discourse* may be at the same time *internally persuasive*.
>
> (Bakhtin 1981, 342 emphasis in original)

A process of ideological becoming requires a sense of assimilating competing discourses and how such a process may impact on the individual's viewpoint. At this point we outline Bakhtin's conception of "authoritative discourse", which he defines as follows:

> The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it. The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers. Its authority was already *acknowledged* in the past. It is a *prior* discourse.
>
> (Bakhtin 1981, 342 emphasis in original)

For Bakhtin authoritative discourse is characterized as static and either accepted or rejected (Cooper & Selfe 1990). Hence, "it is indissolubly fused with its authority – with political power, an institution, a person – and it stands and falls together with that authority" (Bakhtin 1981, 343). It is "given in lofty spheres rather than those of familiar contact" and "it can be profaned. It is akin to taboo, i.e. a name that must not be taken in vain" (1981, 342). Authoritative discourse permits no play with its framing context, or with its borders. It is not negotiable, and may not be argued with: "it demands unconditional allegiance" (1981, 343).

In the case of the British citizenship ceremony, the pledge and oath/affirmation of allegiance can be considered to be authoritative discourses. These discourses represent important words which are to be performed in the moment of becoming British. The words cannot be uttered in any other way nor do they possess the same level of importance in other settings. Thus, the authority of the discourse lies in the content, the setting and the individual's performance.

Yurchak (2006) refers to "authoritative discourse" in analyzing how Soviet state rituals were "performed" in the former USSR. The notion of "authoritative discourse" not only recognizes the authority of a discourse, but also highlights that it is in competition with other discourses. Yurchak (2006, 25) notes that "it became increasingly more important to participate in the reproduction of the form of ritualized acts [which reproduce Soviet ideology] of authoritative discourse than to engage with their constative meanings". Yurchak argues that authoritative discourses may be performed and reproduced yet not assimilated in the way they were intended. That is to say, the performance of authoritative discourse may not indicate shared meanings for all performers and observers, and are not necessarily of equal importance.

Yurchak's work (2006) highlights how authoritative discourses interact with individuals. Morson argues that however it may protect itself from dialogue, authoritative discourse is almost always in contact with social intercourse: "Every

authoritative word is spoken or heard in a milieu of difference. It may try to insulate itself from dialogue with reverential tones, a special script, and all the other signs of the authority fused to it, but at the margins dialogue waits with a challenge" (Morson 2004, 319). While authoritative discourses, such as the discourses of a citizenship ceremony, reserve the right to be regarded as important, the meaning attributed to them by individuals cannot be taken for granted.

5. Methodology

This article is part of a wider investigation which tracked the journey to British citizenship of a migrant to the UK. The study captured the everyday aspects of citizenship (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008a, 2008b) focusing on the details of everyday life on the road to becoming a member of British society, in the context of the legal requirements for acquiring citizenship.

The research design can be best described as an ethnographically-informed case study. It is ethnographically informed in that in that "it is continuous with ordinary life" (Hymes 1996, 13) and consequently "allows us to get at things we would otherwise never be able to discover" (Heller 2008, 250) which in this case is the "the nitty-gritty of nationalist practice" (Verkaaik 2010, 71). Heller (2008, 250) argues that ethnographies "allow us to tell a story; not someone else's story exactly, but our own story of some slice of experience, a story which illuminates social processes, and generates explanations for why people do and think the things they do". One such process in this case is of becoming British.

The study followed an applicant for British citizenship – referred to as W – in the last 11 months of his application for citizenship. W came to the UK from Yemen in 2006. He is a male in his mid- twenties and his spouse is British. He works in a factory during the day and attends English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes in the evenings. He has aspirations to attend a British university. W had not been able to go to university in Yemen for financial reasons and this is something that he has tried to address in the UK. W and Author 1 met through ESOL classes, where Author 1 was conducting research. Both W and Author 1 are males, Muslim and live in the same a neighbourhood of a large metropolis of the Midlands of England. The importance of shared religion was crucial to developing the relationship between Author 1 and W; for example, in extended narrative interviews between Author 1 and W, Arabic words which are typically employed among Muslims are sometimes used. These shared characteristics enabled Author 1 to gain a thorough insight into how W experienced the process of applying for and gaining citizenship.

Data collection was predominantly through fieldnotes and interviews, and was conducted over 11 months. There were periods of intense activity as well as quieter periods (for example there was a mutual and unspoken understanding to not meet during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan). Around 45 sets of fieldnotes were written, as well as around 15 hours of interview data spread across 8 separate, largely unstructured interviews. The data were collected in a number of settings: the ESOL classroom, houses of W's friends, the back of W's friend's supermarket, local mosques, local parks and local leisure centres. In short, these were all places in which W was comfortable. Outside of the ESOL classroom, W chose the locations. Initially Author 1 helped W with his English and at the same time, W showed him parts of his life and the local community. The relationship developed and W would often ask for advice about educational progression (as Author 1 was a former ESOL teacher and Widening Participation Project Manager). This was especially significant given W's desire to go to university. The citizenship ceremony marked a natural and logical end point to the data collection.

Data were analysed through the extraction of emergent themes as the study progressed. The rationale was to take advantage of analysing the data whilst in the field. This allowed for adjustments to be made to the orientation of the study during fieldwork. Following the data collection process, the data were read and coded multiple times to generate key emergent themes.

6. Becoming British: Application process and citizenship ceremony

6.1 Waiting to become British

The British citizenship ceremony marks the legal end-point in the journey to citizenship. The present study locates itself firstly following W's submission of the documentation required in applying for citizenship status. Once documents are submitted, waiting times vary in relation to receipt of the Home Office decision. Successful application leads to an invitation to a citizenship ceremony which must be attended within 90 days of receipt of the invitation.

W could legally apply for British citizenship after five years of residence in the UK. In anticipation, W had begun completing the citizenship application form at the earliest possible date. By the time the date arrived, W was ready and sent the forms. Following the submission of the documentation, W endured a waiting period for which there was no clearly-defined timescale. Initially, W had appeared quite patient:

K – Author 1 W – Participant

(1)

K: So yeah…so, yeah, so, have you heard anything back now from your citizenship or anything? You're still waiting now?
W: I'm still waiting.
K: Yeah, so inshallah [*God Willing in Arabic*], we will wait and see what happens, so
W: Yes, I hope to get it soon
K: It should be soon, yeah, it should be soon…so I think you sent in 2 months, 1 month ago? In ⟨date sent⟩?
W: One month and a half
K: Yeah…so there's not…hopefully there won't be a delay, it will be ok. Inshallah, it will all…resolve soon and you'll get through and it's ok, yeah
W: Inshallah. I've done everything (they asked) that they asked for
K: And you sent all the documents so
W: I sent all of them…all the document they need and I am waiting for their (wait and see, so) decision

W had to wait for more than three additional months before the Home Office responded with a decision. Overall, the time between the submission of documents and the Home Office decision was nearly five months. With a new sense of security upon receiving a final decision, W was more candid about his feelings during the waiting period:

(2)

K: It's strange isn't it…after you try for so long…the British citizenship…you know when you do the British citizenship process? All the forms, all the waiting…five years (yes, yes) and then you've got the ceremony
W: I was thinking why are they delaying us…you know it took me around four months…you know how some people it took him?
K: Weeks
W: Three weeks
K: Yeah
W: More two months…and I ask myself why? Everything they need documents, supporting documents. Yeah?
K: Yeah
W: Did I make any faults in my application I did myself? (yeah) Did I do nothing-
K: Like make a mistake
W: Shall I contact them? No…I said no (wait) no I wait some time….finally I receive a letter
K: How did you feel when you received the letter?

W: I feel…they don't tell me I am British…they told me (you've got the ceremony?) you might…like they say please note that you should…your application form be successful, yeah?

What emerges is a sense of anxiety about the waiting time for a decision. When W refers to the "success" of his application, he is also referring to a judgement based on the papers that he had submitted. This represents one trial before a decision is made. However, rather than imagining that the time taken may be due to the speed of processing documents, W immediately assumes that any fault may be of his own doing. Even after receiving the letter of invitation, his sense of anxiety is not completely erased, as W states that "they don't tell I am British". He is aware that although he is close to becoming British, he is not British just yet.

W had left Yemen, where he was a Yemeni citizen and possessed full rights, for the UK where he was still not a full, legal citizen. W was acutely aware of this change in status and how he lacked security. In the same breath, W remarks how he is vulnerable to discrimination but can be protected by law. In the following extract, W articulates the type of protection and equality of rights that citizenship offers.

(3)

K: So, one of the things that the government wants to do with the British citizenship, they – they want people to feel British. Do you think, the citizenship, generally, do you feel like this is your, you belong here, you're British now
W: Yes, maybe ninety-five per cent I will feel I'm British, because if you went to the government department, you will be treated as a native
K: Yep
W: And there is no…discrimination
K: Yeah
W: Maybe you will find different, few people
K: Yeah
W: That don't like foreign people, but the law
K: Protects you
W: Yeah, protects you and force the other people to…follow the law
K: At the moment now (yeah) because you're still waiting, aren't you? How about now, do you feel British? Do you think you'll need the citizenship to feel more British?
W: Yes. I need the citizenship to feel more British
K: How – how do you feel now, before?
W: I feel I am not fully, fully British (yep) I feel I still have Yemeni passport… and many things, if you fill a form for many department, they ask you, what is your nationality?
K: Yeah, so you fill the boxes, don't you…yeah? They put the boxes and you have to tick the right
W: Yeah. If you are British something, somewhere…some many things, if you're British, you don't need…any, referee or any…

K: Like sponsor
W: Sponsor, yeah…like…if you apply for driving license. If you are British, you can get a form from the post office
K: Yeah
W: Without coming from the side of you
K: The same form as everybody else
W: Yes, the same form as everybody else…send your passport…they make sure…permanent leave in the UK. If you tell them you're British, they don't ask you straightaway. You get the facility

W states "I need the citizenship to feel more British". However, this is not necessarily linked to a sense of patriotism. Becoming British is related here to no longer being impeded in access to resources and rights that natives possess. He uses the example of dealing with bureaucracy. W cannot state on application forms that he is British. Thus, these application forms reproduce the lack of British citizenship which is played out in W's everyday life.

W acknowledges that as a legal resident in the UK with ILR, he is "ninety-five per cent British" and not "fully, fully British". However, the deficit of five per cent has clear, practical ramifications on both a legal level which identifies his citizenship status, and on a quotidian level in which his lack of citizenship may be reproduced in everyday life. There is also the realisation that becoming British not only addresses this deficit, but also affords W a sense of protection and security which he currently lacks; despite what he perceives as latent discrimination in that foreigners are not liked. According to W, the lack of British citizenship means that he is in a position of weakness and vulnerability due to a lack of access to forms of recourse.

W eventually received a letter after five months inviting him to the British citizenship ceremony. His letter, the standard one for the region, stated:

> It is a legal requirement that all adults receiving British citizenship must be seen to say the Oath or Affirmation of Allegiance in English. Take time to read these and decide which you prefer so that you can tell the registrar on arrival.

Prior to the citizenship ceremony, applicants are made aware that they must not only say the British Oath or Affirmation of Allegiance, but also be "seen" to be doing so. Only once this had been satisfied could W be British.

6.2 'They look into our lips' – The ceremony

The following example outlines how W reacted to receiving the letter of invitation:

(4)

K: So what did it say then the new letter?
W: They tell you the detail…your application has been approved please contact the…your local authority

K: Yeah
W: About ceremony for (yeah) oath…doing oath…and this is detail and now automatically…they send a letter, they send the certificate to the…local authority…(ok) and the local authority straightaway send you… appointment for ceremony
K: Yep…that's ⟨date⟩ yeah?
W: Yes…it's registry office…and please make sure you bring the passport
K: Details
W: Detail…No…I mean to make sure…correspondence
K: Yeah…yeah…of course this is normal so
W: And if you don't do the oath you will not be a British {wry laugh}

The legal requirement of stating the Oath/Affirmation was clear to W. He was also well aware of the potential consequences that he would not become British should he not be seen to make the Oath/Affirmation. Like many migrants, W had access to friends within the Yemeni community who had already been through the citizenship process. This reliance on 'hot knowledge' from friends not only prepared W, but also provides an insight into how the citizenship ceremony is approached.

The following suggests how those with little understanding or knowledge of English are able to circumvent the requirement to recite the Oath or Affirmation:

(5)

W: No of course…I have friends and they don't speak English at all, yeah? But you have to move your lips
K: Yeah
W: To show them you are doing the oath
K: So your friends who did….who don't speak much English, did they know what they were saying?
W: No – of course (they were just mimicking) they were different…they – they don't what does mean English

The Oath/Affirmation is an "authoritative discourse" and possesses all the features of rigidity and power that Bakhtin describes as "authority already *acknowledged* in the past. It is a *prior* discourse" (Bakhtin 1981, 342 emphasis in original). Before the ceremony, W was aware of the power of this discourse. The oath is a set of "ritual words" which are to be performed. Rappaport (1999, 151) states "it is virtually definitive of ritual speech that it is stereotyped and stylized, composed of specified sequences of words that are often archaic, is repeated under particular, usually well-established circumstances, and great stress is often laid upon its precise enunciation". The authoritative discourse in the form of the oath must not only be performed correctly, but must be done so in a specific environment and setting that further enhances its authority.

Recitation of the Oath/Affirmation and the Pledge are legal requirements for those seeking to become British. In this case, W's friends did not recite the oath; instead, W's account was that they made the oath through speaking few or no words due to their limited English proficiency. This then creates a curious situation in which they are "seen" within the 'performative dimension' of an authoritative discourse to be saying the Oath/Affirmation, but not actually saying it. Nevertheless, they still manage to satisfactorily fulfil the legal requirements to become British citizens. W's account raises the question whether this "performative dimension" makes the Oath/Affirmation meaningful. Furthermore, it opens up further complexities. For example, a migrant may try to perform the oath but be unable to do so. However, a migrant may also perform the oath perfectly with little desire to do so. In other words, performance of the oath alone is not necessarily an indicator of national pride nor desire to belong.

The following is an extract from discussion with W immediately prior to the citizenship ceremony. The citizens are given a card with the words of the Oath or Affirmation of Allegiance. The cards are blue and red depending on whether the Oath or Affirmation has been chosen.

(6)

K: All right…so then you had a choice between the Oath or the Affirmation
W: Yes
K: So you've chosen the Affirmation
W: Yeah
K: Is that what you had to read?
W: Yes
K: So 'I your name
W: {W says his name} do solemnly swear, sincerely and truly declare and affirm that on becoming a British citizen
K: Yeah…ok …so probably within the next two hours, you're going to be British, the journey to citizenship finishes. How you feeling now? Normal day or
W: I will become really a part of this society
K: Yeah
W: And I will be more confident, and I will get completely British
K: Yeah…yeah
W: And I will not worry about anything that happened for me from this society
K: View it being equal like everyone else now?
W: Yes, now I feel I got all my rights

W had chosen the Affirmation as the legal requirement to becoming British. By stating the legally required sentences within the affirmation, W would go from "ninety-five per cent British" to "completely British". It is notable that W states

"I will become really a part of this society". W notes the sense of becoming. By referring to "really a part of this society", he demonstrates that although he is "in" British society, he is on the periphery. He can gain confidence by feeling "completely British", again referencing a sense that he was until now on the outskirts. More importantly for W, this would mean the acquisition of the rights accrued in being British and the protection that it offers. This is an example of how the practical elements of becoming British supersede its patriotic dimensions.

Before the ceremony each of the citizenship candidates went to the front of the room to have their documentation checked, and to recite the first line of the Oath/Affirmation, to ensure that they would be able to recite it formally. W described this part of the process as follows:

(7)

K: So what did they ask you?
W: She asked me to…read the first line of the Affirmation
K: All right (of allegiance). Was that to check your English? To make sure
W: Yes, to check my English…I can read complete sentences
K: Oh, all right…so you just read it?
W: Yes [inaudible due to background music]
K: All right…so then you had a choice between the Oath or the Affirmation
W: Yes
K: So you've chosen the Affirmation
W: Yeah
K: So why did you choose this one and not the other?
W: {Looks embarrassed and blank}
K: It's ok…so the red one is the Affirmation, the blue one is the Oath, yeah?
W: Yes
K: Is that what you had to read?
W: Yes

Despite the fact that he has already fulfilled the English language requirements for citizenship candidates, W was very much aware that this part of the process was designed to check his English proficiency. Following this process of checking, the officials gave the group the opportunity to collectively practise their recitation of the Oath/Affirmation and Pledge. Author 1's field notes record this part of the process. B is part of a three-person team conducting the ceremony:

(8)

B opens the ceremony on the behalf of the Lord Mayor and as representative of City and Queen. All citizens stand up. B goes through the affirmations/oaths phrase by phrase. I look behind B and there is a table of what appear to be certificates. B encourages the citizens to speak loudly by telling them not to be afraid. He goes through the blue group first and then the red.

> They do a practice run. I notice as they do that the room is quiet but for the citizens – there are no children. All the citizens are standing together, they then make the pledge. As they go through the pledge, some are proud and speak clearly and loudly. Some people are a little more reserved and some look plain shy and embarrassed. B makes a joke that: 'we can't speak your language, so we need you to say it in English. Even if understanding English is difficult – do your best'. He then makes the citizens aware that another hurdle remains. He even says: 'I know you have jumped through a lot of hoops, but there is still a hurdle to go'. He then says: 'we'll be watching. Do your best. Try and do your best'. B is quite welcoming here but it sounds quite ominous. Hence, B asks them to do their best. I sense a desire on his part for the citizens to do their best. He then explains that the citizens will receive a certificate in front of 'your lovely queen. Our lovely queen'. He self-repairs when he says this. They then receive their certificate and welcome pack. Inside the welcome pack is a small medallion as gift which was minted in the ⟨name of area⟩ in ⟨city⟩. B says that everyone gets one – even the children.

In the phrase "we'll be watching" there is explicit reference to the citizenship ceremony as a trial. The citizenship candidates will be subject to the scrutiny of the officials who will check that they are reciting the authoritative discourse of the Oath/Affirmation of allegiance and the Pledge of loyalty.

Finally the ceremony proper commences. Author 1's field notes describe how events unfolded.

> (9)
>
> B stands behind a table in a very formal manner. The table is flanked by two officials who are both women. Everyone looks serious. B then begins a speech about becoming a British citizen and states: 'this is the final step in the process'. At the end of a short speech, B says 'normally you are welcomed by a dignitary. In essence, well done'. He then recognises that 'you have jumped through hoops and deserve to be British'. He says that they don't give it to just anyone. He later says 'with this privilege comes responsibility, and obligation to be a good citizen'. He then says that they will be able to vote, which is also a big responsibility. He makes a joke about the police (he too was a policeman once). He then says 'never forget your background'. He tells the citizens never to be ashamed or to forget their background. B: 'you are safe here. Never ever forget your roots'. He then signals the end of this part of the ceremony by saying: 'Good luck. Show tolerance and respect to each other'. He has read his speech from paper and then asks the citizens to stand up. B leads the Affirmation/Oath and goes through it line by line. It takes just a few minutes. They have difficulties with the word 'allegiance'. B says: 'it isn't easy' in relation to their mispronunciation. As the citizens are saying their allegiance the two

> women who are officials are positioned in order to watch all the citizens perform the oaths. They move, watching the mouths of the citizens as they do this. One official is positioned right in front of the citizens and the other is to their left. They move across and up down like a pendolino trying to be in sight of the citizens giving their oaths. When this is over, the reds make their affirmations. This time both officials work at the sides. This way they see two rows of people at the same time. This time they call attention to each other and someone is perhaps not saying the words. I later find out that the 'citizen' was taken outside. I presume that he will have delivered the oath one to one. The affirmation quickly finishes. The officials move into position. B is now back behind the table. There is a final pledge that is said by all. B explains the next steps.

There is recognition here that the ceremony is a hurdle to be cleared through the "final step". At the same time, there is a contradiction as the migrants "have jumped through hoops and deserve to be British". Until this moment, the would-be citizens cannot define themselves as British citizens. It is the final step. In this sense it is the liminal point between migrant and citizen. Herein lies the paradox of the celebratory endpoint of a journey, and a final trial which is both welcoming yet also ominous. It has the power to reward and the power to punish. Much of this is dependent on the recitation of the ritualised authoritative discourse.

It is notable that the organizer states "never forget your background". Similarly, in Verkaaik's study (2010, 76) a Dutch mayor leading a ceremony says "Do not forget where you come from and be proud of who you are". The officials who implement policy and represent the government interface with the citizens appear to show an awareness and sensitivity in valuing the immigrant journey and heritage as a source of pride.

This interface between officials and citizens takes place in a space of nationalism and 'integration'. It is a point at which migrants have displayed that they are 'ready' to be able to assimilate. While British citizenship ceremonies may also be symbolic of an assimilative and nationalising practice (Kostakopolou 2010, 2011), the officials recognise the backgrounds as well as the futures of the citizens in retaining their heritage. In so doing, the officials demonstrate the interface between the individual and the politics of citizenship. Such ceremonies may include nationalistic and ideological practices designed to assimilate new citizens, but there remains a negotiation of real life histories, identities and trajectories.

The people present must stand and make the utterance of the authoritative discourse through the Oath/Affirmation. The combination of physical conduct (standing) and the Oath itself highlights that "the relationship between the physical and the spoken in ritual is complementary, each class claiming virtues the other lacks" (Rappaport 1999, 152). Furthermore, being seen to be saying the oath requires a physical arrangement that allows the citizenship

ceremony officials to be able to see every person. This is noticed by W during his ceremony.

(10)

K: You did that and…I don't know if you noticed, there was the two women watching
W: Yeah, yeah they were watching us…if we pronouncing the words
K: Yeah, that's right, yeah
W: lips to make sure,
K: Your lips are moving as well
W: Yes {W nods and smiles} They look into our lips

W was aware that he had entered the "performative dimension" (Yurchak 2006) of the authoritative discourse. The authoritative discourse is reproduced as a liminal point of belonging. However the meaning attached can vary as was the case with W's reports of his friends' negotiation of the ceremony.

Immediately following the ceremony, W and K spoke again:

(11)

K: All right…so, so that's the end of your citizenship journey…there's no more -no more journey to citizenship, no more
W: It's a journey of life to the passport

The passport is the symbol *par excellence* of the end of the journey from becoming to being. W had negotiated the authoritative discourse and yet had done so in a way that had satisfied the requirements. For all that political discourse promotes a sense of citizenship and the intrinsic features that it promises, W's first thought following the ceremony was for the passport. W defined the journey as one towards the acquisition of the passport. This denotes, to some extent, W's perception of citizenship, as his first thought is of the practicalities of how becoming British can help him. It possesses symbolic as well as practical value.

The next step would be to see whether in reality the performance of an authoritative discourse contribute to ideological becoming (Bakhtin 1981). Questions remain as to whether such authoritative discourses genuinely create the allegiances they are aimed at developing. If the performance is indeed instrumental, this would question the basis of such ceremonies beyond the political mileage to be claimed from being seen to enforce such assimilationist devices.

7. Conclusion

In this article we have argued that upon receiving the Home Office's decision following the submission of papers, there still remains a "final hurdle" of the

citizenship ceremony. All candidates must be visible to the officials in stating the Oath/Affirmation and Pledge of Allegiance. Consequently, on the one hand the citizenship ceremony is a consecration of belonging, and on the other hand it is a form of trial.

All the citizens are subject to a judgement which may or may not permit them to become full members of British society as citizens. They are required to perform an authoritative discourse which "demands unconditional allegiance" (Bakhtin 1981, 343). However, in giving the performance they do not necessarily offer such unconditional allegiance, as they may be moving their lips without uttering the authoritative text.

As this study has shown, W was well aware of the ceremony as a de facto test, as were his friends. How citizens make the authority of the Affirmation/Oath internally persuasive varies. W's friends did not know what they were saying, yet had done enough to meet the requirements and be "seen". They had entered the "performative dimension" (Yurchak 2006) of "ritual words" (Rappaport 1999). W's approach allowed him to pass the "examination" and yet his first thought following his moment of becoming British was of the practical benefits of holding a British passport. Whether the ceremony had created a greater sense of belonging and made becoming British more meaningful is debatable.

The rituals and discourse surrounding the ceremonial aspects of citizenship represent a microcosm of nationalism and personal experience. Not only are immigrants at the frontline of such intersection, but so are the officials involved. All of those involved became complicit within this choreography of power. How they negotiated this varied.

Overall, the citizenship ceremony marks the endpoint of a legal process of acquiring citizenship status, but there remains a much longer journey in being a citizen. Beneath the pomp of the ceremony is a final examination. While it may not be as taxing as the *Life in the UK* test, it remains, emblematically at least, a final hurdle. Even at the moment that immigrants become citizens, a trial of language performance must be negotiated.

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