Responding to the call for the Super Citizen: migrants’ ambivalent experiences of naturalization in Germany and the United Kingdom

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ABSTRACT
Migration and citizenship studies tend to see naturalization as a highly ambivalent process which simultaneously includes and excludes migrants. Moving beyond this inclusion/exclusion divide, I conceptualize naturalization as a subject-formation regime that encourages naturalized citizens to transform themselves into political, economic and cultural assets to the nation-state, a subjectivity which I term (alluding to its overstraining character) the ‘Super Citizen’. How, then, is the call for the Super Citizen received and answered? Based on a thematic analysis of interviews with migrants applying for citizenship in either Germany or the United Kingdom, this article examines migrants’ experiences of naturalization and identifies three types of response to the Super Citizen call: embrace, contestation, and disaffection. I argue that subject-formation is powerful, but not as deterministic as the literature suggests. The Super Citizen produces a competition for state recognition and new hierarchies among naturalized, national-born, and non-national citizens.

INTRODUCTION
Naturalization is the culmination of state control over migrants’ access to full membership status. Prior to the 21st century, naturalization in most Western European countries comprised a closed administrative procedure which was largely dealt with through paperwork, in writing, by caseworkers in state departments who examined applications and took decisions at their desks. The introduction of citizenship tests, courses, and ceremonies since the 2000s has significantly changed the citizenship admission process. Nowadays, migrants aspiring to citizenship status through naturalization face new, higher state requirements which include a credible performance of loyalty, knowledge, and language skills. For example, the UK established mandatory citizenship ceremonies in 2004 along with the ‘Life in the United Kingdom’ test as well as specific citizenship materials in English language courses in 2005. At the same time, Germany introduced ‘integration courses’ and a new oath requirement in 2005 as well as an obligatory federal citizenship test in 2008, despite the two countries’ markedly different immigration histories and prior integration models (cf. Meer and Modood 2012; Diez and Squire...
The existing research on these new naturalization requirements has not reached a consensus on their legitimacy. Some scholars in political science and law consider the tests to be more or less compatible with liberal or republican values (cf. Joppke 2007; Orgad 2010; Goodman 2010). However, sociological and anthropological analyses argue that the tests, courses and ceremonies are problematic because they exclude, racialize, and securitize migrants (cf. Byrne 2014; Nieden 2009; Hà 2010).

The existing literature tends to focus on the question of inclusion and exclusion, thereby neglecting the view of naturalization as an exercise of state power in another productive way. By requiring migrants to go through citizenship tests, courses and ceremonies, states seek to modify and optimize citizenship applicants’ self-understanding and behaviour. In other words, naturalization can be meaningfully conceptualized as a regime of subject-formation (cf. Foucault 1983; Rose 1998; Bröckling 2016). The new tests, courses, and ceremonies have introduced instances of hailing, of discursive ‘calls’, that migrants face at different moments throughout the naturalization procedure and which amount to a particular subjectivity, the Super Citizen. The Super Citizen subjectivity expresses the idealized figure of the naturalized citizen who personifies the combined potential to become a political, economic, and cultural asset to the nation-state, and who should develop her/his own aspirations accordingly (Badenhoop 2017, Forthcoming 2022). The citizenship courses, tests and ceremonies present guidance and exercises for migrants to use to assess whether they match the features of the Super Citizen, how to improve themselves in order to qualify, and when to think of themselves as deserving of citizenship.

How is this call for the Super Citizen subjectivity received and answered? How successful are its subject-formation attempts? These questions are rarely asked in the existing literature, which has tended to focus on the state’s attempts at subject-formation, thus neglecting their effects (Bröckling 2016; Rose 1998). The aim of this article is therefore to examine the effects of naturalization and subject-formation by studying migrants’ actual experiences of the citizenship tests, courses, and ceremonies in Germany and the UK.

Based on the thematic analysis of interviews with migrants engaged in naturalizing in either Germany or the UK, this article shows that the Super Citizen subjectivity is a powerful call heard throughout the process, and that participants in both countries were aware of elements of it. Surprisingly, the migrants’ responses were broadly similar in the two countries. However, I argue that subject-formation is not as deterministic as the literature suggests. The responses were highly ambivalent and varied, sometimes even from the same person. Therefore, the analysis makes a theoretical and an empirical contribution. First, it offers critical reflection on the argument that subject-formation is highly powerful, and even ‘totalitarian’ (Bröckling 2016, 196). Addressing a blind spot of existing subject-formation analyses, this article shifts the focus of analysis to the perspectives and experiences of those targeted by subject-formation regimes, in this case migrants who submit themselves to naturalization procedures. Second, the analysis provides an international comparison of the lived experiences of naturalization in the UK and Germany.

This article’s argument begins by discussing the two main approaches in the academic debate on naturalization requirements, before outlining the theoretical framework of subject-formation and the specific call for the Super Citizen subjectivity found in
contemporary naturalization procedures in Germany and the UK. The next part briefly discusses the methods used in the present research. Referring to extracts from the research interviews, the main part of the article discusses the three identified response types – embrace, contestation, and disaffection – as well as two further themes: migrants’ competition for state recognition, and the formation of new hierarchies among naturalized, national-born, and non-national citizens. The article concludes by discussing the ambivalent effects of subject-formation and the implications for future research.

Naturalization, subject-formation, and the call for the Super Citizen

Naturalization requirements in the academic debate

The existing research on citizenship tests, courses, and ceremonies can be grouped into roughly two different approaches. On the one hand, authors with a state-centred perspective (who tend to work within the disciplines of political theory, quantitative political science, and law) have focused on the structural-formal citizenship requirements on a macro-level, arguing that these are more or less legitimate and compatible with republican or liberal norms and values. On the other side of the debate, another group of scholars have taken a migrant-centred perspective (often within the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, and education), focusing on the micro-level practices and lived experiences of citizenship tests, courses, and ceremonies, and highlighting their excluding, racializing and securitizing effects.

Citizenship tests first caught the attention of political scientists. To the extent that citizenship has traditionally been studied in the context of normative political theory, the predominant literature on citizenship tests has examined whether such tests can be regarded as ‘liberal’, ‘republican’ or ‘communitarian’ policies (see, for example, Etzioni 2007; Orgad 2010; Joppke 2010; Guild, Groenendijk, and Carrera 2009; van Oers, Erbsöll, and Kostakopoulou 2010), and have struggled to reach clear conclusions. Christian Joppke, for example, argued that language and knowledge tests represent an “‘illiberal social policy’ in a liberal state’ (Joppke 2007, 14). Following this logic, tests are sometimes regarded as ‘liberal’ overall because they pursue ‘liberal goals’, but since they are obligatory, they are also ‘repressive’ (Michałowski 2011, 750).

The distinction between ‘liberal’ and ‘illiberal’ in this debate refers to the tests’ terms (e.g. whether they are mandatory or voluntary), their content, and their social selectivity. For example, test questions or preparation books may convey a pluralistic, open imagination of the nation, or an ethno-culturally exclusive and homogenous one, implicitly or explicitly upholding a view of the superiority of Western liberal-democratic states. The questions may test an applicant’s practical knowledge of how to exercise citizenship rights and duties, e.g. by voting, and/or they may reproduce historical myths about the birth of the nation. The meaning of ‘liberal’ and ‘illiberal’ also refers to the social selectivity of tests as expressed in fees, pass rates, and how the questions are formulated, as this can make them easily comprehensible or deliberately misleading (on the social selectivity of citizenship tests, see also Bauböck and Joppke 2010).

This state-centred approach suffers from an epistemological and a methodological limitation. First, the criticism that certain tests are ‘illiberal’ implies the justification of other tests as liberal. In other words, this literature risks legitimizing rather than critically
analysing citizenship tests. For example, Ricky van Oers concluded that the German citizenship test is more ‘liberal’ than the British one (van Oers 2014, 130–44; cf. 2010), but Ines Michalowski disagreed, arguing that both the German and the British test contents can be described as ‘liberal’ (Michalowski 2011, 765). This raises the question of how meaningful labels such as ‘liberal’ really are. Second, while this body of literature has examined an impressive range of countries, and helped to describe policy shifts at the macro-level, it has approached naturalization as a policy written on paper, and drawn conclusions based on laws, regulations, and government papers. In other words, the distinction between ‘liberal’ and ‘illiberal’ fails to consider the real-life implementation of citizenship tests, thus neglecting the effects of such policies.

Addressing this shortcoming, a growing number of sociological and anthropological studies have provided empirical insights from ceremony halls and classrooms, that can be categorised into three distinct critiques of the tests, courses, and ceremonies as (1) neoliberal, (2) postcolonial-racist, and (3) dialectical naturalization requirements. Following the first critique, the new citizenship requirements represent a shift of responsibility from the state onto migrants, who should take responsibility for their own settlement and integration processes without expecting public support (Suvarierol and Kirk 2015; Turner 2014). The neoliberal outsourcing of state duties also extends the ongoing securitization of migration into the policy area of naturalization, as language teachers are expected to perform border guard-type duties in classrooms, such as checking migrants’ passports and identity documents before they may participate in a citizenship course (zur Nieden 2009; on the securitization of migration, see e. g. Huysmans 1995).

Secondly, it has been argued that the new citizenship requirements represent a form of state racism (Tyler 2010) and a ‘civilizing project’ that inflict mandatory integration lessons delivered by a ‘predominantly white […] administration’ onto ‘mainly People of Colour from the postcolonial states of Africa, Asia and Latin America, in fact especially Muslim communities with Turkish or Arabic backgrounds’ (Hà 2010, 164).

Thirdly, most studies in this area have emphasised that the modern citizenship requirements represent a new level of state selection, through a highly ambivalent process of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of migrants aspiring full membership whereby migrants are considered both as a potential national source of pride and scorn. The ceremonies, for example, provide a welcome that comes too late, and an offer of inclusion to be doubted; they mainly serve to reassure public anxieties about migrants (Fortier 2013; Byrne 2014; Aptekar 2015; Damsholt 2008). Finally, this approach has also considered the perspectives of the migrants who submit themselves to the tests and ceremonies (Byrne 2014, 2016; Bassel, Monforte, and Khan 2018; Monforte, Bassel, and Khan 2019). While these analyses provide important critiques and insights, most of them have tended to focus on one requirement and a single country, thus neglecting to consider that the test (or ceremony or course) is just one element of the naturalization process, and that these new requirements are part of a transnational trend.

The academic debate is divided. On the one hand, a significant body of literature has argued that the new citizenship requirements are more or less legitimate and inclusive from a state-centred perspective, while on the other hand, a growing number of studies has seen them as highly problematic and exclusive from a migrant-centred perspective. Overall, both perspectives revolve around attitudes to inclusion/exclusion. To
understand the productive effects of naturalization processes, a new conceptual approach is needed.

**The subject-formation framework**

Moving beyond the dialectic of inclusion and exclusion that dominates citizenship and migration studies, the subject-formation framework shifts the focus of analysis onto all the attempts through which states suggest to individuals that they should model themselves to reflect a specific subjectivity, shaping and optimizing their self-conduct and self-understanding according to that ideal (Badenhoop 2017, 412). Originating in post-structuralist theories of power, specifically governmentality studies (Foucault 1983; Dean 2003; Lemke 2002), this framework assumes that ‘power [...] also can act positively to produce and to define’ (Bevir 1999, 349). Subject-formation, or subjectification, refers to all instances where ‘human beings shall be made subjects and transform themselves into subjects’ (Bröckling 2007, 121; cf. 2012, 131). The subject or subjectivity is defined here not as a homogenous, bounded, natural entity as it is in the Western, Kantian philosophical tradition; but rather, is understood as a ‘focal point for all the efforts to define and control it from without and within’ (Bröckling 2016, 2–3). A particular subjectivity such as ‘an entrepreneur’ is not something we are, or can ever attain, but is, rather, ‘something we are supposed to become’ (Bröckling 2016, ix).

This definition of subject-formation has three important features. First, it is *performative*, since the subject is not ‘pre-existent and waiting to be discovered’ (vorfindbar) but has ‘to be produced’ (hervorzubringen) (Bröckling 2012, 132–33). Subject-formation requires constant self-modelling, and the focal point for all those efforts can never be reached. Second, the subject is both *socially shaped and self-shaped*. On the one hand, it is produced through being hailed (called upon) by others. In this context, the post-structuralist term ‘hailing’ refers to social interactions where an individual faces discursive calls, i.e. suggestions or expectations regarding his or her behaviour (what to do/not do) and self-understanding (how to think of her/himself) that aim at influencing potential future actions. On the other hand, the hailed individual is not purely passive, reacting to external calls according to his or her pre-conditioned self; they are also ‘a hailer of others’ (Bröckling 2016, 7). Subject-formation thus involves both external forces as well as individual self-conduct: a ‘triock of shaping, being shaped and self-shaping’ (Bröckling 2016, 8). Third, because of this formative aspect, subject-formation is considered highly *efficacious* and powerful. The constant conditioning and modelling means that individuals *internalize* the expected conduct which contributes to ‘structuring and shaping the field of possible action of subjects’ (Lemke 2002, 52).

The subject-formation approach has been systematically applied in the fields of mental health (Rose 1998, 1999; Miller and Rose 2008), economics, and welfare state policy (Bröckling 2016; Cruikshank 1999). This literature has tended to concentrate on the various *calls*, i.e. the attempts of subject-formation, thereby neglecting the *responses* that are the effects of subject-formation. For example, in his study of the ‘entrepreneurial self’, a subjectivity he found in economic theories, management literature, and welfare state policies, Bröckling concluded that ‘[t]he interpellations of the entrepreneurial self are totalitarian’ (Bröckling 2016, 196). Consequently, he saw little room for resistance, let alone agency.
However, the mere assumption of efficacy risks overemphasising the effectiveness of subject-formation. Existing analyses of subject-formation are prone to structural determinism as long as their focus remains limited to how ‘the social world makes the subject, not the ways in which the subject makes the social world’ (Bevir 1999, 357). From a political sociological point of view, analyses of subject-formation must examine the role of individual agency. While it is important to understand which techniques and authorities a specific call of subject-formation is made through, it is equally important to understand how this call is received and answered by those being called upon. When defined in this way, applying the subject-formation framework to the study of citizenship and naturalization has the analytical advantage of examining the productive effects of power, reaching beyond the legal question of inclusion/exclusion.

The call for the Super Citizen

In many ways, naturalization is an example of subject-formation *par excellence*. Citizenship is a significant tool of social closure through which nation-states include their own nationals and exclude non-nationals and migrants (Brubaker 1992). However, naturalization not only selectively includes migrants; it also attempts to activate and optimize citizenship candidates. Naturalization illustrates the ambivalent attitude of the liberal democratic nation-state towards immigrants who are welcomed as ‘givers’, for example by providing their labor, or rejected as ‘takers’, e.g. by accessing welfare benefits (Honig 2001). By applying for naturalization, migrants can resolve their problematized ‘foreignness’, yet their request for citizenship still troubles the ideology of nation-states, which are defined not as voluntary associations but as communities formed primarily through involuntary birthright membership. While the outcome of the process legally eradicates migrants’ difference (by giving them equal status with ‘natural-born’ citizens), the persistent existence and practice of naturalization procedures in many states re-enacts the distinction between nationals who automatically obtain membership at birth on the one hand, and non-nationals on the other who have to apply for, and be tested to attain, citizenship status (on the distinction between assigned and acquired citizenship status, see Brubaker 1989).

Moreover, by directing institutionalized appeals at citizenship applicants through tests, courses, and ceremonies, naturalization procedures express the state’s expectations and create the subjectivity of the Super Citizen (Badenhoop 2017, Forthcoming 2022). This subjectivity was found both in Germany and the UK, and there are indications that it may, in fact, be present across the Western hemisphere because the Super Citizen is a subjectivity of a role model member of a liberal-democratic, capitalist, modern nation-state. The Super Citizen suggests to migrants aspiring to citizenship that they should become ideal citizens and combined political, economic, and cultural assets to the state. They should exercise their newly gained right to vote, thus helping to maintain the democratic political system, and should strengthen the capitalist market economy by providing their paid and unpaid labour. And with their supposed multiple language skills and multicultural lifestyles and cuisines, they should enhance the ethnic and cultural diversity of the modern liberal society. As such, the Super Citizen forms an instrumental
part of maintaining a specific self-image of the nation-state as an open and diverse society based on a competitive market economy and liberal democracy.

The call for the Super Citizen is found throughout the naturalization procedure, expressed by various actors and in different settings ranging from standardized test questions, exercises used in local citizenship courses, speeches delivered regularly at citizenship ceremonies, to the spontaneous interactions with caseworkers in naturalization offices (Badenhoop Forthcoming 2022). For example, migrants may find themselves being reminded before receiving their certificate of naturalization that they now possess the right to vote and the right to stand for election, which they should use to set an example to national-born citizens who do not cast their vote (or who vote for far-right parties) (Badenhoop 2017, 420–21). In a classroom exercise, migrants may be asked to list examples of voluntary work, and then apply the question ‘Are you a good citizen?’ to themselves.

The Super Citizen concept thus provides a critical tool for the analysis of contemporary naturalization procedures in three key ways. First, it highlights the extra-ordinary efforts and self-modification required from, and expected of, citizens by application – as opposed to citizens by birth. No person considered to be a ‘national’ state member is asked to pass a citizenship test, or to demonstrate their loyalty in order to gain full membership status, as citizenship is automatically assigned to them at birth. The formal threshold for migrants to obtain citizenship has been raised in recent years, and the state’s expectations combined in the Super Citizen subjectivity require constant efforts which go beyond the naturalization process. The call for the Super Citizen brings to light these double standards. Second, the Super Citizen points to the idealization of naturalized migrants as citizens by choice (cf. Byrne 2014; Aptekar 2015). Migrants’ active decision to request a specific state membership is considered to be more compatible with liberal democratic ideals than the passive, automatic granting of such membership to nationals at birth without their consent as individuals. Thus, migrants’ applications for citizenship mean they come to be seen as democratically ideal citizens. This idealization justifies the overload of expectations that migrants should constantly strive to become political, economic, and cultural gains for the nation-state. Third, the Super Citizen subjectivity also has a neo-liberal and neo-national aspect, as it activates migrants and holds them responsible for becoming role model citizens in order to convince anti-immigrant citizens by birth that migrants are ‘givers’, not ‘takers’. Migrants are expected to adopt a new, moderate nationalism that should serve as an antidote against new populism and the far-right (Badenhoop 2017). By staging citizenship ceremonies celebrating these new members’ diversities, states can present themselves as inclusive, multicultural, and modern without committing themselves to combat the structural inequalities and racism faced by migrants. Instead, the logic of the Super Citizen expects migrants to fight off the racism they encounter by themselves.

But, how is the call for the Super Citizen received and answered by those being called upon? This analysis examines the various responses to the Super Citizen, and thereby the effects and effectiveness of naturalization and subject-formation.
Methods

This article emerges from a major study of naturalization procedures in the UK and Germany funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (UK). Adopting a multi-sited state ethnography, this study examined the local implementation and lived experiences of naturalization procedures based on participant observations in ceremony halls, classrooms, and naturalization offices, along with interviews with a range of actors involved, including state officials, political decision-makers, teachers, legal advisers, guest speakers, as well as citizenship applicants themselves, all of which were conducted over the course of twelve months’ ethnographic fieldwork in four research locations (two each in Germany and the UK).

This article draws on semi-structured interviews with 64 citizenship applicants, 32 of which were conducted in the UK and 32 in Germany, between September 2012 and August 2013. The sample is highly diverse, comprising 38 women and 26 men from 30 different nationalities from Europe, Africa, Asia, Russia, and the Americas, with an age range of between 19 and 106. These citizenship applicants had come to the UK and Germany through diverse routes, as workers, students, spouses, and documented or undocumented asylum seekers. Some did not have any personal migration experience, having been born in the country to non-national parents. Most were long-term residents and had been living in the country for longer than the required period. At the time of the research, they were either preparing their application, had submitted it and were awaiting a decision, had successfully completed the application process, or had withdrawn their application or been rejected. Participants were accessed primarily through local migrant support groups, adult education colleges, and snowball sampling. The interviews were conducted at places suggested by the participants as spaces where they could talk freely. The responses identified in the analysis were not triggered by specific prompts; rather, they emerged as part of the interview narratives as the participants reflected on their personal experiences of going through the naturalization process, or as they recalled specific situations. Thematic analysis with computer assistance through NVivo was then deployed to analyse and code the data. I adopted an inductive approach with several rounds of coding, first looking for emerging descriptive themes then regrouping them under more analytical nodes.

Findings: three responses to the Super Citizen call

The call to citizenship applicants to become Super Citizens suggests that they activate and optimize themselves, and the data analysis yielded three distinct response types: embrace, contestation, and disaffection. The first response refers to the active embrace and welcoming of the new naturalization requirements as an opportunity to acquire and demonstrate special knowledge or loyalty as part of the naturalization procedure. The second response encompasses the many criticisms voiced by citizenship applicants that the new forms of assessment through the tests, courses, and ceremonies disregarded their previous integration achievements and alienated long-term settled migrants. The third response describes an awareness of the high expectations combined with a sense of disaffection, pragmatism, or ignorance. These three types of responses were found in all the research locations both in Germany and the UK, and across demographic features
such as gender, age, class, nationality, and entry route. These response types are not intended as mutually exclusive, stable categories, but rather as fluid and even potentially highly inconsistent, as sometimes all three response types were expressed by the same research participant. Moreover, the Super Citizen call facilitates a dynamic of competition and new hierarchies, as naturalized citizens distanced themselves from national-born and non-national citizens. The experience of naturalization may thus have both equalizing and alienating effects.

**Embrace**

One way to respond to the Super Citizen call is to listen to and embrace the state expectations as expressed in the courses, tests, and ceremonies. Some participants felt addressed by this subjectivity, in that they could identify themselves with the features of the Super Citizen as it matched their self-understanding and/or aim of being well ‘integrated’. This affirmation of the Super Citizen subjectivity took ambivalent, contradictory forms.

On the one hand, the Super Citizen call was embraced as a way for migrants to achieve empowerment and inclusion, confirming the ideals of the normative civic integration literature (see, for example, Etzioni 2007; Joppke 2010; Goodman 2010). Participants welcomed taking the test or the course, seeing them as sources of support in their settlement process. From this perspective, studying for the ‘Life in the United Kingdom’ test was seen as enhancing their knowledge and understanding of British society, and some participants deliberately kept their textbook months after passing the test for future reference on their bookshelf, because it contained ‘interesting information’ (BuCA6). Similarly, the German ‘integration course’ was appreciated as an opportunity to undergo civic education about political rights in a modern state ruled by law, and to learn about their rights, such as ‘freedom of speech’. Taking the course could therefore strengthen an individual migrant’s self-identification with the state, as it made them ‘feel closer to Germany’ (DrCP2). The citizenship ceremony could also be experienced as an offer of belonging and reassurance in an individual’s sense of self-identification, as an equal member of the nation-state. For example, one participant in Germany recalled her personal ceremony at the local naturalization authority in the following way:

And then he suddenly took the EU free movement certificates [of herself and her children] and put a huge “invalid” stamp on them and I just thought: “Oh my God, it took months to get them!” But then he was right, because I no longer need them, because now I belong here. He said that really well, that we are just as German as everyone else. It was very important to hear that. Sometimes I repeat that to myself and to others, when someone does not think that, then I say: “I am just as German as you are”. There are many nationalists in Germany. (DrCA09)

The above quotation demonstrates the equalizing aspect of the Super Citizen subjectivity, in the form of the state promise of full membership. This respondent initially felt anxiety and panic when the official invalidated her previous identity and travel documents, but then she quickly felt reassured and empowered when the official confirmed that now she was an equal citizen of the country. She utilized this inclusive aspect of the Super Citizen
subjectivity to claim her own, full German membership when encountering anti-immigrant attitudes among national-born citizens.

On the other hand, the Super Citizen was also embraced by some of the interviewees as a means of distinction, selection, and exclusion. The introduction of the test, in particular, was justified as a way for candidates to prove their worthiness based on their language skills. Passing the test is seen as a source of pride and achievement. A participant in the UK explained that the ‘Life in the UK’ test:

[... ] is a screening device, really, and it will screen out those people who don’t know English because at the very least you need to have a basic understanding of English. [...] I would consider mastering the language as a requirement to become a citizen of a country. [...] On that front, it has set [a] minimum hurdle, and so in that sense it’s good. (BuCA6)

From this perspective, the citizenship test and/or ceremony represent opportunities to show one’s knowledge of, and willingness to perform, national rituals such as singing the national anthem. The participant quoted above had prepared himself for his ceremony and learned the text of the British national anthem by heart. He felt disappointed when, at his ceremony, he started to sing along to the music and realized that no one else was joining in (BuCA6). This Kafkaesque situation is an example of migrants’ internalization, anticipation, and over-achievement of the state’s expectations. It also illustrates the contingency of subject-formation, as these individual efforts may well have been expected and rewarded in a different place and at another time. For example, in the other UK research location, migrants were actually expected to sing along to the anthem, and the lyrics were printed and handed out in advance to this end.

Contestation

Another way to respond to the call for the Super Citizen is to hear and challenge it. The second type of response to the Super Citizen call is therefore contestation. Citizenship applicants voiced criticisms of the exaggerated expectations of the Super Citizen subjectivity, having experienced their application for naturalization as a process of alienation, deterrence, and disempowerment. The majority of interviewees had lived in the country for longer than the required minimum residence period, yet they felt treated like newcomers, not permanent residents. They were surprised and annoyed that the state asked them to demonstrate their knowledge and loyalty through the tests, courses, and ceremonies, and felt that their existing integration and settlement achievements were being ignored and that their efforts would never be deemed sufficient. This confirms the critique of tests as neoliberal citizenship requirements where the burden of integration is shifted onto migrants (cf. Suvarierol and Kirk 2015). For example, a participant in the UK was upset to discover that he had to take the ‘Life in the UK’ test even though he had already successfully completed ESOL courses from level one up to level five; he felt he was well educated, so was disappointed that he should have to pass the test, too (BuCA13). Similarly, another participant in the UK who had years of experience in teaching English to speakers of other languages found her situation difficult to comprehend: ‘Why do I need to go to a citizenship ceremony when I teach English?’ (BuCA11). Citizenship applicants in the UK from Commonwealth countries were generally bewildered that they
had been asked to affirm their allegiance to the Queen whom they considered to be the symbolic Head of State already under their previous citizenship.

The naturalization process was thus perceived as a moment of exclusion, suspicion, and control rather than a moment of welcome and inclusion. Participants expressed criticism not only of the formal knowledge and loyalty requirements, but also about the way the tests, courses, and ceremonies were being implemented. The UK is characterized by an increasingly (and, indeed, officially) immigration-hostile environment and a public discourse of ‘fraud’ and ‘impersonation.’ In this context, the interaction with staff at a ‘Life in the UK test’ centre was experienced as a form of state surveillance and an unpleasant form of identity control, as one participant vividly remembered: ‘And then they checked your passport, your name, at least ten times. You felt so searched through’ (BrCA4). This quotation demonstrates that the securitization critique not only applies to the citizenship courses, but also to the tests (cf. zur Nieden 2009). Even the ceremony which formally or symbolically concludes the process for successful applicants was experienced by some as a moment of separation and boundary-drawing, confirming the dialectical critique (cf. Byrne 2014; Aptekar 2015). Participants acknowledged that the ceremonies offered migrants a symbolic recognition by the state, but they also pointed out that this recognition was too selective, or came too late: ‘Why only now? If a guest came to visit, you would also immediately welcome him and not wait until he can demonstrate a three-year rent agreement, that would be ridiculous!’ (HaCA17). In this sense, the ceremonies were a painful reminder that ‘previously you did not belong to society’ (DrCA2). The speech acts made at local citizenship ceremonies could be upsetting, as they reinforced the boundaries between ‘Us’ – national citizens and ‘Them’ – non-national citizens (Anderson 2013, for a detailed analysis of local citizenship ceremony speeches in Germany and the UK, see Badenhoop 2017).

Naturalization was also experienced as a moment of subordination, disciplinization, and infantilization, pointing to the racialization critique (cf. Tyler 2010; Hà 2010). For many adult participants, the reality of taking the course and preparing for the test was that it felt like being back at school. Participants in both countries further criticised the test due to ‘the way the questions are written’ (BuCA8); that they were ‘designed to trick you’ (BrCA4) and required ‘stupid learning by heart’ (HaCA16). This finding is evidence for the critique of the tests as illiberal social selectivity (cf. Bauböck and Joppke 2010). However, even highly skilled migrants admitted that they had to ‘sit down and cram it in’ in the evening and at the weekend (BuCA6). The ceremony was sometimes perceived as a final lecture to be endured. For example, a participant in Germany remembered that the state official told him before handing over his naturalization certificate alongside a copy of the German Basic Law that: ‘When you go abroad, behave like a German!’ which this participant felt was an especially inappropriate instruction, since he had been serving in the City Council as a social worker for many years (DrCA12). A few participants explicitly spoke about how they perceived their naturalization process as an unwelcome form of top-down enforced ‘state nationalism’ (BuCA11).

Disaffection

Yet another way to deal with the expectations of the Super Citizen subjectivity is to note the call and treat it like background noise. The third type of response to the call for the
Super Citizen is to ignore it, or disaffection. Some migrants felt unimpressed by the Super Citizen call because they adopted a pragmatist approach and focused their efforts on gaining the passport. From this perspective taking the course, passing the test, and attending the ceremony were all means to a specific end. The naturalization process was just another bureaucratic hurdle to make life a little bit easier, and all the ‘hailing’ they encountered during the process had little effect on their self-understanding or actions. A participant in Germany recalled how she was asked to describe what naturalization meant for her before receiving her certificate, and she gave the following answer to the official:

You know, this certificate will only help me with some things. Papers do not make humans, I am a human being. And even when I was not yet a German national my task was to use all my given opportunities and skills for the peaceful living together and I will continue to do that, whether paid or unpaid. I am a volunteer assistant for young offenders in prison, a volunteer assistant for people in detention, a community translator, a member of [a local migrant support group]; here [at the legal advice centre] I work paid and sometimes unpaid. I am concerned whenever there is a conflict here, I answer questions about Islam, I care to live in an open and peaceful society and whenever possible I make my contribution. Even though paper-wise I was not yet a German national. And then he just looked at me like that! (DrCA02)

The above quotation is noteworthy because this citizenship applicant picked up the economic and cultural features of the Super Citizen subjectivity when listing her work and volunteering activities, as well as her efforts as a translator and mediator. At the same time, she clearly disassociated these actions and motivations from her citizenship status, thus undermining the logic of the Super Citizen subjectivity. Apparently, the caseworker was not satisfied with this answer, as he had expected a response that attributed more meaning to the naturalization process. In this instance, the about-to-be successfully naturalized citizen already appeared secure, and was relatively unimpressed by the state’s subject-formation attempts as she stressed that her change of legal status was unrelated to the way she understood herself and felt about the state she lived in. Similarly, another participant said: ‘I felt relatively well integrated without holding German citizenship’ (DrCA08).

Others were disaffected by the Super Citizen call because they were sceptical about the subjectivity’s promise of equality and full inclusion. This scepticism was related to personal experiences of persistent racism towards migrants and an acute awareness that neither the process of naturalization nor self-modification efforts are able to undo someone’s perceived ‘foreignness’, for example in terms of their accent, physical appearance, or migration history. Even though they felt confident that their application would be successful, participants expressed doubts as to whether they would pass as ‘German’ or ‘British’ on the street. When comparing herself to her younger sister who had learned German more quickly and easily at school, one participant was well aware that: ‘When I speak I am still perceived as a foreigner’ (HaCA01). For others, language was not the main marker of ‘foreignness’; instead, this was their physical appearance. Speaking to me in impeccable and eloquent German without any trace of an accent, one Latin American participant explained that for many locals, she was ‘like a Martian’, or at best someone ‘from Asia’, because they were unable to distinguish her Spanish-sounding surname and only saw her tanned skin, dark hair, and dark eyes (DrCA08). With a note of cynicism,
she thought she would have to ‘dye the hair blond’ and wear ‘blue contact lenses’ in order to achieve full recognition as a German national.

**Migrants’ competition for state recognition and new hierarchies of worthiness**

Regardless of which response is adopted, the Super Citizen call facilitates a dynamic of competition for recognition among migrants aspiring to citizenship status. The Super Citizen subjectivity is problematic because it induces citizenship applicants to compare themselves to other applicants. The interview data suggests that this dynamic took three forms: migrants assessed themselves; they assessed others; and they were assessed by others regarding whether or not they ‘deserved’ citizenship. A candidate’s ‘worthiness’ was often ascertained based on their willingness and efforts to optimise their English or German language skills. For example, one participant in Germany expressed a note of resentment when he compared his own lengthy application procedure to that of others: ‘I know people who had a tenth of myself then [in terms of] languages, possibilities – and it took them only six months [to obtain German citizenship]’ (DrCA4). It is noteworthy that this person quantified his own linguistic skills even though language is difficult to measure. Some participants distinguished themselves from other migrants who supposedly had the ‘wrong’ motives, such as one participant in the UK: ‘A lot of people came for British citizenship. I was not there for British citizenship, I was there to learn English’ (BuCA09). By implying that some of his fellow students had taken the ESOL with citizenship course with no motivation to learn English, but simply to get the course certificate in order to be eligible for naturalization, he seemed to adopt the idea that citizenship may be granted ‘by mistake’ to those who do not ‘deserve’ it.

This self-assessment and assessment of others was also based on migrants’ contribution to the national economy. For example, one East European participant in the UK whose naturalization application had been rejected told me the story of another East European whom she knew and who had successfully applied for British citizenship:

> I don’t need it [citizenship], it doesn’t bring me any difference to my life. […] I’m just so upset [about] not getting it. […] She is not capable of writing a word of English. […] Came to England with no English, no friends, and no money. Had to clean toilets, trapped in homes, cleaning Romanians’ houses. […] But she is British! It’s annoying. She got it. I’m just pissed. She left in October, too old to clean, all these Polish 16-year-olds coming to London, [she was] forced to go back home. Why did she get British citizenship? In order to get [a] British pension. […] Now [she is] back home with [a] British pension. (BrCA8)

It is noteworthy in the above quotation that the features that are deemed to make a migrant worthy of citizenship are language, but also social networks and financial solvency. The quotation also demonstrates how various layers of neo-liberalism reinforce each other, e.g. inter-ethnic competition in the labour market among low-skilled migrants in the service sector overlaps with competition for citizenship status.

This dynamic of mutual assessment was by no means invented by citizenship applicants, as they also found themselves assessed by others, especially in their interactions with officials. One participant in Germany with particularly impressive past achievements was surprised to discover at his first appointment that the local
naturalization authorities did not ‘welcome my application’, but instead started an *ad hoc* interrogation:

I myself was asked the question: “What special integration achievements can you demonstrate?” I said, I studied in German at a German university. I have a German university degree, not everyone who applies for citizenship has that. I am married to a German woman, our shared future is here. I have led large projects [international business cooperation bringing significant funds to the region]. I volunteered while I was at university. I was awarded honorary citizen of [a neighbouring town]. These are the integration achievements I have. (DrCA5)

This dynamic of competition creates new hierarchies of worthiness among successful and unsuccessful migrants, but also among naturalized and national-born citizens. Participants both in Germany and the UK were acutely aware that their national-born neighbours, colleagues, and friends would have been unable to pass the citizenship test if they had to sit it. While some merely noted this with bemusement, others explicitly criticised the apparent inadequacy of native knowledge, and derived a sense of superiority from being somewhat ‘better’ German or British citizens due to actually having passed the test. This situation was perceived as particularly ironic and inappropriate when some officials and decision-makers were apparently unable to meet the knowledge requirements they expected from migrants.

**Discussion and conclusion**

This article has examined migrants’ lived experiences of contemporary naturalization processes, which represent the final form of state selection in the immigration and settlement process. In this, the first comprehensive, comparative study of naturalization procedures from the migrants’ perspective, I have made the case for moving beyond the inclusion/exclusion divide in the existing citizenship literature by conceptualizing naturalization as a subject-formation regime. This theoretical innovation allowed me to critically examine how states attempt to optimize and modify those migrants who apply for naturalization, and to assess how successful these subject-formation attempts are. The subjectivity of the Super Citizen suggests to migrants that they should aspire to become political, economic, and cultural assets to the new membership state. Based on a thematic analysis of interviews with migrants naturalizing in either Germany or the UK, I identified three types of response to the call for the Super Citizen, namely: embrace, contestation, and disaffection.

This article has made a theoretical and an empirical contribution to citizenship research. First, it has shown that the Super Citizen is indeed a powerful subjectivity. The analysis of the interviews revealed that this call is heard throughout the naturalization process, from the pre-application to the final stages, in all four research locations in Germany and the UK. This confirms that these two countries’ citizenship tests, courses, and ceremonies are highly powerful techniques of subject-formation and sites of ‘hailing’ calls. The Super Citizen call is influential as it compels migrants to engage with it, but does not prescribe a response. Indeed, the Super Citizen call did not produce a uniform response. The analysis of the interview data showed that the three response types identified were highly ambivalent, ranging from embrace to contestation to disaffection. On the one hand, some
migrants embraced the ceremony, test, or course as a means of receiving helpful support, civic education, and as a welcome source of pride – a confirmation of their worthiness as migrants who saw themselves as Super Citizens. In this sense, the Super Citizen had inclusionary and equalizing effects, corresponding to the arguments of the state-centred civic integration literature (cf. Joppke 2010; Etzioni 2007; Goodman 2010). On the other hand, as some migrants saw the naturalization requirements as reinforcing boundaries and posing irrelevant, overly high hurdles, for them, the Super Citizen call had exclusionary, alienating, and differentiating effects, thus confirming the migrant-centred critiques in the existing sociological and anthropological literature. My empirical analysis thereby provided evidence for both the state-centred and the migrant-centred approaches; however, neither of these can sufficiently explain the complexity of contemporary naturalization processes by themselves. Moreover, this analysis found that migrants are not just targets or agents of subject-formation, as Monforte, Bassel, and Khan (2019) argued; citizenship applicants may also remain unimpressed by the Super Citizen call, as the third response type showed.

It is important to note that the reception of the Super Citizen subjectivity was highly inconsistent, sometimes even fluctuating in the same participant’s responses in one interview. Respondents took pride in passing the citizenship requirements and even derived a sense of superiority vis-à-vis other migrant and national-born citizens, yet they also felt the state’s disdain when their language or integration skills were not officially recognized. This suggests that subject-formation is not necessarily as deterministic and ‘totalitarian’ as Bröckling (2016, 196) has previously suggested. Governmentality and critical citizenship studies should therefore be careful not to overestimate the effects of subject-formation, and should treat its efficacy as an open empirical question by considering the individual agency of those who are called and answer. Resistance to a subject-formation regime also, of course, has some structural limitations, particularly in the case of naturalization procedures where the conditions are set by powerful institutions such as the state. If migrants want to obtain citizenship status, they have little choice but to comply and meet the requirements.

Secondly, the comparative research design yielded the insight that all three response types were found in both Germany and the UK. This finding is perhaps surprising given that the two countries’ differing immigration histories and policies continue to be regarded as examples of the traditional distinction between ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ models of citizenship and nationhood (cf. Meer and Modood 2012). On the other hand, this result can be interpreted as a logical outcome of the transnational convergence towards increasingly restrictive immigration policies since the early 2000s. My analysis has shown that the Super Citizen call impacts on all migrants, and the responses to it do not seem to be determined by gender, age, nationality, class, or immigration route as they were found to be scattered across a highly diverse sample. One hypothesis arising from this qualitative empirical analysis is that a person requires strong intellectual and language skills to be in a position to reject the Super Citizen call. The likely conditions under which migrants adopt one or the other response is therefore an area for further research. It is notable that many responses placed a strong emphasis on language and work/volunteering, thus stressing the cultural and economic features of the Super Citizen. The political element was picked up less frequently, confirming the results of a recent survey in the UK, according to which naturalized migrants tend to be less involved in politics than non-naturalized migrants (Bartram 2019).
By requiring migrants to undergo citizenship tests, courses, and ceremonies, naturalization produces highly ambivalent equalizing and alienating effects. By choosing to naturalize and striving to meet both the formal requirements and the informal expectations of the Super Citizen call, migrants may seek to signal to natives their ‘worthiness’ to be full citizens, just like those who are citizens by birth. This article has shown that one inadvertent effect of the new, stricter naturalization regimes is that, while some migrants pick up this subjectivity and see themselves as a Super Citizen, they also think of themselves as better citizens than both non-citizens and natural-born citizens. Contemporary citizenship admission procedures thus not only facilitate formal inclusion, but also foster perceived inequalities and competition between naturalized and non-naturalized migrants, and also between naturalized and national-born citizens.

**Note**

1. All direct citations from German sources were translated into English by the author unless otherwise specified.

**Acknowledgments**

I presented earlier drafts of this article at the following research centres and conferences: Glasgow Refugee Asylum and Migration Network (GRAMNet), University of Glasgow; Citizens, Nations and Migration Network (CNaM), University of Edinburgh; IMISCOE Spring Conference ‘Transforming Mobility and Immobility: Brexit and beyond’, University of Sheffield; Ethics, Law and Politics Department and Socio-Cultural Diversity Department, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen; Migration and Diversity Department, Berlin Social Science Centre (WZB); as well as the Law and Anthropology Department, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle; and I am deeply grateful for all the helpful feedback I received. For very useful comments on this article I would like to thank Rainer Bauböck, René Wolfstetter, as well as the two anonymous reviewers. I would also like to thank Bridget Byrne, Robert Gibb, Andy Smith and Satnam Virdee for their valuable feedback on earlier drafts of this article.

**Disclosure statement**

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

**Funding**

This research was funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council [award number ES/J500136/1] and the German Academic Scholarship Foundation (Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes). It also received funding from the Ethics, Law and Politics Department at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen, and the Dean’s Fund of the University of Edinburgh.

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