

The psychic life of policy: desire, anxiety and ‘citizenisation’ in Britain

Anne-Marie Fortier

Lancaster University, UK

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Abstract

This article empirically grounds the ‘psychic life of power’ (Butler, 1997) by demonstrating the psychic form that power takes as immigrants or agents of the state make their way through the British ‘citizenisation’ policy – i.e. the ‘integration’ policy that requires noncitizens to acquire ‘citizen-like’ skills and values in view of seeking citizenship or other statuses (e.g. settlement). The framing argument is that an ambivalent relationship between desire and anxiety mediates the state-citizen relationship (following Honig, 2001). Taking this argument further, the article offers an in-depth analysis of how citizenisation policy’s frames of desire (the assumed desirability of citizenship and the desire for desirable citizens) also take the form of anxieties. Drawing on a multi-sited study of citizenisation in Britain, the article explores some of the different forms anxiety takes: fetishisation, enervation, and uncertainty. The analysis reveals how the uneven distribution of anxiety between agents of the state and immigrants not only mediates the state-citizen relationship but also variously enacts the state itself. Attending to the psychosocial dynamics of citizenisation reveals how hierarchies are (re)produced not only discursively and materially, but also through different ‘anxious states’.

Keywords: affect/emotion, citizenship, immigrants, psychosocial, state-citizen relations

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I am sitting in a room with six other people, waiting to take the British citizenship test. The body language of several other applicants expresses nervousness: nail biting, legs shaking, tense expressions. In those minutes before the test, we all sat there with varying degrees of optimism or anxiety, in the hope that we were approaching the conclusion of our 'journey to British citizenship'.¹

Optimism was unevenly distributed in that small waiting room in a small city in the Northwest of England. I was securely optimistic that I would pass the test. But I could tell that others were, literally, scared – one told me that it was her second attempt, as she was clutching her 'Life in the UK' Home Office study guide, the title of which resonated as particularly cruelly optimistic (Berlant, 2011) at that moment. Her husband, who was accompanying her, added that if she failed the test, 'she will be deported'. At that time (this was 2011), the law stated that immigrants on a spousal visa who fail the English language or Life in the UK requirement would not be deported but would be granted a further leave of thirty months in order to fulfil the requirement (Home Office, 2012: 12).² But the fact that this couple feared deportation suggests the extent of the anxiety experienced by many immigrants³ applying for settlement or citizenship. The (anticipated) consequences of this test and its effects on individuals' experiences were thus drastically different among individuals in this room.

The 'test supervisor', Georgia, asks us to proceed to the testing room where she briefs us on how the test works. After forty-five minutes, we emerge and return to the waiting room to wait for our results. Mohammad, the 'test authoriser', calls us one by one to inform us of our result. I passed and was given the valuable certificate attesting to my knowledge of 'Life in the UK', which is also evidence of my English fluency. As I walk out, an African-Caribbean woman follows closely behind me. 'Is it

a good day?’ I ask. ‘No’ she says, downcast. And so our journeys took different paths. This woman was going to return to this test centre, its waiting room, and wait again for the results. I, for my part, was now on route to citizenship, which would take me to other waiting rooms and encounters with other ‘aspiring citizens’ and ‘agents of the state’.⁴ That day I, other applicants, as well as Georgia and Mohammad, were all brought together as a result of increased state intervention, disciplining, and policing in the field of citizenship attribution, yet we were also radically moved apart through the stark inequalities that are intrinsic to it. In this article, I attend to the role of emotion⁵ – namely anxiety – in the reproduction of such inequalities and, more broadly, in shaping the state-citizen relationship.

Like many other countries in Western Europe since the late twentieth century, Britain has undertaken a radical reform of its naturalisation and integration measures, which, since 2004, include language requirements and knowledge of ‘life in the UK’ (the latter known as the ‘citizenship test’). Such measures are not confined to the conferment of nationality and extend into the attribution of settlement status or of spousal visas.⁶ Sara Wallace Goodman, drawing on Marie-Claire Foblets, speaks of these measures as ‘citizenisation’, because ‘citizen-like’ skills and values are required for those seeking legal conferment of citizenship as well as other statuses such as indefinite leave to remain (settlement) or leave to remain for a fixed period of time (e.g. spousal visas) (Goodman, 2014: 3). I shall use the term ‘citizenisation’ hereafter to refer to such measures that include, but are not reducible to, the conferment of citizenship (for a fuller critical discussion of citizenisation and its relationship to naturalisation, see Fortier, forthcoming).

Citizenisation is a form of dispersed governing (Clarke, 2004: 116) that outsources the design, development and use of new governing technologies to registry

services in local authorities (amongst other organisations⁷) across the country. These governing technologies include first, the delivery of citizenship ceremonies, and second, the provision of two optional services available to applicants for settlement or for nationality: Settlement Checking Service (SCS) and Nationality Checking Service (NCS). Citizenisation thus introduced a new set of encounters between applicants and local registrars that were hitherto non-existent. With regards to the SCS or NCS, registrars had to learn new rules and tasks as ‘agents of the state’ whose role is advisory rather than decision-making, and consists of checking through applications to ensure that they are complete. Applicants, for their part, experience the process as one where they encounter ‘the state’ more directly and more often than they would have done prior to 2004. Thus citizenisation policy positions different parties into different relationships: to each other, to the state, to citizenship, to the policy, etc.

Citizenisation measures constitute a unique vantage point from which to observe the enactment of state-citizen relations. Although aimed at noncitizens,⁸ these policies speak volumes about the ways in which the state represents and imagines itself, ‘good citizenship’, and its relationship to citizens.⁹ That being said, this article focuses on the psychosocial dynamics of the encounters that citizenisation stages: in particular, the uneven distribution of anxiety among those who are variously involved in British citizenisation. This article thus contributes to debates about the ways in which the distribution of power and inequality through affect works to enact the state-citizen relationship and the state itself. Scholarship on policy enactment rejects a conception of policy as a coercive instrument of the state or as a fixed document, conceiving of policy instead as performative, relational and as producing multiple effects (Shore and Wright, 1997; Shore et al., 2011; Newman, 2013; Clarke et al., 2015), including the ways in which citizenship, the state, and the state-citizen

relationship come to be (Clarke et al., 2014). In the vein of other literatures on ‘performative states’ (Weber, 1998; Sharma and Gupta, 2006), literature on policy enactment sheds light on how the state is not a pre-given, disembodied and unified decision-maker. Rather, the theory of policy enactment insists on rethinking how the state is ‘made up’, in Davina Cooper’s words (2015), both in the sense of how it is imagined and in the sense of how it is actualised in everyday practice.

A further strand of research draws on psychosocial approaches to emphasise the role of emotions in policy-making and how ‘the distribution of power and emotion are intimately connected’ (Hunter, 2015: 22; also Hoggett, 2000; Stenner et al., 2008a; Lewis, 2010). By ‘thinking together’ (Stenner et al., 2008b: 412) the psychological and the social, the psychosocial approach posits that the psychological is not a self-contained space that pertains exclusively to the individual. A psychosocial approach understands the individual psyche as thoroughly social and the social as shaped by and ‘imbued with the “psychic” life of individuals’ (Froggett, 2012: 179). Regarding the performative state, Shona Hunter’s psychosocial study of British diversity policy moves the discussion further through her introduction of the concept of ‘relational politics’. As she argues, ‘relational politics’ draw attention to the everyday life of state policy, the ‘messy and uncontrollable agency constitutive of the everyday state, rather than the idealised coherent singular abstracted state of (neo)liberal fantasies’ (2015: 16).

Together these interventions on policy enactment and the psychosocial life of policy invite, first, an analysis that captures not only ‘something of the livedness’ (Lewis, 2010: 214) of the policy’s social life (how it is lived), but also something of its *live-ness*: how policy is ‘in some sense “living”; . . . as the product of relational practices, but also as productive of social relations.’ (Hunter, 2008: 507). Second,

they invite a rethinking of the state as enacted not only discursively, in the vein of Foucauldian governmentality (e.g. Clarke, 2007; Dean, 1999), but also through (psycho)social dynamics (Stenner et al., 2008b). Attending to these dynamics further allows us to give agency to those involved in enacting policy – including, in the case that interests me here, those seeking ‘citizen-like’ statuses as well as the registrars charged with checking applications or conferring citizenship – inasmuch as their encounters, actions, experiences enact different versions of the state-citizen relationship. Neither victim nor helpless nor simply ‘powerful’, registrars and applicants are variously positioned as subjects/objects of policy who will consciously or unconsciously negotiate their positions and their relations to the state. As Judith Butler states, we need to think about subject formation as fundamentally depending ‘on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency’ (1997: 2).

Taking these as my points of departure, I ask, following Butler, ‘what is the psychic form that power takes?’ (1997: 2). But I expand on her question by zooming in on the psychosocial dynamics between different parties – agents/subjects of the state, the policy itself, or subjects/objects of the policy – and the place of affect in the make-up of the state-citizen relationship and in shaping its enactments. In the *Psychic Life of Power*, Butler is primarily concerned with submission and the desire for recognition as the condition of subjection. She develops a theory of power together with a theory of the psyche, bringing psychoanalysis to bear in Foucault’s theory of the subject and asking how we are ‘to understand not merely the disciplinary production of the subject, but the disciplinary cultivation of *an attachment to subjection*’ (1997: 102; emphasis original).

While I depart from what emerges from Butler's theory as a unitary, top-down form of disciplinary power that cultivates a uniform desire for subjection – I argue elsewhere that not all desires are equally desirable to power or equally desiring of subjection to power (Fortier, 2013; also Somerville, 2005) – I do appreciate how Butler recognises the centrality of desire in the psychic life of power. My questions here are: What forms does desire take? And how do individuals (applicants and registrars) negotiate the desire for citizenship or citizen-like status and the state's desire for desirable citizens?

Indeed, desire is a central founding principle of citizenisation. Desire *for* citizenship and national membership and the desirability *of* citizenship and national membership constitute the core of citizenisation policies in the Western world. But not just any desire is desirable. The White Paper on immigration, asylum and nationality where the new citizenisation measures were laid out distinguished between an instrumental desire and a more 'committed' desire:

becoming a British citizen is a significant step which should mean more than simply obtaining the right to a British passport. . . British citizenship should bring with it a heightened commitment to full participation in British society. (Home Office, 2002: 30)

The concern stems from the assumption that British citizenship and Britain are desirable and attractive to 'millions of people [who] hear about the UK and often aspire to come here', as former Home Office Secretary David Blunkett stated in his foreword to the White Paper (Home Office, 2002).

While policy makers' concern is founded on the *assumption* of the desirability of citizenship, what it *expresses* is an anxiety about the apparent weak desire for (British) citizenship. Taking as my premise citizenisation's frames of desire – its

programmatic structure and discursive demands for desirability – this article offers an in-depth analysis of how the assumed desirability of citizenship and the desire for desirable citizens also take the form of anxieties – about failure, about undesirable citizens, and about recognising how and when the criteria of desirability are fulfilled and by whom. More broadly, the analysis shows how the state-citizen relationship, and by extension the state, come to be through the ongoing negotiation of anxiety in citizenisation practices.

Anxiety, I argue, constitutes the dominant and enduring ‘structure of feeling’ (Williams, 1977) not only of citizenisation but also of the state-citizen relationship. Anxiety is the dominant ‘structure of feeling’ of citizenisation insofar as, in Raymond Williams’s words, anxiety is ‘what is actually being lived’ in contrast to ‘what is thought is being lived’ in terms of ‘formal and systematic beliefs’ as they are codified in various sites (1977: 131, 132). Williams might also add that anxiety ‘gives a sense of a generation or a period’ (1977: 131). The tightening of citizenship attribution processes in many European countries since the turn of this century can certainly be read as a manifestation of an epochal anxiety about risk (Beck, 1992), which led several authors to examine how new forms of governance are mediated by anxiety. Engin Isin (2004) writes of the ‘neurotic citizen’, a citizen who governs him/herself through managing responses to risks and anxieties. Didier Bigo describes contemporary governmentality as operating through fears and anxieties by framing ‘the state as a body endangered by migrants.’ (2002: 68) Mark Salter considers how border controls not only police the mobility of noncitizens but how they also enact ‘the primary political relationship’ between state and citizen, which he argues ‘is the anxiety, the uncertainty, the constant uncertainty that pertains at the border because

there is no inside: there is no right of entry. The citizen is undone and the sovereign [power] to ban reinscribed at every border, in every decision' (2008: 369).

I submit that anxiety is not confined to a particular epoch, new forms of governance, a particular location, or to the experience of noncitizens; nor is it simply an effect of the power of the state to revoke citizenship, which is ultimately Salter's argument. Rather, following Bonnie Honig (2001), I argue that anxiety is an enduring feature of the state-citizen relationship.

In her analysis of the symbolic politics of foreignness in the US, Honig (2001) alerts us to the broader reach of anxieties that are 'endemic to liberal democracy' which 'generate or feed an ambivalence that is then projected onto the screen of foreignness' (2001: 12-13). One such anxiety is 'the lack of a sense of choiceworthiness [of 'us', the nation-state] or the periodic need to have that sense refurbished' (2001: 13). Anxieties, she argues, are a function of liberal democracies' ambivalent xenophilic/xenophobic relationship to immigrants: the 'xenophilic insistence that immigrants are givers to the nation itself feeds the xenophobic anxiety that they might really be takers from it.' (2001: 99). Anxieties, here, are a function of the desire for citizenship and the desire for desirable citizens. And this ambivalence between desire and anxiety is an organising feature of citizenisation measures, which are designed to separate the 'givers' from the 'takers'.

This article draws out the ways in which anxiety – as a function of the ambivalent desire/anxiety towards immigrants – mediates the state-citizen relationship by exploring some of the different forms it takes: fetishisation, enervation, and uncertainty. In the pages that follow, each form is the subject of a separate vignette. Fetishisation, I argue, is at the basis of a hierarchy of desirable citizenship that revolves around English fluency as a fetishised commodity that conceals and

reproduces the inequalities that it is said to resolve. Enervation – which Elizabeth Povinelli defines as ‘the weakening of the will’ (2011: 132) – reveals something about the radically different effects that the investment in the promise of citizenship has on applicants and on the national ‘we’. In this sense, enervation is a function not of the gratifying optimism displayed at citizenship ceremonies, but of the cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011) that applicants face when they repeatedly fail to obtain the recognition they desire. In the third vignette I consider uncertainty, which is widely attributed to applicants or to the abstract ‘nation’ in the literature on citizenship attribution (e.g. Byrne, 2014; Coutin, 2003; Mazouz, 2008). While these uncertainties are significant features of the psychic life of citizenisation, in this section I focus instead on registrars’ experience of uncertainty when processing applications. I argue that registrars’ uncertainty arises from their ambivalent position as both agents of the state and alienated from the state. In conclusion, I explain how together, these vignettes reveal how the ongoing negotiation of anxiety mediates the state-citizen relationship and enacts the state differently. I argue that attending to the psychosocial dynamics of citizenisation reveal how hierarchies and systems of stratification are (re)produced not only discursively and materially, but also through different ‘anxious states’.

I draw my material from a multi-sited study of citizenisation in England conducted between March 2012 and February 2014. The fieldwork involved observations of eleven citizenship ceremonies in nine local councils, six ESOL¹⁰ classes, and of a citizenship and nationality team at a London Borough Council (which I call Stadlow Council). The latter involved shadowing registrars for one week as they completed a range of tasks related to citizenship attribution. I conducted a total of 43 interviews with: five ESOL teachers, fifteen registrars, three ceremony

officials, eighteen applicants and two new citizens. All names and locations are anonymised.

Vignette 1: fetishisation

The tightening of the requirements for obtaining citizenship or citizen-like statuses delineate the kinds of citizens that are desirable to the nation and the state, thus producing new hierarchies of desirable citizens (Honig, 2001): the sincere, desiring citizen; the integrated citizen (English speaker); or the fraud (instrumental or dishonest). This hierarchy rests on the uneven distribution of worthiness, which distinguishes not only between the sincere, desiring, and integrated citizens on the one hand, and the instrumental ones on the other, but also between *degrees* of worthiness (e.g. sincere but not integrated). While markers of identity and status such as race, gender, sexuality and class certainly impact on establishing the worthiness of some immigrants over others, my attention here is on less visible and more insidious ways in which English fluency becomes a benchmark against which applicants are assessed and assess each other. My argument in this section is about how anxieties about Englishness are integral to the way in which the politicisation of English fluency in recent years has shifted the debates about language as a necessary tool for integration, to language as an adjudicating principle distinguishing the worthy from the unworthy immigrant.

The hierarchy of worthiness is operationalised in the category of the ‘model citizen’ that appears in the Stadlow e-form used by registrars when they take the details of new citizens who phone in to schedule a ceremony. When registrars take the calls, they bring up the caller’s details on a computer screen as they are talking to them. They also upload a ‘ceremony form’, used for organising and planning the

event, and they fill out the caller's details on the form. As they do this, if they consider the caller to be fluent in English they will at some point move their cursor to a tick box for 'model citizen'. In doing so, they are identifying this person as someone to be seated in the front row of a ceremony and used as the 'model' that others could mimic.

Integral to British citizenisation measures is the fantasy that English tuition will lead to English proficiency, which, in turn, will solve the problem of integration (Fortier, 2013). The idea of the 'model citizen' is implicit in this fantasy, which shapes individuals' perceptions of new citizens. Some registrars and ceremony officials told me of their surprise and disappointment at the poor English of some new citizens, at times questioning the genuineness of the means through which the new citizens obtained citizenship.

English proficiency works as a similar adjudicating mechanism among applicants themselves. Khebat was a 27-year old Kurdish man from Iran when I met him in May 2013 in a private language school where he was taking a one-week intensive English language class to try to fulfil the ESOL requirement for indefinite leave to remain – at a cost of £300.00. He had arrived as an asylum seeker in 2004 and was refused refugee status. He was living in Britain on a three-year leave to remain visa.

I mean, my friend, they don't speak English yeah they don't do nothing even no been in college but has got British now, and I don't understand how come he has got British which is you have to do UK Life I mean the test, you know the test in the UK but how can he passed, he don't speak English, he can no write his

name and how he's got British. Shame, sometimes I see him I
said, phww this is wrong.

English fluency operates as a 'checkpoint' (Back et al., 2012) at the policed borders of citizenship rights. It acts as a benchmark of entitlement that distinguishes between worthy and the non-worthy citizens. Media reports of citizenship and language tests have been riddled with accounts of cheating and abuse (from the figure of the Chinese cheater to bogus language schools), while at the same time English fluency itself has become a key indicator of integration and commitment to Britishness.

The implementation of new language and citizenship tests created a space for *suspicion* rather than cohesion and integration, which were their stated aims (c.f. Home Office, 2002, 2013b), and for producing a new hierarchy of entitlement and belonging to Britishness. This suspicion is an example of the 'insidious damage that [new] hierarchies of belonging do to social life' that Back, Sinha and Bryan (2012: 249) identify. Khebat's and some state agents' condemnation is a form of dissociation from the 'fraudulent' and unworthy applicant, a figure whose longstanding history (e.g. the 'bogus asylum seekers' or 'economic migrants') is given extra force with the current emphasis on English fluency.

Khebat experiences himself, and assesses his friend, through this dominant governmental lens. This is akin to what Butler refers to as 'injurious interpellation', whereby the subject occupies 'the discursive site of injury' (1997: 105), which becomes

the condition under which resignifying that interpellation
becomes possible. This will not be an unconscious outside of
power, but rather something like the unconscious of power itself,
in its traumatic and productive iterability. (1997: 104)

But in resignifying that interpellation, Khebat is also, as Shona Hunter suggests, repeating ‘those affective/behaviour/cognition patterns that uphold the very social norms that cause psychic distress in the first place’ in what Lynne Layton calls ‘normative unconscious processes’ (Hunter, 2015: 33)

More broadly, English fluency has become a fetishised commodity that is viewed primarily in terms of its promise of a final outcome (settlement, integration, nationality), while the process through which it was created remains obscured. It is *commoditised* in that it works as a form of (cultural) capital that gathers value as a function of its circulation and (re)production in the media, in political debates, in its institutionalisation as a key selection criteria, and in its instrumentalisation for the smooth running of ceremonies. English fluency is *fetishised* through ‘the displacement of the object of the desire onto something else through processes of disavowal.’ (Gamman and Makinen in Dant, 1996: 5)

The disavowal behind the fetishisation of English fluency is twofold. First, in the Marxist sense, it is detached from the process through which it was created. Numerous applicants must expend significant amounts of time, money, and intellectual effort to achieve the required levels of fluency, while others complete the tests at much less personal and financial costs. But in reducing English fluency to scores on tests, the policy obscures that labour and equalises differences between applicants. As Marx puts it, ‘[t]he equalisation of the most different kinds of labour can be the result only of an abstraction from their inequalities’ (1887: 48). Furthermore, English fluency is seen as evidence of individual achievement and of individual worthiness, in a disavowal of the role of the state in creating and reproducing inequalities between the more or less fluent in English.

Second, in the Freudian (Freud 1927/2001) sense, fetishes are often partial objects onto which desires are projected. Underpinning the insistence on English fluency is an anxiety about ‘incursions’ of foreign cultures and terrorism (Prime Minister David Cameron in Mason, 2016) into the national domestic space, which crystallises in images of neighbourhoods (Fortier, 2010) or homes (Byrne, 2013) where English is not spoken. For example, in his book about post-war immigration, political commentator David Goodhart ‘anxiously recites statistics from the 2009 labour survey which tell how various ethnic minorities “come from homes where another language is spoken” and repeatedly asserts the dangers of homes where English is not the primary language.’ (Byrne, 2013) These imaginings bear traces of a nostalgic attachment to the ‘national mother tongue’, that implies a desire for origin, purity, and identity (Derrida, 1998); a desire that operates through the *disavowal* of difference, otherness, and multilingualism.

As already suggested, another desire projected onto English fluency is that it will lead to integration. And the failure of that desire to materialise is projected onto the immigrants’ assumed refusal to speak English. In 2011, Prime Minister David Cameron bemoaned the fact that people unable to speak English or ‘not really wanting or even willing to integrate . . . [have] created a kind of discomfort and disjointedness in some neighbourhoods’. The conflation of integration with English fluency becomes a site where the desire for protecting the ‘national mother tongue’ is projected but it is also disavowed by making it *about* immigrants who cannot or refuse to speak the language.

In sum, English fluency is fetishised because it stands in for anxieties about ‘incursions’ of the threatening immigrants into the national cultural and social space, and the desire for retrieving the national mother tongue. And this desire-anxiety

operates through the disavowal of inequalities reproduced through language testing, and the disavowal of difference and multilingualism.

Vignette 2: Enervation

Khebat again:

I mean, when I first time arrived [...] always used to be my dream since young, to speak English, always [...] [But now] I wanna just leave here this year and go somewhere else, because there's no point, life is getting harder. This is my [inaudible] it's why I come to UK, but when I come here in UK it was fantastic that time, I love to be here but now I don't want to live here I want to run away. [...] I mean it's hard to say but I love, I love to live here I don't understand, this country it doesn't let me come, I don't know why, always I say to myself, not just me, everybody, I want to go tomorrow but something like holding me back here, you know, it's, it's really crazy

Khebat is caught up in the relation of cruel optimism that 'exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing' (Berlant, 2011: 1). His desire for Britain has faded as a result of the hardship of trying to fulfil his desire. He is also troubled by the country's rejection of him, leading him to want to leave whilst he remains drawn to stay. 'Something' is keeping him here.

What also comes across in Khebat's words is the loss of a sense of purpose. There's 'no point' in staying here, he suggests, yet he tries again to find a way to stay in this country, to have a peaceful life running his small business in a small town in Lancashire. He is tired and has lost faith. His love of England, and of English, has

faded after years of moving, working, seeking asylum, paying for language classes, and waiting for one visa to run out and applying for the next one. And he is exhausted.

In her book about the unequal global distribution of endurance and exhaustion in late liberalism, Povinelli likens exhaustion to enervation which she describes as ‘another form of violence: . . . the weakening of the will rather than the killing of life.’ (2011: 132) Paradoxically, the measures for access to settlement and citizenship were ostensibly designed as tools to facilitate integration and to foster ‘Life in the UK’ (Kiwani, 2008). These same measures, however, can also turn into technologies of recognition that reward the desiring and worthy ‘new citizens’ and exclude the assumed fraudulent and instrumental ones.

But for many, like Khebat, seeking ‘life in the UK’ is an exhausting form of cruel optimism. What struck me in Khebat’s story is that he invested time, money and energy in taking an intensive ESOL class in the hope to get the language credentials needed to apply for settlement, even though he knew that he was not eligible to apply for settlement as a ‘failed’ asylum seeker. Yet he persists. Khebat spoke at length about the hardship of living in Britain, how difficult it is to survive, to get by, to get resident status, let alone citizenship. He spoke of the rules constantly changing; how he must submit to them and feels powerless in the face of them. He is struggling to fit himself into the policy and the mismatch plays out in the way that he reads the requirements for English fluency versus the way that the law reads him as a perpetual outsider *regardless* of his English fluency.

But at the end of the day, when asked how he would define himself if he were granted citizenship, he unhesitatingly declared ‘British’; ‘not Kurdish-British or Iranian-British?’ I asked. ‘No, I will say I am British. I love to live [here]’. Were he to attend a citizenship ceremony, Khebat would undoubtedly be relieved and extremely

happy. At that moment, he reminded me of a British-Lebanese man I saw at a citizenship ceremony who looked at me, all smiles, his eyes welling up as he pounded his chest with a closed fist, telling me how happy he was to be granted British citizenship after ‘so long in Britain’.

This is what the citizenship ceremony exhibits – the gratifying optimism of the new citizens. It is gratifying because it gratifies the state, the nation, and their representatives by confirming the choice-worthiness of the nation and the state (Honig, 2001; Fortier, 2013; Byrne, 2014). It also gratifies new citizens with the state’s recognition of their (legal, if nothing else) membership in the state. Sitting at the junction of the end of what for many was a long, hard, painful and costly journey and the beginning of a ‘new challenge’, the ceremony fundamentally conceals the new hierarchies of citizenship (re)produced through citizenisation and its uneven distribution of desire and anxiety. Despite his stated love of country or love of the English language, despite his repeated attempts to make a life for himself in this country, Khebat’s enervation speaks volumes about how investing in the promise of citizenship leads to a range of emotional responses, some of which are prescribed, expected and desirable – happiness in achieving citizenship – and some of which are not – indifference, for example. But Khebat’s enervation also speaks of the extent to which the ambivalent relationship between desire and anxiety can manifest itself as a form of violence.

Vignette 3: Uncertainty

I am sitting in a small meeting room in Stadlow Council. Caroline, the registrar, is meeting with an Egyptian man applying for SET(M), i.e. settlement on the basis of marriage (in this case to a British woman). Caroline is concerned because there’s a

gap in proof of cohabitation for early 2012. She makes a copy of her checklist for him to take home as a guide for what he's looking for. He goes home and promises to return later that afternoon. When he leaves, she tells me that she is worried; worried that he might not have the necessary documents to get through. He may not be a genuine applicant, she muses. He returns after about 1-1.5 hours, with the missing proof of cohabitation for early 2012. Caroline checks, selects, and makes copies. After he's left, Caroline turns to me, smiling, and says 'I am happy now'.

The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (Section 24) states that registrars have a duty to report suspicious marriages (or civil partnerships; Home Office 2012). Thus for many registrars dealing with SET(M) applicants, the figure of the 'sham marriage' haunts every move they make. As suggested above, Honnig argues that the US myth of 'immigrant America', which in the UK translates into the myth of 'welcoming, tolerant Britain' (Tyler, 2006; Fortier, 2008; Byrne, 2014), depends on immigrants to prop-up the desirability of 'us', the nation. She states that this 'fundamental (unacknowledged) dependence upon foreigners produces an anxiety that finds expression in a displaced anxiety about foreigners' dependency upon us' (Honig, 2001: 95-96).

Citizenisation measures were ostensibly revised to contain such anxieties about dependent immigrants who take without giving. The policy was introduced as a technology of reassurance against an external anxiety attributed to 'the public', caused by external forces such as the threat of immigrants unwilling to integrate and the risks of terrorism in their midst. In this context, registrars find themselves pressed by the law's impossible demand to distinguish between sincere and fraudulent applicants (Honig, 2001), worrying about the risks of misrecognition. The policy's organising principle – to separate the good from the bad – is both expressive and productive of an

anxiety that is a function of the ambivalent xenophilic/xenophobic relationship to immigrants as givers who might be takers (Honig, 2001: 99).

Another anxiety that Honig identifies is ‘people’s perpetual uncertainty about the law and their relation to it: Is it really part of us or an alien thing, an expression of our intimate will or a violent imposition?’ (2001: 9). Here, anxiety about the uncertainty of the law informs a concern about the inadequacy of the law. Many registrars, like Caroline, are aware of the limits of the tools at their disposal to judge the validity of applications and live with the uncertainty of getting it right. I observed a training session for registrars on the new SET(M) regulation led by two UKVI¹¹ case workers. An extensive discussion took place about how and when registrars can be satisfied with the documentary evidence that couples provide. Does this or that type of evidence count? What if there is a gap of two, three, or more months? What if the bills are only in one spouse’s name? And so on. Aside from the immediate anxiety about getting it right, ambivalence about the law also resonated during that discussion. Registrars desire the law to provide clear binary codes distinguishing between the legitimate and the fraudulent (Foucault, 2009: 5). When faced with monitoring and evidencing people’s intimate lives, registrars also see limitations in the legal code, which comes up against the incommensurability between the kind of coherence stipulated by the law and the much less coherent ways that people live. Some registrars tried to resolve that tension by suggesting how *they* would live as a foreign spouse: ‘these people know that they are going to be applying for settlement two years down the line, so if that was me, my priority would be to get myself onto the system the moment I arrive into that country.’ The UKVI case-worker responded: ‘You have to appreciate also that some people come from a country where they don’t have that responsibility’, and that it takes time to understand how things work in a new country.

By saying what they would do, some registrars were projecting their anxieties about the inadequacy of the law and about their possible mistakes onto the applicants. In short, throughout this discussion the immigrant acts as a screen upon which anxieties about ‘the alienness of the law’ are projected.

Overall, anxieties expressed by registrars result from their ambivalent position as agents of the state who are also alienated from the state. Registrars exercise the state’s anxiety that applicants might be takers rather than givers, while at the same time experiencing their own anxiety because of the failure of the state’s tools to allow them to make that assessment.

Conclusion: anxious states

My intervention in this article is twofold. First, I argue that we need to approach policy not only as discursively enacted, but also through psychosocial dynamics. This article empirically grounds the ‘psychic life of power’ by offering an in-depth analysis of the ways in which the distribution of power and inequality through affect works to enact the state-citizen relationship. Second, and taking citizenisation measures as a unique vantage point from which to examine how the state-citizen relation comes to be, the analysis centres on three different forms that anxiety takes: fetishisation, enervation, and uncertainty. In doing so, the article hones in on the ambivalent desire/anxiety relationship that is constitutive of the state-citizen relationship, and by extension constitutive of the state.

Each vignette reveals how anxiety takes on different forms in policy and how immigrants and agents of the state differently negotiate anxiety in their enactments of citizenisation policy. Processes of projection, disavowal, and internalisation work in the vignettes to enact the state differently through the dynamic process of the unequal

distribution of power and inequality. The fetishised commodity of English fluency projects the impossible fantasy for retrieving a national mother tongue onto the assumed unworthy immigrants who are said to be unwilling to integrate. Anxieties about incursions of foreign cultures or of terrorism crystallise in foreign languages, and are redirected into citizenisation measures designed to assess immigrants' integration skills. Immigrants like Khebat, for their part, internalise the hierarchies of worthiness and distance themselves from the unworthy, while struggling and investing much time, effort and money to fit into the policy's requirement. As a result of the hardship of trying to fulfil his desire for inclusion, Khebat's desire for Britain has faded, while his will has also weakened. His anxious state, his enervation, takes the form of violence – 'the weakening of the will rather than the killing of life' (2011: 132).

Registrars also find themselves in an ambivalent relationship to the state, whereby they are at once agents of the state and alienated from the state. As agents of the state, they enact a similar ambivalence towards immigrants when they express concern that new citizens with poor language skills are 'takers' rather than 'givers'. At the same time, when faced with the impossible demand to distinguish between the genuine or the fraudulent applicant, they are anxious about getting it wrong and anxious about the failure of the law to provide them with adequate tools to make that assessment. Registrars' anxiety about the inadequacy of the law is redirected onto applicants who fail to present themselves in the coherent ways prescribed by the law. Overall, the vignettes reveal how the immigrant/applicant is not only the screen upon which government anxieties are projected, but also a figure who is made to feel some of these anxieties as if taking them away from 'us'.

The psychosocial dynamics described in the vignettes variously produce the state as subject 'of power, elusive, unlocatable, ever present, immensely powerful, or impotent.' (Aretxaga, 2003: 399) More specifically, the vignettes show an anxious state, which is ambivalent about the desire for desiring and desirable citizens. To be sure, in the minutia of everyday interactions such as between Caroline and the Egyptian man, we can glimpse a caring state, an attentive state that wishes the best outcome for its subject. But Caroline's worry, Khebat's enervation, and the fetishisation of English fluency all speak of a pervasive anxiety that surrounds the state-citizen relationship that shapes the state itself. The respective anxiousness of registrars and applicants is not entirely their own, but rather an effect of the (very different) roles, tasks and requirements each is expected to fulfil within the programmatic structure of policy. Citizenisation measures can be seen as expressions of the ambivalent desire/anxiety about foreigners that is constitutive of liberal democracies (Honig, 2001) and that circulates unevenly among those who are variously positioned in the process. Attending to the psychosocial dynamics of the citizenisation policy reveals how hierarchies and systems of stratification are (re)produced not only discursively and materially, but also through different 'anxious states'.

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¹ 'A Journey to Citizenship' was the subtitle to the first 'Life in the United Kingdom' study guide for the citizenship test issued under the New Labour government in 2003 (Home Office, 2007). The coalition government amended the test and study guide, including its title 'Life in the United Kingdom. A Guide for New Residents' (Home Office, 2013a).

² However, in January 2016, Prime Minister David Cameron announced that foreign spouses – and he targeted Muslim women – might be forced to leave if they fail to provide evidence of improvement in English fluency in a test taken halfway into their five-year spousal visa. See Mason 2016.

³ I use the term immigrant here to include the range of categories and circumstances of migration: spousal, refugee, professional/work. I am aware that the term 'immigrant' carries negative connotations, but I also contend that we need to avoid hierarchies of deservedness by distinguishing between 'im/migrants' (understood as undeserving) and, e.g. refugees (understood as deserving).

⁴ 'Agents of the state' (Du Gay, 2005) designates all local civil servants and other professionals and 'street-level bureaucrats' (Lipsky, 1980) from public or private sectors tasked with roles in the citizenisation process. These include test supervisors and authorisers, ESOL teachers, local authority registrars and officials.

⁵ I use emotion and affect interchangeably. The former refers to specific feeling, such as anxiety, while the latter designates more generic category of emotions and feelings. Engaging with the extensive debates about the terms is beyond the scope of this article.

⁶ The process for obtaining British nationality was revised in 2001 and implemented in 2004, introducing language and citizenship tests and an obligatory citizenship ceremony. Subsequent amendments in 2007 and 2012 extended the requirements to the attribution of spousal visas and Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR), and tightened the language requirements for all applicants. Prior to 2004, applicants applied by post and, when granted British nationality, swore allegiance in the presence of a solicitor.

⁷ Other non-state agencies are also involved, such as private English language schools where applicants can obtain ESOL certificates.

⁸ I use 'noncitizens' here to mean those who do not have British citizenship, because of course, most if not all are citizens of another country.

⁹ I argue elsewhere that citizenisation measures must be understood as communicative events directed to the nation at large, as Bonnie Honig (2001) argues with regards to citizenship ceremonies (Fortier, forthcoming).

¹⁰ English for Speakers of Other Languages

¹¹ UK Visas and Immigration, which replaced the former UK Borders Agency (UKBA).