INTERVIEW WITH ENGIN ISIN BY MICHAELA BENSON
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Introduction

This interview was originally conducted in March 2021 for *Who do we think we are?* (2021), a podcast series hosted by Michaela, discussing urgent questions of citizenship and migration in Britain today.[1] At the heart of the series is a commitment to showcasing social science knowledge and understanding to demonstrate how these might challenge public and political understandings of Britishness and belonging and offer alternatives ways of thinking about a range of current issues, including the Windrush Deportation Scandal, the citizenship test, and the UK government's commitments to the people of Hong Kong. The series follows a narrative format, using edited excerpts from the recorded interviews within each episode. Excerpts from this interview appear in *Episode 9: What does it mean to be a citizen?* (to be released 10 December 2021).

I had first approached Engin with the idea of introducing the podcast listeners to *Acts of Citizenship*. The shift away from seeing citizenship as solely on the terms offered by the state, and instead as resignified through resistance and struggle as people "claim the right to claim rights" (Isin 2012), offered an alternative perspective that I felt had particular resonance. At the time we were preparing and recording the interview, events including the coup and subsequent protests in Myanmar, and the global #BlackLivesMatter movement, were a reminder of the importance of such understandings. Indeed, the story of citizenship struggles which resonates around the world and through history is the central pillar of the episode, which explores how ordinary people engage in acts of resistance and otherwise in order to resignify what it means to be a citizen.

However, as I was conducting the interviews for the series which often extended to an hour and beyond—with colleagues at all career stages from the across the social sciences—it became clear that the interviews themselves were a rich resource that others might find useful and interesting. My interview with Engin offered insights into the longer intellectual trajectory leading to his current work. It made visible the development over time of his ideas and how these were made in dialogue with other scholars. But more than anything, we were able to explore together the relationships between the different concepts he has developed through his work on citizenship.

MB: I am really excited to be talking to you today about your entry points into and trajectory through thinking about citizenship, and how this has changed over time as the field of citizenship studies has grown and developed. What really attracted you to this field of enquiry?

EI: Thanks, Michaela, and I really appreciate this opportunity to reflect on my intellectual journey in citizenship studies. My PhD thesis originated as a genealogy of the city as a technology of power, as I understood those concepts in Michel Foucault's terms in the chapter "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History". (1977). My focus was British settler colonialism in North America from 17th century to the 19th. I became particularly interested in giving an account of the

divergence between American revolutionary conception of the city and the Canadian counter-revolutionary conception. I discovered a central concern for the British colonial apparatus that the city provided the conditions that led to the American revolution. British colonial authorities identified the city as a space that cultivated a revolutionary subject. The considerable effort of the colonial apparatus was then to redesign this technology of power in the remaining settler colonies, especially Canada. How they did so was the object of my study. The thesis was entitled *The Birth of the City in British North America* (1990), a very PhD thesis-like title but I had tested it before I finished it and the response was encouraging (Isin 1989). Yet as I was publishing a slightly revised version as my first book my editor suggested ever so gently that I perhaps needed a more attractive title. In responding to this challenge and under certain political circumstances that we cannot really discuss today, I changed its title to *Cities without Citizens* (1992). I have no recollection of how it really came to me but I thought it captured exactly the redesign of the city that the colonial apparatus itself had dreamed and imagined. I had not used the concept citizenship up until that moment knowingly in the book and yet the concept never lost its grip on me since then. Shall we say it was an accident?

MB: I really like the way you kind of explain that kind of serendipity, shall we say, by which these things happen. I also think that description of the shift from being a PhD student to becoming a published scholar is one that we do not reflect on publicly frequently enough. I think it is really important that more established scholars make this visible, to give a bit of a route map to those at earlier stages in their intellectual journeys.

You said that you had not used citizenship knowingly in the book and then you changed the title to this very catchy and immediate title, *Cities without Citizens* At that stage, how were you using citizenship, and what did you think its potential was for your ideas?

EI: Once the book was published, I was unexpectedly invited to seminars and conferences, to publish chapters in books and submit articles and so on. I was interpellated, as it were, as a citizenship scholar into a space which I did not know how to inhabit. I had to begin articulating to myself what this space was and how to inhabit it. If by accident at that time, had I called that first book *Cities without Democracy*, I think my intellectual journey could have possibly taken a different trajectory. In other words, I would have been interpellated differently. Democracy was, and still is, a well-established field of enquiry but then there was scant literature, apart from obvious classics, on citizenship. And given that I was beginning to address citizenship particularly as a challenge to British colonial power, I was entering a debate from a very different perspective. And starting from democracy would have had fundamental different consequences. With democracy I suspect I would have become more interested in processes and institutions. But with citizenship, interestingly, trying to find that space in which I could articulate myself, I became really interested in the figure whose conduct was an object of government and tellingly that was the figure in which British colonial apparatus was interested. British colonial authorities often talked about the colonial subject, the colonial settler, or loyal subjects. They used this discourse to articulate the idea that they had to find a way of remaking

that subject that was conducive to effective government, without mentioning the catastrophic failure in the thirteen colonies. That was the ominous background. So, then this figure of the citizen, a type of subject whose conduct is conducive or not conducive to government became a fundamental question of concern for me. Interestingly it is still a fundamental question for political thought and yet there I was, at a time when there was scant literature that asked that question.

So, I had to open that space. Yet, if there was scant academic literature, there was a veritable discourse amongst men, and I mean men here literally, of government for whom thinking about the figure of the citizen was a primary activity. Those who oversaw governing the conduct of people had written a massive amount on citizens as subjects, so I ended up reading mostly in the archives what these men of government wrote about the political subject and how they thought they were producing it. To me then historically understanding how that figure of citizen was produced became the potential for also understanding the broader problem of domination. There were, I should mention, two major riots or protests or rebellions in Canada in 1837 and 1838. So, the British colonial apparatus became very concerned that, despite all efforts between the 1780s and 1830s, the repetition of the revolution was still a possibility. In 1838, Lord Durham was appointed as Governor General of British North America. He authored the famous *Report on the Affairs of British North America*, known simply as the Durham Report. This report became hugely important for me to understand the inner workings of the political apparatus and to understand that figure of the citizen. I was deeply engaged with what Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) would call “minor” or Michel Foucault (1926-1984) “grey” literature on government. As a genealogist my choice was not an accident. I had latched on to a literature that was concerned to articulate measures of government that would *not* produce a citizen.

MB: This is really fascinating, this is a history that I do not personally know, and I think that what you have made really clear there is the way in which those in power were seeking to produce a different type of political subject, one that would not revolt. So, they were seeking power and control essentially. And yet probably I assume selling it to their publics on grounds of, this is *your* responsibility, *your* obligation, as a person who is governed by these people. I was interested, I just wanted to pick up on one other thing that you said though which was at the time, you were talking about 30 years ago, there was very little written about the figure of the citizen during British colonialism in North America. I just wondered if you had any thoughts on why that was the case?

EI: It is a really difficult question. I have asked it myself in the past and I thought about addressing why until the 1990s citizenship had not become an object. Incidentally, my article “The (Re)emergence of the concept of citizenship in academic discourse” (Isin 1994) scratched the surface of this question, and it was later expanded in *Citizenship & Identity* (Isin & Wood 1999).

It is really in the 1990s we have some narratives emerging on citizenship but also colonial movements, imperial government and so on. But in the 1980s when I was doing that research, I just had not read an account of subject formation (or subjectification) in the colonies. There was some limited work on

citizenship theory, and as I said until the book was published, I really had not used the concept of citizenship, so I discovered TH Marshall's 1948 lectures *Citizenship and Social Class* (1992) which was republished by sociologist Tom Bottomore to draw attention to changing social citizenship in Britain. So, there was an emerging interest. Bryan Turner had already written his influential *Citizenship and Capitalism* (1986) and there was a debate between Michael Mann (1987) and Bryan Turner (1990), the former giving an account of citizenship as a ruling class strategy and the latter arguing for citizenship as an institution of social movement. And then Iris Young (1989) and Will Kymlicka (1995) somewhat changed the terms of the debate with implicit or explicit critiques of Marshall. Yet when I was doing the research and subsequently trying to think about the figure of the citizen this debate of the 1990s was not exactly addressing my problem. I returned to history of political theory and the conceptions of citizen and subject. There was an interest during the bicentennial of the French Revolution and some literature on Ancient Greek and Ancient Roman figures of citizenship. Yet how the British political struggles in settler colonialism and how that reflected on the metropole, as it were, for the formation of an empire-state, there was not yet a debate.

I still have not answered your question, of course: you asked why there was not as much interest in the study of citizenship until the 1990s. It may well be that citizenship in the post-war period was pretty much an uncontested concept at least in Europe and particularly social citizenship. For the post-war liberal democratic states, I think citizenship was not problematised and there was almost a state-citizen agreement on what were the entitlements, what the extent of these entitlements were, and who were entitled to them. The post-Thatcherite consequences of neoliberalism began to be counted in the 1990s and this unsettled the relationship between state and citizen; that relationship became a question. Arguably, we still belong to that era of unsettlement and renegotiation of state-citizen relationship. It has taken of course turns and we do not know yet where it is going but it is being negotiated through struggles. What Bryan Turner once said of the "erosion of citizenship" was a consequence of the end of that post-war settlement. And I suspect that was one of the reasons for the absence of a literature on citizenship. It is not accidental that in the 1990s citizenship begins to be articulated as a question.

Yet, there is also non-British and non-European backgrounds for this as well. When I look back, for example, Iris Marion Young's 1989 article "Polity and Group Difference", which I hugely value as a major feminist intervention, a critique of the ideal of universal citizenship was the first opening for thinking about the very category of universal citizenship. The idea of a universal citizen, an entitled subject, equal before the rule of law, from a feminist point of view, sounded rather hollow. She posed the question by examining the actual experiences of women and drew attention to various forms of exclusion, various forms of differentiation, various forms of domination, not only in political rights which had arrived only recently in the 20th century, but also in civil and social rights. Iris Young reminded us about the missing story in citizenship. She also linked civil rights and social rights together in a narrative to resonate with the struggles of Black people in America and Europe. Then she expanded that argument with indigenous people, queer movements, environmental

movements and beyond. I think if in the 1980s there was already a questioning of the universal idea of the citizen, partially because of neoliberalism and partially because of the rise of social movements making all sorts of demands, the question “What is this thing we call citizen then?” was articulated. So, there is the British story connected with the imperial and colonial histories but also European and American histories where citizenship becomes a problem.

There are also three other momentous developments to remember. First, as I was completing my PhD in the Autumn of 1989, we were daily observing the collapse of the Berlin Wall. The revolutions and the breakup of empires and states that followed with wars underpinned by nationalism were momentous for the emergence of the intertwined questions of citizenship and identity. Second, we were simultaneously witnessing the negotiations for a European Union that led to the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 with the birth of a new kind citizenship, European citizenship, which undergirds much of European politics today. Third, when I was invited to Simon Fraser University to give a keynote lecture in 1993, Mosaic, a web browser that had opened a new window into the rapidly developing internet was just introduced. Another momentous development was the birth of “hello world” which most first web sites had used for their “home” pages. We are still trying to understand the consequences of that development, which both integrated and disintegrated the world to which it said hello then.

MB: The time in which Marshall was writing, it was a very specific period, as you have just pointed out, of the development of the welfare state. But he doesn’t explicitly foreground the fact that this was also taking place alongside Britain’s decolonisation, its shift from empire-state to nation-state. It is interesting to think about why that was not done and where that leaves us in terms of understandings, particularly when people still pivot towards Marshall for understanding citizenship in Britain and more universally.

The idea of the British citizen through its institutionalisation in nationality law, emerges on the back foot because Canada has already developed its conception of citizenship in a very different way. Something that struck me from reading your work, that really stood with me, and this is from your book *Being Political* (2002) is your description about how commonplace understandings of citizenship are really the stories that the victors of citizenship struggles tell, which gives us a picture of citizenship that is only ever partial. I just wanted to kind of ask you why do you think it is important that we consider citizenship in these terms?

EI: When I eventually followed up my genealogy of the city in British North America and then overcame my trauma of being thrown into or interpellated by a debate that I did not understand, I was attracted to the idea of writing genealogies of citizenship itself and push it as far back in political history as I could possibly manage. So, I ended up confronting, in that journey, the origins of the city-state, development of the state, the appropriation of ancient Greek and Roman histories in modern history and framing them as “European”, and the development of the city-state relations in European history. All of that got a bit complicated and when, after 10 years of uncertain work—and it was exactly 10

years—I was gently reminded by my editor that perhaps I might consider submitting the manuscript that I had promised. I had already concluded at that time that histories and theories of citizenship were written by those who claimed it as theirs, going through all that material that was available to me, it appeared to me that, the figure of the citizen was constructed as white, male, propertied, able-bodied, straight, upright, and European. That was the figure who wrote the histories of citizenship. So, it appeared to me a pattern was there from the earliest written laws in Mesopotamia and Minoan and Mycenaean cities to Athens and Sparta and Rome, dominant social groups, appropriating always various forms of capital, military, physical, sexual, social, economic, gradually establishing their hegemony and giving an account of themselves as citizens, as the holders of values, virtues, and merits. What struck me in these, what I called games of citizenship that were played right across two millennia, each game always producing a series of others opposed to citizens, variously black, female, poor, infirm, old, deviant, or non-European, Oriental. In my work, I called this “alterity citizenship” and formulated figures such as strangers, outsiders, and aliens to demonstrate the different grades of alterity. My story was that to categorise a citizen would not function without the category of non-citizen. So, the citizens established their virtues and defended these virtues as values that constitute the citizen. Citizens would constantly be drawn into a discourse of identifying what the non-virtues were as the attributes of non-citizens. Yet it seems to me that there was always something arbitrary or contingent about these virtues and values. Those who somehow obtained power would identify blackness as backwardness, womanhood as backwardness, non-Europeanness as regressive. So it was that game that really became clear to me as a game of domination. What struck me in these games of citizenship is that the figures of alterity always involved the production of categories that opened as a site of struggle. Then genealogies of citizenship were not only about citizenship but simultaneously about non-citizenship. From that point on I never thought that I was studying citizenship but the dynamic relationship between what I call production and distribution of alterity, the relationship between citizenship and non-citizenship. That is why I am often sceptical of the discourse on inclusion and exclusion in describing citizen and non-citizen relations. To me citizenship games are about dialogical production and distribution of alterity rather than inclusion or exclusion of already existing identities as though they existed outside this discourse and then they are included or excluded. To me what became attractive is to see how the discourse produced them. So, when we are considering these terms citizenship games to me opened possibilities and potentialities of both domination and liberation. That perspective was not available to me when I was working on the settler colonial history, it became more nuanced and more connected to this dialogical relationship between the two. To me domination and emancipation are closely related. Citizenship functions then because of these struggles and that is why I began thinking that studying citizenship and non-citizenship relationships should be focused on struggles that shape these citizenship games. So, struggle became the production of discourse of these identities.

MB: I really like that idea which is that, you know, what you are really saying there is that we should be sceptical of actually reproducing the categories that are produced through citizenship struggles by which actually attributing the

differences that emerge through those struggles, as a kind of fixed reality, as it were, and instead say these are made through this process where people are struggling over power and struggling over who gets to define the political subject in their image. But what is also really exciting about this approach is that it opens up the space for hope and that I think that is something that I really struggle with when we talk about the politics of exclusion. I think you can find yourself going down this route of thinking “These people have been pushed out, how can we ever get them back in?” whereas actually when you realise that this struggle is ongoing that none of these groups are stable or as stable as they purport to be, then you have the space for hope. Reading across your work this seems to be at the heart of what you have developed in terms of this idea of acts of citizenship. I wondered if you wanted to explain what this means.

EI: Yes, I would be very happy to reflect on that, Michaela, because I think you are right, hope as a horizon of struggle was inspiring to me. When I traced multiple genealogies and discovered an entire European literature in history, anthropology, sociology, and politics, I returned to the archives and printed archival documents and used the languages that I know to understand the specific dynamics of struggles right across these two millennia. I also came to deeply appreciate what was called a subaltern literature, feminist, black, indigenous, queer, ecologist scholars who recovered subjugated knowledges about struggles of resistance in the 1980s and 1990s. When I was reading histories of Ancient Greece by white European male subjects working through my hypothesis, I became aware of subaltern histories. For example, in Ancient Athens how women were banned from the Agora, the forum. So, on the one hand white-European subjects who are hailing the Agora as the invention of citizenship, and yet I am really interested in why figures such as women, slaves, sailors, and merchants are absent in the Agora, and their presentation as figures lacking the virtues and values of citizens. So, then I became interested in the absence of women, sailors, slaves, and merchants. This is not a passive history, people waged bloody struggles and lost their lives because they refuse to just let go of the fact that they were defined, the way in which they were defined by dominant people. Merchants staged what we would call strikes, resistances, they fought against their conditions, women may have been banned from the centre, but they created their own Agora and Forum in the periphery and produced work, theatre, drama, tragedy, in those spaces, asking questions about why they had been peripheral, marginal, and outside. Similarly, slaves had revolts through which they questioned why they ought to be burdened, as it was used then, for who they were. So those who were defined as a burden to society were doing the work so that the citizen can be unburdened by such work to do “politics” as a noble activity. I was inspired by subaltern and not noble politics. I found the examples of this in ancient Greek, Roman, medieval, early modern, and modern histories, and became especially intrigued by the struggles in the 12th, $13^{th}$and 14th century revolts, as the figure of the citizen persisted dimly but significantly as some virtues of a group or class and resistances to it. There was never a moment where subaltern citizens just stopped struggling and resisting. So that resistance itself is hope but also the inspiration that it produces a memory and leaves.

But I then pushed all this much further and formulated a hypothesis: actually, citizenship virtues are produced by those who are dominated, and because they are forced in a space where they must articulate anew what it means to struggle against it, they end up producing a figure of ideal citizenship: a dissenting, inventive, creative, autonomous, thinking, and resisting figure; that was for me the performative citizen (Isin 2017). The performative citizen is the dissenting citizen, asking questions about why they should not have the right to perform themselves as such. This is what Etienne Balibar (2000) expressed so well: what "we" owe to the *sans-papiers*. So, my additional hypothesis was that citizenship is articulated in that space and in that moment when there are those who are othered by it make claims to it. That is when and where you see it clearly, and how that happens is through acts. When they act (with deeds) they invent certain ways of performing themselves as citizens, even if they are not given the right to by the dominant, they take it. So, this constitutes a reversal: we investigate how rights are taken as well as given. My essential hypothesis then in this moment of taking, the acts of citizenship really articulate what the potentialities of citizenship are. This is where we get a glimpse of it. That to me encapsulates the idea of acts. This was the key narrative of *Citizens Without Frontiers* (2012).

MB: I think when you have written about this, you write of it as an act of citizenship is claiming the right to claim rights. This is powerful and links in with that discussion around hope that we just had. But just to turn that on its head a little bit, is it enough to act as a citizen on your own terms in the way that you have described, is that sufficient?

EI: It is not. I think of performing rights as participating in historical repertoires of resistance that accumulate over time with memory, traces, remembering, commemorating, recording, documenting, and so on. I often say that a symbolic production must both accompany and follow an act. There are many actions that come under the description of citizenship, any combination of these actions can be interpreted as an act of citizenship. But those who are acting under this description and those who are describing it must somehow come to a symbolic agreement that this combination of actions must be understood as an act of citizenship. To give up your seat for a person who needs it on the bus is an act of citizenship, but we do not necessarily perceive it as such because it has become part of the normative structure of that symbolic agreement. But what happens when you refuse to give up your seat because you are asked to as a black person to give way to a white person? That act of refusal is also an act of citizenship and only a previous work of symbolic production would enable us to recognise it as such.

When Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat she was considered as a non-virtuous citizen who does not deserve to be an American citizen. Yet her refusal produced a symbolic order that was repeated, cited, and resignified as a performance of citizenship. So, in the beginning when they are new and unheard of these repertoires may not be seen as acts, but over time we go back to them and reinterpret, repeat, record, transmit, and transform them and this is what I mean by symbolic production. We begin to see them as acts of citizenship. Once these acts are embodied in our symbolic order, they guide

our conduct on how citizenship ought to function, they begin to gather strength. So, in and of itself an act could be an isolated event and yet over time it can accumulate into acts, and that is why I make a distinction between action and acts. Acts are symbolic products; they do not happen in the moment of their performance.

MB: I think that's really good way of distinguishing between the two and distinguishing that process by which an action becomes an act, as a symbolically, socially produced and I assume, legitimated, act. And that is kind of what you are talking about, how things move from that situation where someone does something, to being recognised as something that can be interpreted as signifying citizenship, making visible the virtues at its core that members of that political community would stand by. I think that helpfully actually brings us onto a concept that you have developed in your work, in your more recent work, called "Performative Citizenship" (Isin 2017). There are several elements of this, we have already talked about what you understand by citizenship, but I thought before we moved on to discussing the intricacies of performativity I wondered if you could provide a very brief introduction about what you are trying to do with this concept of performative citizenship.

EI: When I began articulating the language of acts of citizenship, I was working with a group of students and colleagues, shifting our focus from citizenship described (in) law or (in) theory to citizenship (in) practice (Isin and Nielsen, 2008). How could we describe what it means to act like a citizen? So even though the performance of citizenship might not be by someone who has a right to how do we theorize the description of an act, the performance itself, the consequences, the act, which have all the elements of an act of citizenship. How do we understand this and what methodological principles can we develop to study it? Is there a consistent or at least somewhat coherent way of thinking about these acts? Again, yet another episode of interpellation by virtue of a word I use "Acts" got me into a philosophical literature and history of what it means to act and the story of acts and so on and then I was introduced slowly to the language of performativity and performatives. At that time, I was of course familiar with Judith Butler's work on gender trouble and bodies that matter (1990, 1993). I had not yet read her through the performative lens. And I was really interested in developing this language of various aspects of acts of citizenship and then broadly the notion of acts. So, it really follows from considering citizenship as I must add often deadly games of struggle in the production and distribution of alterity among citizens, strangers, outsiders, and aliens. If these acts produce these subjects, what language, what repertoire as scholars we can use became my question. By shifting the emphasis from inclusion and exclusion to production and distribution of alterity, I began to understand acts through which citizenship games are played. And the concept of performative citizenship began naming this perspective. It is not so much as they are identical and equivalent acts and performativity or performative citizenship, but performative citizenship became perspective from which one investigates acts. That allowed me to draw on a rigorous and long-standing literature on performativity and performatives to bear on studying acts. When I first wrote about acts, I was not yet exposed to that literature, it was around

2004 that began seriously reading on performativity. That was when I began developing the idea of performative citizenship.

MB: I really appreciate the way in which you describe how you deepen your conceptual contribution over a period by bringing yourself into conversation with these other bodies of work and thinking about how that transforms what you have already written and build it into a bigger product. I was just wondering, if we go back to the example of the seat on the bus that you talked about, what happens when we add performativity into this, what happens when we look at this from your perspective of performative citizenship?

EI: When we go back to that example, and particularly the two examples being compared, we expect certain repertoires to be undeniably an act under a certain description. I think nobody would object on the bus to a young person or an able-bodied person to give up their seat to someone who needs it. We consider this universally as a good act of citizenship in a broad sense of conduct. This is an important notion of citizenship that we maintain and cultivate. The performative here signals that it is routinised, repeated, cited, and signified in ways that it becomes embodied in people's habits. So, we habitually act ourselves out as citizens, and that is a good thing, we have learned the discipline of being a citizen and we expect that from each other as mutual obligations. If I am following certain rules, like for example currently about wearing a mask in a public space, it is a good conduct to get habituated into because it is not only about yourself, what is happening in the public space, it is also about the other. This is a perfect definition of citizenship; it is through being in the presence of others that we understand how to conduct ourselves responsibly and fulfil our obligations. And yet at the same time there are moments when in fact these routines must be broken, they must be ruptured, because they also produce certain domination effects. There are moments where you must ask, "I am doing what I usually do, but what does that do?" is also responsibility. What are the effects of me performing myself routinely as a citizen in this way, what consequences does it have? Does it create, for example, if I am speaking as an environmental citizen, adverse effects? Is my consumption activity, what I buy, generating adverse labour effects elsewhere or adverse environmental effects elsewhere? I can obligate myself to think about these things. Then I ask myself the question, I am acting like a citizen, but it is producing these results, do I want to participate in these effects and then I can say no, I do not want to participate, I do not want to create adverse labour effects in another place so that I can have my conveniences, I do not want to participate in environmental degradation so that I can have my conveniences. How do I act? At that moment, a possibility of rupture enters, and that is the moment that I want to focus on performatives because, as Austin says, in ordinary language philosophy, there are infelicities and moments where we bring something new into the world in how we act, even if they rupture the current rituals. The cycle of citation repetition and signification produces a resignification, recitation, and rupture. It is at that moment that performativity brings back those two issues that I compared. For someone to give their seat to someone who needs it is fine if we think about the seat on the bus politically but what happens when you refuse to give it up for other reasons? If those

games of domination are ruptured, then we might find ourselves in the performance of an act that resignifies now what it means to be a citizen.

I have inevitably oversimplified certain aspects of how I see performatives. So far, I have given a voluntarist account because I speak of a person who is a citizen who is thinking about these things. But there is a tension between voluntarism and interpellation. We are not all too powerful autonomous agents, we also follow the rules, take other rules as given and we do not sometimes even know all the rules that bind our actions, and we do not think about our own acts always in the way in which I portrayed. It is a good deal more complicated than that. Then it becomes even more significant for me, more interesting too, particularly when people are giving an account of themselves, as to why they have done what they have done. Yet something drew them to it and that they can no longer tolerate to behave the way they used to behave, even though they are not yet able to give an explanation. That to me captures a significant moment of understanding act. Acts are purposive but non-subjective performances. They are purposive in the sense that we are orient our action toward something, that we do things for various reasons but not necessarily for reasons that we know ourselves all the way. I want to capture that particularly with the notion of the act and bringing performativity into it.

MB: What you are saying is that we act for purpose. There is an element of deliberation about what we do, but we might not always know why we do what we do. Beyond that I suppose what was really striking me when you were speaking was that kind of idea about habituation and the repertoires that we have that are almost automatic sometimes, when you start to think about habit and routine, things that you don't have to think about because they are almost second nature. Rosa Parks refusing to give up her seat on the bus, an undeniably political action, forces us to ask those questions again. We need to ask what inequalities and injustices are habituated through these habits. How are different people positioned vis-à-vis the normative values around what is assumed of being a citizen. And therefore, how are you made as a citizen or non-citizen.

I was just wondering if you could reflect a little on how you work with both the political and the struggle in your understandings of citizenship? What does this open up in terms of understanding and what alternatives does it give us?

EI: So, when I was writing *Being Political,* I was quite exercised by the difference between politics and the political. The humdrum events that we call politics is indeed a significant aspect of how we distribute the sensible, distribute alterity in citizenship games, and yet the political is that purposive but non-subjective aspect of why we do what we do, that there is a political engagement and commitment in each situation and produces the subject who dissents. What is the mobilisation that brings that subject to act in a political way? This was the question that I wanted to articulate. And I came to settle on a very different – performative – conception of justice. The notion of dissent is not Eurocentric or European. We find it in different world cultures. All the examples I studied of resistance from slave revolts to women's struggles and from plebs to the dispossessed and so on, there arises a sense in which the dominated

conditions under which people find themselves are resisted and to be dissented because it is not right, it is unjust, and the sense of injustice based on arbitrariness of the power that condemns them to that injustice, becomes the object of the struggle. So, the struggles are often waged in various daily registers, but other registers are also important. One register is the content of claims, so one could say there is no reason why a woman ought not to be chosen for office, there is no inherent demonstrable reason, it is arbitrary, the fact that women are described as emotional beings, therefore they cannot make political choices, is an instance of domination, it is a masculine patriarchal ideology constructed domination. This is the content of the claim. And then there is another register which reveals that this arbitrariness is not only the reason why it ought to be resisted, but also unjust, unjust in the sense that there is not any justifiable claim that would demonstrate this, there is not anything in human experience that shows that in fact women will not be able to make these choices because they are emotional beings. That this not only an ideological construct for domination but it is also unjust. So, it is both arbitrary and unjust: that constitutes dissent or resistance as an act. As I mentioned, the notion of studying citizens ought to be about non-citizens, or rather the relationship between the citizen and non-citizen, I became concerned with not just justice articulated as an abstract ideal, but when acting beings resist an injustice, in a specific site and articulate two different registers: as a content claim but also a justice claim against an injustice. So, injustice/justice became the distinction that I mapped onto political and politics and through working with these dimensions. That notion of a struggle became the struggle to make claims, the struggle against injustice as the operative elements to understand why and how people do what they do when they resist or dissent. Again, going back to that notion of purposive but non-subjective idea, I think most people when they resist, they may or may not be able to articulate the specific content of their resistance, in the first register, but often they have a very good sense of the second register of the injustice. In other words, even if I am not able to articulate yet why this is so, I have a very strong feeling that this is unjust, and it is this injustice moves me toward a certain righteousness or indignation that comes from that feeling of injustice. It is incredible to find this performative justice throughout the world.

MB: I am going to pick up with you again there, we were talking about the kind of, what a lot of people would find familiar this idea of sensing there is injustice but not really being able to articulate it and then kind of acting because you feel the injustice and you were saying some very interesting things there about the politics and the being political, and I wonder if I could ask you to elaborate a little more on that.

EI: The difference between political and politics that I began using with these genealogies was to understand how people engage in political struggle with specific reasons (and how they give those reasons) as purposive deliberate politics (stating or naming a situation as inequality and intolerability and so on or naming sources for these situations such as slavery, racism, misogyny) and yet still orient themselves something broad. It seems that those who wage political struggles through various repertoires appeal to historical sensibilities and cultural understandings. This is important. Without necessarily using

"universal" I am saying that across cultures, it seems as if becoming political subjects involves developing a very strong sense of rightfulness and the sensibilities around the difference between right and wrong. That is political. When I study people in acts and when I interview them, speak with them, or read what they have written, given an account of themselves, I always hear these two registers. One register is the specific claims that they make, of the specific situation in which they find themselves and yet there is always another register, a register where they may not be able to explain and give full account of themselves but strongly oriented toward its injustice. To claim that that there is an inherent injustice in this inequality that we are fighting against registers a different kind of claim than that there is inequality. And this is transversal, people read across various histories, geographies, and identities when these sensibilities are performed. We know that, for example, much has been written about the ordinary Chinese shopper in front of that tank. Yet I keep going back to that, and imagine if I were to speak to that person would he be able to explain why he did it? At one register he will, perhaps he will say "I am not going to allow People's Army to roll over people". And yet risking one's life that way when one was returning from grocery shopping and putting oneself in front of a tank. Can that really be explained by reasons given? Some interpret this is an individualist act. But I do not think that it is an individualist act. It is performed by an individual, but it is a collective act of performative justice. Can there be such as a thing as an individualist act?

MB: That is an interesting example and one that is worth remembering. You are talking about Tiananmen Square, you are talking about 1989, and yet we've recently seen a very similar act in Myanmar with a nun, putting herself up in front of the Army there.

EI: Exactly, she said, "You'll have to kill me first" and that is courageous. It has been reported in the media as an act that failed. But time will tell.

MB: It is really fascinating. I just wondered if we could think of some perhaps, obviously I do not want to make this entirely British focused, but I wondered if we could think about performative citizenship in respect to the Windrush scandal and the issues there. How might we understand this from a perspective of performative citizenship?

EI: I would begin with citizenship games that produce and distribute alterity and how states and empires have been instrumental in setting up these games. In some ways the dominant classes, dominant social groups through policies and polities such as states and empires do exactly that, in law and in norm, to constitute games that define the roles and rules people can play in those games and to what extent those roles and rules can be controlled in situ. So, when we think about a post-imperial state such as Britain, in the post-war situation diagnosing a labour shortage decides to open its citizenship games in 1948 to allow all its colonial subjects to have access to British citizenship. This is a momentous event, whether one reads that as generosity or cynical is irrelevant; from my point of view, it is an example of how empires and states open these games and once these games open, like I said before, they become spaces of both domination and liberation because now we are entering into transformed

power relations, and under certain descriptions we can do certain things. And of course, over time the British state, or those social classes and groups who are in control of it, or those who are dominant broadly in British society, change its strategies for various reasons. Whether the performance or the enactment of institutional racism that made the empire possible in the first place, from 1948 onwards it becomes restrictive, questioning, and eventually hostile for making that space available to subjects from outside the British state. So gradually a colonial citizenship or imperial citizenship ends. And yet at the same time we are talking about a people who have made the decision to move and constitute themselves in performance as citizens, they were given the right to move or exercising the right to which they were entitled. This was a declaratory system, and they were not required to do anything to register their status at the time it was changed. And so, there was what we might consider as a symbolic agreement between an empire and its *de facto* if not *de jure* locked into each other as two actors in citizenship games. For that game to continue through a hostile environment, a different government in Britain exposed the game as its rules changed. And this is where we see how deadly citizenship games can become. Some people have lost their lives, some people have lost their livelihoods, some people have lost their opportunities, some people have been exposed to intolerable conditions, they have been deported, all instances that we see that states and empires are so competent in making subjects suffer so that the imposed cruelty on them can produce another set of disciplinary rules conducive to good government as they understand it. And it is a performative injustice. The struggle over the Windrush illustrated that those who exposed it as a performative injustice also called out an empire-state's game for playing with the lives of its citizens.

MB: It is the state performing its right to do what it is doing, which is a deadly game for some people.

EI: A deadly game, performing of sovereignty, performing of cruelty, performing of demonstrating that it is both capable and entitled to play with people's lives like that and play again here, not accidental, and those who are being played with also play the citizenship games and make a case of it and there has been, in some ways we could say that perhaps our resistance came too little too late as citizens, we didn't become aware of it early enough to avoid some of the disastrous consequences. But on the other hand, I think there was also resistance, it did not go in annals or history without being resisted by both citizens and non-citizens, many of us agree that even though these British citizens did not have the formal acceptance to British citizenship, in all manners of performance they were British citizens, and the fact that the British state failed to recognise that is a tragedy.

MB: That is helpful in terms of laying out exactly what's at stake in those struggles. It shows you precisely that there are stakes and people are very unevenly positioned in relation to them and yet there could be a presentation that would say, you know, the British government just did what they were allowed to do or what they had laid out as the right route and you could have an argument along the lines of that being just a bureaucratic procedure, these people weren't citizens therefore, but then you go back and you look and you realise that

actually it is a lot more complicated than that because these people came, they were citizens, their status changed, they may or may not have been aware of the fact that their status had changed, they may or may not have been aware of what they needed to demonstrate that status and there is the question about what the Home Office did with the landing cards and all of these things. You start to open it up and you realise, this was in the hands of the state to do something different, and they didn't. This framing of the struggle as a deadly playing field which quite a lot of people are never going to be on the receiving end of but for those who are, those who had already had a lifetime of found repeatedly being constituted as "other", as outside of that political community, the consequences have been deadly and life-limiting. We can find examples of this all over the world, this is not just Britain that this happens in.

Just to wrap up, I was just wondering, I know the answer to the next question is also a big one, but it is really inspiring the way you talk about citizenship and how you extend it beyond that legal framing, beyond those people who even hold a legal status, shall we say, as citizens and thinking about it instead as a kind of concept of this idea of having the right to claim rights, those types of things, pairing it with this idea of acts, with this idea of performativity. What you have described, scholars in other areas like social movement studies, would recognise as protest as resistance. Why do you stick with the idea of citizenship to explain these actions?

EI: Perhaps we ought to separate the idea of the *citizen* from the idea of *citizenship*. To me the citizen has been the name of the political subject who acts without coercion in a political tradition that has been inherited, reimagined, reinvented for at least two millennia. If we name that tradition as only "European" or "Western", it is a grave injustice to all known political traditions of the world. A similar figure exists everywhere signifying a political subject who acts against domination, without coercion, with rights, against injustice. What distinguishes a subject from the citizen is that the latter is a collective subject of resistance making rights claims against injustice. By contrast, citizenship is an institution that functions as a technology of power. To me studying citizenship involves determining the subjects it produces (from citizens to non-citizens or more specifically from citizens to strangers, outsiders, and aliens) and the possibilities and potentialities it regulates and distributes as an institution. Studying citizenship is important because understanding the ways in which citizenship has been signified, repeated, cited, and performed in specific games unlocks possibilities for becoming citizens when being unjustly denied of its potentialities as strangers, outsiders, and aliens.

Just quickly I will revisit the Windrush scandal. It is important to note that some of the most significant political actors in that resistance against the way in which the British empire-state treated them were the Windrush citizens themselves. They were the ones who organised, mobilised, and performed acts of resistance about their own status and how they understood themselves as citizens. They were the ones who made rights claims against what they articulated as injustice. Their struggle shows us that citizenship is that capacity to perform possibilities and potentialities of resistance and dissent against injustice. So, the Windrush citizens ruptured the institution of citizenship that

was used to reframe them as outsiders. The Windrush citizens taught us and the empire-state how to be citizens. We owe that to the Windrush citizens.

This also raises a related issue, you know, Michaela, that we are so, as social scientists, maybe less so in humanities, exercised by studying processes, institutions, movements, or large-scale processes, as Charles Tilly (1984) elaborated (and indeed advocated) so eloquently. The study of citizenship as an institution fits that description. Yet in all of this I am overcome by the feeling that citizenship as an institution would be impossible without provoking that subject who acts. The political name for that subject is citizen; if we find another name, I am fine with it. James Tully's (2014) proposal to study "citizenization" is in part a response to this question. "Citizen" is the name that has organised both our political thought and political practices, so it is necessary to resignify it to open its potentialities and possibilities for resistance and dissent. We cannot leave its resignification, repetition and citation to the empire-state or the dominant classes and groups that constitute it. So, if we want to occupy and inhabit it, we must perform it by subverting its meaning and making it function differently.

MB: What you are saying is that it's important to reclaim that potential for citizenship and recognising that citizenship and its definition in the hands of the state, or in the hands of some states, is really the problem rather than the concept itself. If we reclaimed and reimagined citizenship, by acting as we wish it to be, this could become the new signification of citizenship. So, the potential is there, we must keep acting, we must keep resisting, to bring that into being essentially.

EI: Exactly.

MB: We've come full circle back to hope. Thank you for being so generous in opening up about your intellectual trajectory and development over the course of your career.

EI: You are welcome, Michaela, it has been a pleasure.

Notes

1. The podcast *Who do we think we are?* was produced as part of the British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship 2020-21, *Britain and its overseas citizens: from decolonisation to Brexit* [MD19\190055].

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