Citizenships under Construction: Affects, Politics and Practices

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While societies have never been socially and culturally homogeneous, postcolonial and post-Cold War migration have provoked a sense of ever-increasing cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic diversification – some even say “super-diversification” (Vertovec 2007) – in spite of homogenizing tendencies due to globalization. These processes of globalization and cultural diversification seem to generate both a “closure of identities” (Geschiere and Meyer 1999), with discourses of nationalism, separatism, autochthony (Geschiere 2009; Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005) and “homogeneism” (Blommaert and Verschueren 1991), and imageries of cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism and hybridity. In this context, citizenship has emerged as a vibrant area of research for scholars across a wide range of fields, making important contributions to our understanding of shifting configurations of belonging.

This issue of COLLeGIUM presents a selection of extended papers presented at the HCAS Symposium on “Citizenship and Migration”, held in October 2014, which aimed to further the conversations on citizenship in the context of increased global migration. A focus on migration is highly relevant in today’s world of globalization, which is characterized by an intensified circulation of goods and people. The free circulation of goods, capital and ideas is, to a large extent, favoured and facilitated in a neoliberal capitalist economy; nevertheless, it is still governed by profoundly unequal power relations stemming from centuries of slavery and colonialism. Conversely, the circulation of people, or at least the migration of people coming from formerly colonized regions and impoverished and/or war-torn countries, is increasingly problematized and thought to be in need of ever-stricter immigration policies, control and the tightening of access to citizenship.

While this tightening of border control has recently been extremely visible in the United States – where a travel ban was introduced by the newly elected President Donald Trump, targeting seven countries with majority-Muslim populations – the borders of all OECD1 countries are becoming increasingly impenetrable for those

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1 OECD is the acronym for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which brings together 35 high-income countries describing themselves as committed to democracy and the market economy.
coming from formerly colonized and war-torn countries. To give only a couple of examples, in 2016, the Finnish Immigration Service turned down approximately half of the applications for asylum in Finland (Yle News 19.11.2016). While the percentage of denied asylum applications had been 25 in 2015, in 2016 it was 51.\(^2\) The increase of denied asylums was due to an updated estimation of safety by the Immigration Service in May 2016, which, following a similar estimation by Sweden's immigration authorities, deemed Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia as “safe places to return to”. In addition, the Immigration Service amended the provision of the Aliens Act that allowed asylum seekers to be granted a residence permit on the basis of humanitarian protection. As we write this introduction in May 2017, there is an ongoing demonstration in Helsinki: since February, asylum seekers and allies have been spending their nights in tents to demand equitable application procedures and the freezing of all deportations until these procedures are sound and fair.\(^3\) So far, their demands have not been met by the immigration authorities or the government. In February 2017, the Belgian parliament adopted a “counter-terrorism” law which provides for the possibility of deporting “foreign” residents who are suspected of threatening public security, even if they were born in Belgium. These examples testify to the effects of the “global cycles of impoverishment, oppression and displacement” (Malkki 1995, 504), including the socio-political production of “illegitimate” border-crossers and non-citizens, deprived of their human rights by lack of citizenship (De Genova 2002). Processes of social abjection channel public anxiety towards those groups within the population who are imagined to be a parasitical drain and threat to scarce national resources and values, such as “bogus asylum seekers”, “illegal immigrants” and “terrorist/criminal” immigrants (Tyler 2013). The Belgian example also shows the precarious citizenship of those racialized as “Others”; even though obtained through birth in the territory, it can be revoked or suspended (Stasiulis and Ross 2006).

Ideals of “active citizenship” that define “active” in terms of economic productivity and entrepreneurialism affect the very concrete possibilities for migration, and also the ways in which citizenship, shaped as it is through processes of diversification and globalization, is inevitably tied to different hierarchies based on material inequalities and divisions of class. The ideal of the economically productive, “active” migrant shapes the politics that, for instance, grant temporary residence permits for investors migrating to Europe from outside of the European Union. In Portugal, purchasing a house worth at least half a million euros gives rights to a “Golden Visa”, which extends also to the investor’s family members (Helsingin Sanomat 1.11.2016). This example stands in stark contrast to the situation of those coming from war-torn or conflict countries who struggle to get asylum in Europe and, if that is granted, must then fight to be united with their families.


Alongside discourses of border securitization and philosophies of immigrant assimilation which envision a unilateral (and never completable) incorporation of minorities into mainstream society, a rhetoric of “diversity” and “interculturalism” thrives in public and scholarly debates. In light of prevailing anxieties about cultural differences, these discourses aim to emphasize the positive sides and inevitability of heterogeneity and the constant need for mutual adjustment and adaptation (Vertovec 2007; Vasta 2007). Some scholars also point to the disaggregation of citizenship (Benhabib 2002) in the current world of increasingly de-territorialized politics and the transformation of citizens into “transnationals” or “cosmopolitans” (Hannerz 1992; Werbner 1999a), with increasingly universalistic citizenship identities (Joppke 2008) within a post-territorial political community (Chandler 2007). Yet, this somehow optimistic view is not without its critics for its power-evasive tendencies and its apparent lack of conceptualization of material inequalities, conflict and struggle (Mouffe 2005; Chandler 2007). The age of super-diversity exposes a painful difference between those who enjoy and manage the benefits of globalization and those whose strategies of spatial mobility are much more precarious. While the promise of happiness in affluent societies mobilizes people in both categories, for many the fantasy of upward mobility, political and social equality reveals itself as “cruel optimism” (Berlant 2011), leading to a vicious circle of hopes and disappointments.

This issue on citizenship and migration adopts a broad definition of citizenship that goes beyond classical liberal, communitarian and republican theorizations. The contributors draw upon conceptualizations of citizenship as developed by critical citizenship studies during the last couple of decades, which have pointed out that citizenship is not just about access to formal rights, but also recognition and full participation (Lister 2007; Yuval-Davis 2007; Isin and Wood 1999). These critiques have emphasized the dialogical, relational and experiential aspects of citizenship and its inflection by a range of social and cultural factors such as identity, social status, cultural presuppositions and belonging (Lister 2007; Werbner and Yuval-Davis 1999). They not only call attention to the strong and increasing intertwinnings of private decisions and practices with public institutions and state policies (Oleksy 2009, 4), but also reveal the citizenship potential of practices that are relegated to the so-called private sphere. Doing so, they extend the concept beyond a formal status in the public domain to practices and imageries of social positioning and belonging that are played out in both the public and the private realms of life (Ong 1996; Werbner 1999b; Lister 1997; Plummer 2001; Isin and Nielsen 2008; Longman, De Graeve, and Brouckaert 2013; Plummer 2003; Lister 2007; Oleksy 2009; Werbner and Yuval-Davis 1999; Turner 2008). Drawing on this valuable body of work, the contributions to this issue aim to refine, extend and complicate our understanding of citizenship and its inclusionary and exclusionary potential.

Moreover, the volume aims to further a nuanced concept of citizenship, which not only calls attention to the framework of rights and legal practices of citizenship but extends to explore the imaginary practices of participation, discourses and
symbols of belonging, ways of imagining and remaking citizenship (Modood 2007). It thus also draws upon work that emphasizes the narrative production of citizenship. Nations, as famously delineated by Benedict Anderson (1983), are imagined communities, whose members never meet most of their fellows in face-to-face reality, yet are story-projections of simultaneous belongings, created by narratives and vocabularies that shape and adjust the understanding and experience of citizenship. By tracking the power of print-capitalism in generating modern nation-states, Anderson reflects on the ways in which imagining communities is tied to existing modes of cultural representation stemming from prevailing political and economic conditions. While the novel and the newspaper were vitally important in the creation of nineteenth-century nationalism, the current globalized society is faced with an increasing exchange of stories via new media and technologies, which prompt the massive transfer of numerous historical presents across space and time. While offering community-building tools and ways of binding citizens together, the new kind of circulation of stories is not without its dystopic prospect, as new technologies have provided venues for a post-factual fabrication of realities, exploited by political populism that uses media authority and its effects of reality to legitimate disinformation and an anti-immigrant agenda.

This issue also builds on scholarly work on migration and displacement that provides a critical assessment of immigration and nationality policies (e.g. Fassin 2001; Ticktin 2011; Nyers 2006) and interrogates the taken-for-granted ways of thinking about identity and territory (Malkki 1992, 1995). This body of work has drawn attention to the analytical consequences of conceptual frameworks used in scientific analyses that reproduce common-sense ideas about the world of nations as “a discrete spatial partitioning of territory” (Malkki 1992; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002) and to the consequences of uncritically accepting categorizations (such as “refugees”, “asylum seekers” “economic immigrants”, “expatriates” or “natives”) broadly used in academic writing and the assumptions that underpin them (Nyers 2006; Malkki 1995). This work analyses immigration and affective as well as material landscapes of belonging and citizenship within the broader context of neoliberal politics, documenting how these politics advance the transformation of immigration control and border securitization to a productive form of industry (Tyler 2013, 75–76). In addition, it reveals how neoliberal politics promote “active” forms of citizenship (Lem 2010, 169; Tyler 2013), in which entrepreneurialism, “employability”, flexibility and adaptability are positioned as the values that define both ideal citizenship and the “model migrant” (Lem 2010, 169).

Critical migration studies have also pointed to the ways in which the models and ideals of citizenship are tied with the construction of some subjects as valuable and others as abjects (Tyler 2013). This construction of valuable and abject subjects draws from historical and present forms of racial and ethnic stigmatization as well as from trajectories of class, and it is also based on the emotional and affective engagements and projections stemming from these formations of inequality and oppression. The concept of abject, when detached from the psychoanalytic tradition
and rethought of as “social abjection” (Tyler 2013; 2009), provides visibility into the dynamics of the simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of the interiorized Other in the construction of citizenship. These dynamics are present, for instance, in what Nicholas De Genova (2013) has called “the Border Spectacle”, in which asylum regimes convert asylum seekers into “illegal” and deportable migrants, rendering them officially undesirable and excluded, while simultaneously producing these migrants as a legally vulnerable, precarious and tractable labour force. Studies of the material and discursive construction of valuable subjects and abjects direct attention to how the different modalities of subject formation and state formation can be thought of together, not as unitary entities but as an assemblage of practices (Tyler 2013, 46). Looking at these practices as part of both subject and state formation destabilizes not only the national insider/outside distinctions, but also the boundaries that “racial neoliberalism” produces between the rational, self-managing and productive citizen-subject and the wilful, dependent, not-valuable and resource-heavy subject (Lentin & Titley 2011, 178).

The collection presents four articles written by scholars from a variety of disciplinary fields, notably media studies, sociology, and literary studies. It brings into a productive dialogue (1) detailed empirical accounts of citizenship practices, demonstrating how in the current-day context of neoliberalism and globalization citizenship unfolds in particular contexts and settings, with (2) more theoretical reflections that examine how the concept of citizenship as a status and as a practice, both practical and political, can be further refined and developed. The approach followed in this special issue, which crosses disciplines and research methods, provides unique insight into and a useful contribution to the ongoing theorization of the complicated workings of power and affects in constructions of race, gender and class, in the shaping of narratives of history and nation, and in the creation of hierarchies of belonging and deservedness.

The contributions by Anne-Marie Fortier and Bridget Byrne focus on processes of becoming a citizen to examine the ways in which citizenship and the nation-state are understood. What is naturalized in citizenization? This question is central to Anne-Marie Fortier’s article, which, drawing upon her fieldwork on the attribution process of British citizenship, sets out a theoretical base for rethinking citizenization and naturalization. Working with Nordberg and Wrede’s (2015) definition of citizenization (i.e. “the ways in which ‘citizens to be’ are enacting and negotiating their paths of citizenship through myriad street-level encounters”), Fortier proposes to go beyond a linear understanding of citizenship attribution. In such an understanding, naturalization (the conferment of citizenship) is cast as a discrete legal event and the “natural” outcome of citizenization. Fortier argues for the need to supplement the institutional approach with an understanding of the “ontological politics” of citizenization. This understanding, she argues, can be obtained by adopting a social life approach that focuses on how the effects and outcomes of citizenization policy are variously enacted by different actors (both immigrants and institutional actors involved in citizenization processes) and in
different settings. Fortier’s theoretical move consists of her call for deconstructing the baseline assumptions of much scholarly work on citizenship and migration that tends to accept the distinction between chosen and ascribed citizenship. She seeks an exploration of how citizenization and naturalization are variously entangled, connected and disconnected, through investigating “the experiences, realities, subjects, and objects (such as citizenship itself)” that citizenization measures enact. Examining policy as embodied, “as performative, relational and as producing multiple effects”, Fortier argues, yields a fuller understanding of the ways in which assumptions about citizenship come into being, as well as the material, discursive and affective economies that are involved in processes of citizenization and naturalization.

Citizenship ceremonies constitute an interesting site for investigating the “intertwined social life” of citizenization and naturalization, as they are the example par excellence of an imagery that confines naturalization to a single moment at the end of the citizenization process. In her contribution, Bridget Byrne analyses citizenship ceremonies in the U.S. as public rituals of naturalization that reveal prevalent understandings of citizenship. Through a detailed description of events, Byrne demonstrates how an account of a nation open to immigration and new citizens – a narrative of a nation built on immigrants – is being told. She shows how this narrative of inclusion and democracy is constructed through the silencing of certain experiences and histories (such as the histories of Native Americans, the history of forced immigration of slaves and the restricted immigration of particular ethnic and racialized groups). By analysing citizenship ceremonies in the contemporary context of increased securitization and a retreat from multiculturalism, Byrne also points to the tensions that are inherent in the act of “naturalization” and in the processes of differentiating between citizens and non-citizens (or even anti-citizens) that underlie it. Byrne’s analysis makes clear that even in the ceremony that celebrates the end of the citizenization process, the possibility of becoming a “full” citizen is called into question and doubts are expressed about whether one will ever be conceived of as a proper American.

The patterns of attachment and exclusion created and reinforced in nationality ceremonies clearly point to the emotional dimensions of citizenship and citizenship-building discourses. As an imagined community, nation is not only an abstraction and an invention, a set of vocabularies and discursive practices, but something deeply felt and felt to be real (Smith 1998). In this view, imagined communities define themselves as “emotional communities”,4 which are charged with a variety of affective investments, hopes and fears of belonging, expectations of reciprocal attachment and threats of being excluded. The acknowledgement of citizenship and community membership is also an affective judgement regulated by a cluster of emotions and beliefs, desires of proximity and avoidance. The concept of ‘affective citizenship’ (Johnson 2010, Mookherjee 2005) has been used to illustrate

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4 On the concept of “emotional community”, see Rosenwein 2007.
how emotions impact on the construction of citizenship, and how ideas and ideals of emotions influence the ways in which individuals are encouraged to feel about others and themselves in public domains. The emotions being evoked are not something private and solitary; through their objects and common vocabularies and verbalizations, they constitute profoundly shared and collective means of making citizenship politics (Ahmed 2014). They are patterned and constituted by rituals of everyday social interaction (Wetherell 2012), though frequently modified by indirect and unseen ways of expression. Research on populist rhetoric illustrates the complexity of the community-shaping affective vocabularies by analysing, for instance, the ways in which nationalist metaphors of family love are used as tools of avoidance and exclusion. Mulinari (2014) coined the concept of “caring racism” to apprehend the ways in which anti-immigrant politics are being disguised as technologies of love and care (Ahmed 2004; Mulinari 2014) as a mainstream tactics in political populism. This “caring racism” also reverberates in Trumpist slogans of a “great America” “loved” by its president and in the use of the term by “immigration critics” among Finnish anti-immigration activists, who sugar-coat extreme nationalist and racist tendencies and the dissemination and production of hate speech with a veneer of analytical and rational criticism. Important is not only what is being directly said, but also the emotional tone of the discourse. In general, the affective atmosphere of political communities matters since it frames our orientation to others and thus constitutes premises for the exercise of citizenship besides juridical and economic standards. A politics of inclusion and exclusion is shaped by public mood, which can foster a sense of equality (e.g. not having to be ashamed or apologize for one’s origins, family or community), or by stirring up public disgust and contempt (Modood 1997).

The power of emotions as social glue or, conversely, as an exclusionary force in processes of citizenization, are also central in the contributions by Anu Koivunen and Olli Löytty. Through studying works of literature and film, as well as representations of citizenship in written and visual media, both contributions specifically focus on present-day reflections and productions of “Finnishness”. In her paper, Anu Koivunen investigates the complexity and variety of affects and emotions in processes of citizenization, examining the narratives of Finnish immigrants in Sweden. Koivunen highlights an affective practice, a pattern in process: an economy of pride and shame mobilized for purposes of identity construction and community building in the contemporary revisiting and reimagining of the histories and memories of Finnish immigrants in Sweden. A new generation of children and grandchildren of the Great Migration in the 1960s and 1970s have, since the turn of the century, entered the public arena in Sweden, articulating new narratives in pop music, literature, theatre and film. By drawing from theoretical work on affect and the production of class by Sara Ahmed (2004), Margaret Wetherell (2012; 2015) and Beverley Skeggs (2004), Koivunen investigates three genres – two novels (Svinalängorna by Susanna Alakoski, 2006; Ingenbarnsland by Eija Hetekivi Olsson, 2012), two television programmes (Emigranterna SVT 2006–
2007; Kansankodin kuokkavieraat YLE Teema 2011) and the musical documentary Ingen riktig finne/Laulu koti-ikävästä (Mika Ronkainen 2013). She argues that while “third-generation” Sweden Finnish artists embody success stories of migration and enjoy the appreciation and positive publicity of Swedish mainstream audiences, the new narratives are nevertheless essentially stories about living with, managing and rejecting shame. To be a cultural producer of or audience for new narratives about Sweden Finns, Koivunen proposes, is to engage with an affective legacy of shame, a sense of history and a repertoire of representations. Paradoxically, then, narratives of shame enable the revaluation of Sweden Finnishness as symbolic capital and thus propel the politics of pride. It is this dynamic of pride and shame that Koivunen dissects as a significant part of identity construction and cultural citizenship for Sweden Finns – and politics of pride as its given rejoinder.

The traditional imagery of nation-building, as expressed in patriotic poetry and other cultural products of nationalism, frequently circulates positive emotions, including love for a nation, to create attachments between citizens (Anderson 1991). Laden with imperatives of progress and growth, these vocabularies may create “emotional regimes” (Reddy 2001) of national happiness which propel monologic citizenship politics and imply a requirement to be in consensus and sympathetic agreement with others (Ahmed 2014). Yet, citizenship storytelling in contemporary literature and film tends to create counter-narratives that challenge and complement the neoliberal regimes of optimism and happiness by unveiling the painful and melancholic side of the migrant condition (see e.g. Ahmed 2010) and pointing towards the emotional liberty of imagined communities under construction. A nuanced economy of narrative community building does not avoid taking readers out of their comfort zones by depicting and soliciting negatively valorized emotions, which, as shown by Koivunen’s analysis on shame, can nevertheless serve communal functions by offering transgressive experiences of identity formation (see also Sedgwick 2003).

The difficulties of processing the trauma of war and exile also comprise a central theme in the fictional work of the Iraqi-born author Hassam Blasim, whose authorship and reception is further discussed in Olli Löytty’s article. Löytty illustrates how social and cultural diversity and the multilingualism in contemporary Finland has provoked a redrawing of the boundaries between Finnishness and strangeness. By focusing on the media reception of Blasim, who writes in Arabic but lives in Finland, and who after a complicated procedure has acquired Finnish citizenship, Löytty looks at the ways in which literature is used in symbolic nation-building. The story of “two seemingly mismatching things, an Arab author in the Finnish literary landscape”, allows Löytty to explore Simmel’s concept of a stranger. While the media welcomed the internationally awarded author to Finnish literature, the officials initially rejected his citizenship application because he failed the required Finnish-language test. His story exemplifies the mechanisms of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion that alternatingly position Blasim inside and outside the narrative of Finnishness. As such, he is a stranger in the Simmelian sense, a product of the constant negotiation between the familiar and the alien.
Moreover, Löytty uses the case of Blasim to pose questions about the formation of the literary canon and literature’s institutional functioning in Finland. He reflects on the way in which the symbolic nation-building still echoes and processes the nineteenth-century concepts of national literature, defining which literature produced in Finland constitutes “real” Finnish literature and which is dismissed as “immigrant literature”. Löytty’s article is a powerful plea for rethinking Finnish literature in a Europe in transition, as well as a call to consider it as a flexible category.

Taken together, the articles in this special issue extend empirical knowledge of the ways in which citizenship is negotiated and reconfigured in everyday practice and through different cultural and literary resources and distinctions. Moreover, through the description of particular experiences and practices, in geographically different regions (the U.K., the U.S., Sweden and Finland) with different aspects of social, political and cultural life (citizenship attribution processes, citizenship ceremonies, fictional narratives and the reception of “immigrant” literature), they not only make important empirical contributions, but also key theoretical additions to the growing body of literature on citizenship and migration. Through thorough analysis and theorization of the affects, politics and practices that (re)construct citizenship and political identity in everyday life, the articles both explore and contribute to the ongoing construction of citizenship. The guest editors thank the contributors to this issue for their willingness to engage in this intellectual endeavour.

References


