

Transcript, Anne-Marie Fortier, *Uncertainty as a mode of governing and its (ontological) implications on citizenship*. Policy Ontologies; Working Across Theory and Practice, 16.03.22

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Rachael Dobson 00:00

And then over to you. So Anne-Marie Fortier's research focuses on governing practices that seek to stabilise identities in the face of migration. Her publications include *Uncertain Citizenship*, *Life in the Waiting Room*, that's 2021, Manchester University Press, and *Migrant Belongings*, *Memory, Space and Identity*, and *Multicultural Horizons*, *Diversity and the Limits of the Civil Nation*. So I'm just so delighted to have Anne-Marie here. Anne-Marie has been a contributor in terms of taking part in the previous event and just contributing to the kind of thinking that we're doing around the policy ontologies project. So I'm very appreciative that she's made time to be here today. And over to you Anne-Marie.

Anne-Marie Fortier 00:52

Just making note of the time, so I don't go over. Yes, thank you so much. And thank you, Rachael, for organising this event. And I mean, it's been a long time coming. But you consistently you are model organiser. And so and thank you for the, you know, Kylie and Tess are really, really interesting talks. And I'm so happy to join all of you here. So I'm, I am going to build on this my recent book, *Uncertain Citizenship*, which is come out last year, I'm going to dare to show it here. And it's it's basically a book about the experience and enactment of policies around citizenship, naturalisation, and integration. And it's grounded in fieldwork with not only people applying for citizenship and permanent residency, but also different institutional actors involved in the process. So it basically is about tracking the realities that are constituted and enacted in theory in that are enacted in and through policy. So a bit aligning with what you were talking about Kylie. So I'm going to be reading my paper, I'm afraid, and I don't have any PowerPoint slides. So here goes, I'll be introducing roughly the book and then giving you a few a few scenes from the waiting room.

Citizenship is uncertain, it's volatile, its boundaries, limits and promises are forever revised and amended the current war in Ukraine but also wars elsewhere, which we shouldn't forget, like in Yemen, Yemen and Syria, as well as the recent past, are brutal reminders of the unequal distribution of the presumed certainties of citizenship, and the concurrent growth of precarious statuses that will render the racial minoritized poor, as more disposable. But uncertainty is always has been integral to the governance of citizenship. In other words, states are both responding to and using uncertain citizenship in their government in their governing projects and their national projects. This force is a reconsideration of how we think and understand citizenship politically, and theoretically and in terms of how its policies are designed and implemented. And uncertain citizenship is embedded in the very institutional practice that are seen to erase it. Integration and naturalisation measures, which are the focus of my book in which I call in I refer to as citizenization processes, they offer a unique vantage point from which to examine certain citizenship is integral to their design. And at the same time, they also rely on narratives that set up citizenship as something that's certain stable and a guarantor of

rights. So and that's what interests me. So I'm not so much focusing on the nature of the policy itself, but on how it's inhabited, but also on this combination of the normalisation of uncertainty and of uncertain citizenship on the one hand, and the insurance of the promise of citizenship as a stable source of protection. The uncertainty of certain set of citizenship is not new when we take the long view in acknowledging the role of Imperial colonial and anti colonial histories and imaginaries and shaping what citizenship is understood as to be today. But there's something distinctive about the present neoliberal condition, and conjuncture, which is that there's a large scale normalisation of uncertainty. What was once lived, understood and experienced by colonial subject is now established as widely understood beyond that as the normal state of things. So in a world where uncertainty is normalised where social reality is understood as fundamentally unstable certainties like citizenship are also normalised as uncertain. So the question then is how uncertainty plays itself out what forms it takes, how it's smoothed over or not in practices of citizenization? So, I viewed citizenization as a social ontological process, which invites analysis of the ways in which the artifice and uncertainty of citizenship are concealed, or rendered irrelevant in citizenization. So this takes me to a deceptively simple question, what is naturalised in citizenization? What are the assumptions of citizenship? How are these? How do these assumptions articulate different realities? And again, I'm kind of resonating a bit with what you were saying, Kylie? How by whom, and under what circumstances is one kind of reality enacted rather than another one? What are the effects of privileging one reality over another. So the task is to decipher the ways in which certain bases of citizenship differentiation so here, they're authentic, bogus, committed and committed safe, unsafe. All these different bases of differentiation are foregrounded or recrafted, while others are minimised and made and make those who sorry, so while others are minimised in ways that make those who enter the citizenization process, those people who are applying for citizenship or settlement come out at the end as insiders rather than outsiders, what are the processes or other transactions involved there? How do individuals and by individuals here I mean, migrants but also institutional actors? How do they learn in that the modes of conduct that are required to make migrants into presumed insiders, and what transactions do they undertake in doing so? So the second thing I want to just briefly talk about is this idea of the waiting room in life in the waiting room. So instead, I'm extending here this the concept Dipesh Chakrabarty writes about in his book the provincialisation of Europe and his critique of historicism where he writes about the imaginary waiting room of history. So I'm extending that idea of the waiting room here to use it as a heuristic device to examine it to examine how citizenship takes place, takes time and takes hold. And we can think more broadly, I suppose how policy takes place, takes time and takes hold in ways that conform but also exceed the the frames of reference and the frames of coherence, that policy, you know, the kind of narrative narrative arc of policies aspires to how a citizenship takes place, is a nod to John Clark's and his colleagues book on disputing citizenship so John Clarke, Kathleen Coll, Evelina Dagnino and Catherine Neveu, who write about citizenship, variously, how citizenship variously takes place were taking place, is understood, and I'm quoting here, not only as a metaphor, but also in consequential spatial terms, citizenship happens in places citizenship is practised, or not in particular places. We begin from an interest in why some places are deemed by states social movements and citizens to be proper ones for citizenship while others are not end of quote. So the main interest of these authors is citizenship from below, but still, their their definition of taking place resonates with my own

concerns, different citizenships happen, our practice, affirmed or erased in citizen associations waiting room. The question is, how did your graphical imaginaries of good or bad citizenship feed into and in turn are reproduced or questioned in these citizenizing practices? Citizenship takes time in the sense that individuals be they applicants or institutional actors will be channelled through different waiting times and still have different experiences of waiting. The waiting room of citizenship is intimately connected to migration and visa regimes that controls people's movements and determines the time it takes to become resident or citizen. Furthermore, the historicist develop there's a historicist developmental rationale of these citizen citizen decision practices that bracket individuals, as non citizens are not yet citizens who need to be educated and who need to achieve citizenship through a set of hoops and tests. And that that's locates them somewhere between past lives and biographies and aspirational futures. If we turn the lens of migration onto the waiting room of citizenship, it reveals this heterogeneous temporalities and how migrants live in and with different temporalities. So for example, writes of the head or not head anonymous times of migration that result from migration and visa regimes where, where politics of who is to wait and for how long will vary and be shaped by human as well as financial capital the financial capital of migrants fleeing.

Finally, citizenship takes hold in two ways, through the political economy of affect, and through various forms of grasping bodies and subjects. So in terms of the effect of politics, that is in relation policies enact the ambivalent relationship between desire and anxiety that mediates the state citizen relationship, anxieties of the state who desires only desirable citizens and who fears undesirables anxieties of the migrants who desire the state to anoint them with the desire of citizenship status. But the desire anxiety status also takes hold on bodies, which are historically racialized genders sexualized and otherwise differentially marked as more or less desirable, future citizens. Citizenship also takes hold in a political economy of affective citizenship that dictate dictates how some feelings attach themselves to citizenship for example, feelings of belonging or rightful presence, and how citizenship itself can bring up certain feelings such as feelings of safety, but the safety is safe is presumed the status presumed to have the responsibility of, of ensuring for all its citizens. And finally, citizenship takes hold through the documentary capture of individuals through different identification papers, forms and documents which grasp their histories be processed, and identified to be an identities to be confirmed. And that's one of the scenes of the waiting room that I'll come to in a moment. So in some, the device of the waiting room captures this interplay between on the one hand the structural and institutional conditions that bring different people in the waiting room as language teachers, registrar's citizenship, citizenship ceremony, officials, or migrants, and on the other hand, help these people inhabit and endure the governing practice governing practices.

So scenes from the waiting room, I have four scenes which I hope I'll have time to go through looking at the time I need to look see my watch that have a particular visual sight of my time. So documents scene one documents, an image that stuck to my mind from observing these meetings between local authority registrar's and people applying for citizenship or settlement where it says checking service where the registrar's could check their application. So an image that that stuck to my mind from observing these meetings is that of applicants walking in with

plastic bags briefcases large, bulging manila folders full of documentary evidence in support of their application. A vast array of document types circulate in the waiting room of citizenship, application forms home office letters, government certificates, birth certificates marriage civil partnership certificates, diplomas, language test language certificate, citizenships, test certificate checklists, policy documents, personal letters, certified letters, identity cards, photographs, passports driving licence p 60s, mortgage statements, bank statements council tax statements to licences, utility bills, proof of subscriptions, membership cards and more. This is about requirements of documented intelligibility, which put different actors in different reading or writing positions in different relationships to each other, and in different relationships to the state. Registers are asked to check for the state. applicants are asked to narrate themselves into the state and UK visa and immigration caseworkers UKVI read for the state. But checking narrating and reading are not confined to any particular role nor are they conducted in any monolithic manner. registrar's must also read applications, assess their accuracy and interpret what counts as legible as a legible account. And many do so in ways with great empathy and care and examples of that later. Applicants for the part read the law or have someone do it for them and check the accuracy of their picture as they collate regular rate relevant evidence. UKVI caseworkers loom large in the imagined as the imagined recipient recipients in the minds of applicants and registers are the ones who must be satisfied with the picture that's sent to them. All in all, what registrar's and applicants are doing is curating others or themselves as potential desirable citizens. They and they are in this kind of a curatorial relationship with each other. They gather a select organised present of raving of, of documents, and forms in order to produce the accurate picture of a spouse, resident and refugee and in the process. Some documents like a utility bill takes on a whole different nature and character and meaning. documents also punctuate periodize and shape people's lives. For some migrants, like Nebas, the circulation of documents, and their expected arrival is experienced as real interruptions. A state of substantial states of suspension. He tells me I was sitting around 10 days waiting for that piece of paper. That piece of paper was no bounces five year leave to remain that would that was regular that would regularise his status as a refugee from Iraq. He tried to express how long these 10 days felt very hard he said it's causing me heart attack. So under VAs his account says a lot about the affective charge of documents even when they've not yet materialised. That piece of paper was invested with anxious hope and brought relief when it finally came. There's no heart attack he said nothing anything it should be all okay. But this was a momentary relief because as Nebas went on to tell me about his current anxiety for getting indefinite leave to remain. So he said these are finish now apply for indefinite my time my life everything off hold on hold. My wife My wife says it's okay now everything okay? Now you have got piece of paper Don't be Oh sometimes say don't be like children. I'm not being like children because I hope it will be okay. So for Nebas this experience of unbearable waiting exemplifies the asynchronicities of citizenship in British citizenship. It Bridget Anderson's term, the difference between subjective experiences of time and bureaucratic time and timing of documents. So these this tension constant tensions between these experiences and the bureaucratic type of citizenship navires lives lives in a state of permanent temporary temporariness that limits his capacity for an imagined future see seem to imagined futures and deferred citizenship. Tariq is a Pakistani man on a spousal visa when I met him and he said Pakistan is very small country and very poor people it's not good still in Pakistan. No jobs no anything like like good for your life. I want to get good life happiness with

my children my wife and I support my back home family as well. Wow, why don't want where we're born. May be accidental. The unequal distribution of our ensuring life chances are not as a result, assumptions about Free autonomous choosing migrant comes with further assumptions that this subject is free to pursue happiness and the good life. But this pursuit is entrenched in global inequalities in the act of the accidents of birth, that direct individuals to what has naturalised as being the cause of happiness, citizenship of the Global North. Migrants pursue the good life or better life for for, you know, migrants pursuing the good life force the interrogation of how ideas of the good life and happiness circulate globally. What kinds of social, cultural and national values are privileged in the process? One feature of the waiting room of citizenship is the deferred promise that the struggles to get through the hurdles of naturalisation will be rewarded. Eligible migrants will have to live with less now, in order to live with more in the future. To paraphrase the promise of happiness and the good life is conditional. Sara Ahmed points out how citizenship provides a technology for deciding whose happiness comes first. The narrative of the narrative arc of naturalisation places the expected migrant desiring relationship with the terms of desire where the terms of desire are dictated by the state. And in turn, as Ahmed would say, the promise of citizenship is offered as a promise of happiness or happiness that you have to demonstrate. Then you have to if the promise of citizenship sorry, is offered as a promise of happiness, then you have to demonstrate that you're worthy recipient of that promise. But even when one is granted citizenship, it remains deferred and conditional.

I attended several citizenship ceremonies. And there's it's noteworthy when ceremony officials welcome few the new citizens they often speak in the future tense about what new citizens can and should do in order to become full participants of society and good citizens. For example, in a London ceremony, the welcome of the of the the official said the citizens the citizenship ceremonies are out of patterns that formally welcomes those who wish to join us into form membership of the British family and into citizenship of the United Kingdom. And in another ceremony in the northwest of England, the official stated citizenship should not just mean holding British Nationality. It should mean total involvement in British life and its social networks, and it's groups and organisations that connect citizens to the life of communities. So the London ceremony migratises new citizens and differs their citizenship by speaking of those who wish to join us. And both speeches give instructions about what good citizenship should mean. And by inference when the good life will be achieved. Citizenship takes time. In its perpetual default, I've seen governing through exhaustion. Kebat is a Kurdish man from Iran and I met him in a language school in 2012. He said, I mean, when I first time arrived, I always used to be my dream since since young to speak English always. But now I just want to leave here this I want to leave I go somewhere else because there's no point. Life's getting harder. Why come to UK, but when I come here in UK, it was fantastic. I love to be here. But now I don't want to leave 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. I always say to myself, I want to go tomorrow. But something like holding me back here. You know, it's really crazy. Kebat is caught up in the relation of cruel optimism that Lauren Berlant explained as something that exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. His desire for Britain is faded as a result of the hardship of trying to fulfil his desire. He's also troubled by the country's rejecting of him, leading him to want to leave but also wanting to stay drawing to stay

something is keeping him here from Any like your bad seeking life in the UK is an exhausting form of cruel optimism. What struck me in Kebat's story is that he invested time, energy and money 300 pounds in taking an intensive language class in the hope to get the language credential that he needed to apply for settlement, even though he knew that he was not eligible to apply for citizen for settlement as a failed asylum seeker. But he persists he was persisting, he spoke at length about the hardship of living in Britain, how difficult it is to survive to get by to get residents visas, 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's struggling to fit himself into the policy. And the mismatch plays itself out in the way he reads the requirements for English fluency versus the way the law reads him as a perpetual outsider, regardless of his fluency. In her book about the unequal global distribution of exhaustion in neoliberalism, Elizabeth Povinelli likens exhaustion to enervation, which she describes as another form of violence, the weakening of the will, rather than the killing of life. Jonathan Darling in a recent forthcoming book is drawing on personality as well and he writes about the politics of dispersal. And he writes of exhaustion as a governing strategy in the asylum system. And that's what I also find found in argue in my book, all be a bit more implicitly, we can think of exchange exhaustion as one of the facets of uncertain citizenship. And one of its effects. A technique of governing as a technique of governing. exhaustion and endurance are an effective and embodied states that are produced through policy practice and the policing of migrants access to citizenship. exhaustion is pointedly captured in a comment from another participant in my research, Ella, who was Greek British, she'd recently attended her ceremony. And she said that she felt disappointed after the ceremony. And she said, I still have the balloon that friends gave me which says congratulations, it's deflated. scene for becoming citizen otherwise. But people endure, and they do so in ways that are less readily identifiable within traditional forms of activism, activism or resistance, becoming otherwise revisits citizenization how it sets up forms of becoming through achievements that distinct how one learns to become citizen. In contrast to this, I contrast this kind of policy track of citizenization to ordinary ways of becoming what some have called ordinary citizenship, ways that are excluded from citizenization but which are perhaps more meaningful and productive. For example, the life in the UK citizenship test was revised in 2013. By the coalition government led by conservatives and the then minister for migration, Mark Harper explained the rationale and he said we've stripped out mundane information about water metres or to find trying trying timetables, or using the Internet. The new citizenship test solely focuses on values and precise principles at the heart of being British indeed, instead of telling people how to claim benefits it encourages participant participation in British life. What does it mean to strip the test of mundane information? How does mundane persist otherwise? What counts as mundane? When, for whom, under what circumstances? For all the value attributed to Britain's long and illustrious history, participate, participate with democracy and various facts or figures about traditions factual festivals and population statistics. Others find other people find valuable information from what Harper dismissed as mundane. So Maya, a Lebanese person applying for citizenship and Emily's woman applying for citizenship said the only sections I personally found interesting was laws regarding maternity leave and how you have kids and what age you are allowed to leave them alone. That was before we had kids but this was practical information which you needed to know but everything else I was just I just memorised and just forgotten. Tamara for her part said that she learned about how you buy a house in Scotland. Tamara and Maya are speaking about

elements of ordinary life that many take for granted, but which are extraordinary for those who do not have the right legal status to get her to get a mortgage or job, let alone be eligible for parental leave. Like while people likewise people attending language classes, or studying for the citizenship, find useful practical sources of learning. Changuna, who's a permanent resident from India, who was seeking to acquire British citizenship spoke of the language class she saw class as a way to improve our English in order to do my British passport and computer and learn how to work or something, and then help my children with their homework. My eldest, she's 11, and her home homework is very hard. It's very hard. She's helping me. When I'm doing my homework most of the time, I'll ask for spelling. But her homework is very hard. I can help on math because I like math. So she was basically saying how this language classes the citizenship test learning English as a stepping stone to other routes of progression to other qualifications to jobs, but also to share study time with our kids. Finally, becoming otherwise is also refusing to be alienated. Salah, a woman from Egypt spoke to me movingly about her experience of citizenship. And her experience of her citizenship ceremony, where the feeling rule is to be happy. Her account was fraught with mixed feelings that resulted from her belonging to Britain through lawful historical and personal colonial connections, and I'm going to cite her quoter at length here. All my life, although my father talked about his own direct experience of decolonization, he also admired British authors, British thinkers, British culture, British education and his dream in life, his dream His life was for me to come here. And to get a PhD from here, he wanted me to be a scientist. So I was fulfilling my father's dream. But then thinking about my father and the tension in what he was feeling about loving British culture, maybe more than Arab culture. He himself lived in Britain for a few years, but he turned down the citizenship because he refused to give up his Egyptian nationality. And eventually he left Britain and lived in the Middle East. So I thought, I'm fulfilling my father's dream. But maybe maybe one of the reasons why I delayed and delayed and applying for British citizenship is because I thought I don't want to be something that my father fought thought was inexcusable to give up your own identity, even though I don't have to give up my the Egyptian nationality now. But it felt a bit strange to want to become British. So you also lament the fact that these things are so complicated, and you're hostage to fortune as to where you're born. And so it makes you think about the arbitrary nature of how the world is organised. Why did I have to do this? Salah goes on to describe how she started crying uncontrollably as she was walking up the stairs to the room where people were gathered before the ceremony. She struggles with her feelings and her struggle or in part about not knowing what to do with them, or maybe knowing that she can not display display them. If only to avoid drawing on desired intention, attention on her and having to explain them for struggle goes to the heart of the split between becoming British and identifying as other. There's much more to Salah's account than I have time to share here. But her story speaks volumes of migrant lives migrant belongings, migrant postcolonial belong becomings migrant citizens where they are, what holds them, what their temporalities are, their histories and stories in our experience of citizenization nor could they or should they. They're becoming otherwise it's not simply making Britishness become otherwise is unveiling how Britain is and always has been brim full of other becomings migrants are not without agency or reflexivity about their pull towards citizenship and their ways of becoming citizen unravel the parameters of good citizenship by becoming otherwise migrant citizens or refusing to remain alienated by doing something with our difference rather than hiding their difference. They're extra ordinary trajectories doing

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something thing with that doing something with their lack of choice and then and their alien affects those more bracketed in the citizenization process are not passively waiting. They're actively reconfiguring what it means not only to become, but to be citizen. Thank you

Rachael Dobson 35:26

and thank you Anne-Marie for such a powerful talk and also I feel has bought a type of maybe stillness to this morning.