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INTRODUCTION

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Intimate citizenship: introduction to the special issue on citizenship, membership and belonging in mixed-status families

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ABSTRACT

This special issue investigates citizenship and belonging in mixed-status families, i.e. families consisting of both citizens and non-citizens. We critique the standard perception of citizenship as 'hard on the outside and soft on the inside'. For citizens with non-citizen family members, the exclusionary nature of citizenship is very much 'inside', in the very heart of their families. We deploy the concept of 'performing intimate citizenship' to understand how citizens deal with migration regulations that hinder them from living with their families. Often this is a first, shocking confrontation with state intervention into their private lives. Protesting such interventions – in court, in collective mobilisation, in letters to the authorities – involves making claims both about who belongs and about what 'proper' family is. Thus, citizens and their non-citizen family members 'perform intimate citizenship': they express what citizenship is and should be, by mobilising intersecting conceptions of intimacy and of belonging.

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Introduction

At the origin of this special issue was a workshop which took place in Amsterdam in the Summer of 2015. At this workshop, we explored the problematisation of migrant families, i.e. the ways in which 'the' migrant family has become the focal point of a wide range of concerns and fears related to national identity, social cohesion, and cultural diversity. The conclusions we drew from this workshop were threefold. First, we noted that the focus on 'migrant families' obstructs the view to the fact that many families affected by family migration policies consist not only of migrants but also of citizens. Second, we saw an urgent need for further theoretical exploration of the

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intersection between politics of citizenship and belonging on the one hand, and gender and family norms on the other hand. Third and finally, we wanted to move beyond studies of elite policymaking to gain insight into the ways in which individuals and families participate in the politics of family migration.

This special issue is the result of these three scholarly ambitions combined. We zoom in on families consisting of citizen and foreign members – which we refer to as ‘mixed-status families’ – in Europe, to ask how their encounters with immigration law and authorities have affected their sense of citizenship, membership, and belonging.

This introduction starts by setting out what we know about mixed-status families and their encounter with migration law, to then propose to conceptualise citizens’ response to family migration policy as ‘performing intimate citizenship’. In the final section, we summarise the main findings of this special issue.

Mixed-status families

Over the last decade, family migration has become a flourishing field of research. However, many studies on family migration implicitly assume that families share the same citizenship, and pay limited attention to mixed-status families and the particular effects of migration policies on these families. This neglects the fact that the ‘globalisation of intimacies’ (Plummer 2001) has resulted in the development of family ties across borders, uniting families with members of different nationalities and origins (see also Kraler et al. 2011; Bhabha 2003; Constable 2003).

Fix and Zimmermann (2001) coined the term ‘mixed-status families’, pointing out that although one tends to think of families consisting of citizens on the one hand and families consisting of non-citizens on the other hand, in fact, one in ten American families was a mixed-status family: a family in which one or both parents is a noncitizen and one or more children is a citizen. They pointed at the consequences of the (irregular) status of the migrant family members on the family members with citizenship status: how different family members are affected differently by migration law (divided fates), how restrictive migration policies also affect citizen family members, e.g. in access to social welfare (spill-over effects), and how restrictive admission and restrictive deportation policies keep families apart (dividing families).

Since then, a growing, albeit still limited, literature has developed on these so-called mixed-status families, and the ways the (irregular) migration status of one family member influences those of the other, citizen family members, predominantly in the American context (Abrego 2019; Kanstroom and Lykes 2015; López 2015; Romero 2015; Schueths 2012). This literature on mixed-status families demonstrates that migration laws have repercussions at the family-level. Political discourse and policy create categories like ‘immigrant’ and ‘citizen’ to separate groups of people, but such categorisation does not



necessarily reflect a similar separation of those groups in social life (López 2015). This literature points out an effect not mentioned by Fix and Zimmermann (2001), namely how the sense of citizenship and belonging of citizen family members is affected, as they feel treated as second-class citizens because of the ways migration law impacts their lives. It is this effect that is central to this special issue. Furthermore, we shift the perspective to mixed-status families in a European context.

In Europe, too, there are likely to exist considerable numbers of mixed-status families, although they have not drawn the same amount of academic attention. One in twelve married persons in Europe is in a nationality-mixed marriage (Lanzieri 2012). Many of the sponsors who apply for family reunification are citizens: in France, for instance, 60% of family migrants reunite with a French citizen (Kofman, Rogoz, and Lévy 2010, 9–10). In the Netherlands, 85% of the sponsors are Dutch citizens, and 35% of the sponsors are citizens without migration background (Kulu-Glasgow et al. 2009). In Britain, an estimated 79% of the 15,000 children affected by strict family migration laws are British citizens (Wray et al. 2015, 18). Thus, it is obvious that the increasingly restrictive family migration policies that have developed in Europe over the past decades profoundly affect the lives not only of non-citizens but also of citizens in mixed-status families. Moreover, as philosopher Joseph Carens (2003) has pointed out, family migration is not (only) about the moral claims of foreign family members (outsiders) to get in, but about the moral claims of insiders (citizens) to have a home and a family in the country of citizenship. Hence, both empirically and normatively, the encounter between mixed-status families and migration law is of profound importance for our understanding of what citizenship is today, and what it should be.

This special issue investigates citizenship and belonging in mixed-status families, i.e. families consisting of both citizens and non-citizens. In doing so, we reinforce Linda Bosniak's critique of the standard perception of citizenship as 'hard on the outside and soft on the inside' (2006, 4), i.e. inclusive for insiders and exclusive for outsiders. Mixed-status families are the ultimate illustration of Bosniak's argument that 'in a world of porous borders' (*ibid.*), this distinction does not hold. Bosniak focused on irregular migrants, who are inside and outside at the same time as 'the border effectively follows them inside' of the nation-state (*ibid.*). Mixed-status families complicate the matter even further: they bring the outside even further 'inside', into the very heart of citizens' families.

Both the inclusive and the exclusive face of citizenship are present within mixed-status families: citizen family members may be confronted with exclusion through migration policies affecting their relationship and family life, while non-citizen family members may experience inclusion through their family relationship with a citizen. The 'outsider' status of the foreign members of these families may be mitigated, as they may be granted privileged access

to residence, naturalisation, employment, education, or social security as family members of citizens. Hence, insider citizens can act as ‘membership intermediaries’ or ‘gatekeepers’ not only for their migrant spouses but also for a wider set of kin, as they facilitate non-citizen relatives’ formal incorporation in receiving countries through the provision of more or less privileged forms of legal status (Bonizzoni and Fresnoza-Flot 2017; De Hart 2003). Adoption of foreign children by citizens is so privileged, that it is not even categorised as family migration, turning the adopted child into a citizen automatically (Schrover 2020, in this issue). On the other hand, the ‘insider’ status of citizens with foreign family members may be put into question, if migration law makes it difficult for them to live their family life in their country of citizenship. One of the questions we address is how the ‘insider’ citizens’ encounters with immigration law and immigration authorities have affected their sense of citizenship, membership, and belonging.

Mixed-status families and migration law

Traditionally, citizens have enjoyed strong family migration rights in most European states, based on the principle that citizens should not be forced to choose between living in their country of citizenship and living with their foreign spouses, children, or parents. That is, *male* citizens had these strong rights. According to the traditional gender norms that were dominant in Europe and North America, the husband and father, as head of the family, determined the nationality of all family members. It was assumed that his wife and children would follow him to his country of citizenship, where they were thought to belong. Women’s marriage to a foreign husband was perceived as a choice of belonging: a choice for his nationality, his nation and culture. Culturally and socially, she was no longer considered to belong to the nation in which she was born. Thus, a citizen woman who married a foreigner automatically lost her citizenship, while a foreign woman who married a citizen automatically obtained his citizenship. Children obtained the citizenship of the father and women could not pass on their citizenship to their children (De Hart 2006). Women had no say whatsoever in matters concerning their nationality. In contrast, it was considered vital that a citizen husband be allowed to establish a home and a family in his country of citizenship. If he could not be the head of his family, he could not be a good citizen (Bredbenner 1998; Cott 1998).

Karen Knop (2001) has shown that when gender equality was introduced in citizenship law – in most European countries well after the Second World War – the notion that citizenship entailed an absolute right to a home and a family was discarded. Thus, the introduction of gender equality in citizenship law did not mean that citizen women obtained the rights that men had

for decades, but rather that the absolute right to a home and a family was taken away from citizen men.

Consequently, mixed-status families of citizens became subjected to family migration policies. In most countries, the family members of citizens retained a privileged status within family migration policies.¹ However, as migration laws have become increasingly restrictive, citizens' family migration rights have deteriorated in different European countries, increasingly putting citizens on the same par as third country nationals (migrants from outside the EU). Bonjour and Block (2016) have noted this trend of 'levelling down', meaning that the difference in rights between citizens and non-citizens diminishes not through an increase of foreigners' rights, but through a decrease of citizens' rights. This happened for instance in Belgium, the United Kingdom, Denmark, France, Germany, Norway, the Netherlands and Sweden, although in different ways. France and Germany maintained the traditionally strong privileged rights for citizen sponsors and their non-EU family members, but have introduced pre-entry tests applying to both citizen sponsors and third country nationals. The Netherlands introduced equal rights to family migration for citizen and permanent resident sponsors rather early, in the 1980s, as part of the development of 'levelling up' migrants' rights to match the rights of citizens. As Dutch migration policies became stricter from the 1990s onwards, a 'levelling down' occurred, as new conditions such as income requirements were applied both to Dutch sponsors and to migrant sponsors (Bonjour and Block 2016). In Sweden, an income requirement was introduced for the first time in 2010, and it came to be applied to Swedish citizen sponsors after 2016 (Mustasaari 2017). Other countries, such as Austria and Belgium used to have strong family migration rights for citizens (on equal footing with EU-citizens, see below), but have abolished this privilege in 2008 and 2011 respectively, putting their citizens in the same box as non-EU migrants.

Some countries have demonstrated shifts back and forth. Denmark introduced the so-called 'attachment requirement' in 2000 to demand that couples have a greater attachment to Denmark than to another country, which also applied to Danish citizens. After protests by Danish sponsors, in 2004, this requirement was made to apply only to sponsors who had been a Danish citizen for less than 28 years – thus effectively excluding most native Danish citizens from the requirement. After the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the 28-years rule was discriminatory, the attachment requirement came to be applied again to all Danes, thus levelling down once again (Bech, Borevi, and Mouritsen 2017).

Nevertheless, there are still countries that hold on to the relatively privileged position of citizen sponsors with migrant family members, such as France and Germany where income and housing requirements do not apply to citizens. This privileged access of citizens to family migration is especially strong in those countries with a strong family ideology, such as

Italy and Portugal, although restrictive trends have also been noted (Cook 2018; Parisi 2015; Van den Broucke, Vanduynslager, and De Cuyper 2016).

The reforms mentioned here exemplify the policy impact of notions of citizenship and belonging. Restrictive reforms have often been justified with arguments either of promoting self-sufficiency and independence of sponsors and family migrants or of emancipation of women and gender equality (Bonjour and de Hart 2013). Even if these reforms were frequently aimed at citizens of specific ethnic minority backgrounds (Bonjour and Block 2016), they also affected majority citizens. Migration law varies between countries and over time, shifting the relative weight of the inclusive and exclusive faces of citizenship, and bringing different groups of citizens into or out of the ambit of migration law.

We have so far discussed family migration law as if it were determined by nation-states. In Europe, however, there is another arena of governance which crucially affects migration law, namely the European Union (EU). Under free movement law, EU citizens who move to another EU country are granted generous family migration rights: they may bring in not only spouses and children up to 21-years old but also older children, (grand)parents or grandchildren, if they are dependents. Integration or language conditions may not be imposed. The EU Family Reunification Directive, adopted in 2003, sets the minimum conditions for family reunification of Third Country National sponsors, i.e. non-EU citizens. These conditions are much less favourable than those for mobile EU citizens: only the nuclear family (partner and minor children until 18 years) is entitled to family migration, and strict income, residence, age, and integration requirements may be imposed by Member States (Bonjour 2017). The only category of sponsors that is not at present affected (or protected) by EU law is the citizen who has *not* moved to another EU country. While some countries such as Spain grant these so-called 'static' citizens the same strong family migration rights as mobile EU citizens, in many countries restrictive reforms have resulted in weaker rights to family migration for non-mobile national citizens than for mobile EU citizens; an issue at times typified as 'reverse discrimination' (Staver 2013). As a consequence, one of the strategies that citizen sponsors sometimes employ is to use their right to free movement to another EU-member state, with the aim of returning to the country of citizenship under these more favourable conditions for family migration for Union citizens, the so-called 'Europe route'. In this way, they can avoid strict income requirements and pre-entry tests in national migration law. Needless to say, Member States are less than happy with their citizens using this route, that they consider 'abuse of rights', although it is perfectly legal.

The developments discussed here have made family migration by citizen sponsors increasingly politically salient and controversial. Thus, mixed-status families have certainly not escaped the problematisation of family migration.

Performing intimate citizenship

In this special issue, we look at these developments through the lens of citizenship. To this aim, we understand citizenship as a lived, intimate practice and experience, in a phrase: intimate citizenship.

Both in politics and in academia, citizenship tends to be conceived either in terms of an abstract, large collective ('the nation', 'the political community') or in terms of a formal relation between an individual and the state (citizenship as status and rights). In Marshall's classic account of civil, political and social citizenship, citizenship is conceptualised as rights granted to individuals by the State (Marshall 1950). Kymlicka (1998) defines citizenship both as a 'legal status' which confers 'rights and responsibilities' to individuals, and as a 'normative ideal' of 'full and equal membership' which includes 'the right to participate in the political process'. Joppke (2007, 238) proposes a threefold definition of citizenship as status, i.e. 'formal state membership'; rights, i.e. the 'formal capacities and immunities connected with such status'; and identity, i.e. 'the behavioural aspects of individuals acting and conceiving of themselves as members of a collectivity'. In these and similar accounts, a citizen is imagined as an isolated individual who relates to the state primarily through rights and status, and in second instance through participation or identification. These perspectives miss out on an aspect of citizenship that is in fact crucial, namely the fact that people experience citizenship primarily neither as a member of an abstract collective nor as an isolated individual, but as a member of a web of significant relationships, most notably family relationships.

Critiquing this traditional perspective on citizenship has been one of the core projects of feminist scholarship. Carol Pateman (1988), Susan Okin (1989), Ursula Vogel (1994) and others have pointed out that these perspectives define citizenship as 'public' in opposition to all things 'private' – thus excluding 'private' matters such as marriage, family, parenting, and sexuality from the scope of their theories of citizenship – and ignoring the fundamental role of gender and family in shaping social and political relations and institutions.

Building on the key feminist insight that the personal is political, feminist and queer citizenship scholars have advocated a shift towards a 'contextualised' understanding of citizenship as an embodied practice and everyday experience (Lister 2007). These scholars have emphasised that the realm of gender, family, sexuality and reproduction is crucial to the construction of citizenship (Plummer 2001; Roseneil et al. 2013). The concept of intimate citizenship has been used to explore a variety of citizenship

experiences, such as reproductive rights, family policies, same-sex couples, and the disabled. However, it largely focusses on intimate citizenship within national borders. Even studies that extend beyond borders to address sex tourism, for instance, still study ‘intimate citizenship’ as the relation between straight and gay citizens of the same state (Coon 2012); not on citizenship as an instrument that distinguishes between outsiders and insiders of the nation (what Bosniak (2006) calls ‘at the threshold’). Consequently, issues of migration, migration law and ethnicity receive relatively little attention.

In part, this gap is filled by feminist students of nationalism and empire who have shown that collective identities and boundaries – be they cultural, racial, or national – are defined in deeply gendered ways, as gender and family norms are represented as ‘the “essence” of cultures’ (Yuval-Davis [1997] 2008, 43–45, 67). These politics of intimacy extend beyond notions of femininity and masculinity to what Stoler (2001, 829) defines as ‘intimate domains’ – ‘sex, sentiment, domestic arrangement, and child-rearing’. From colonial times to the present day, defining who ‘We’ are and how ‘We’ are different from and better than ‘Them’ inevitably involves reference to proper roles of men and women, proper dress, proper parenting, and proper loving. The politics of belonging are intrinsically connected to the politics of intimacy.

Regrettably, this crucial insight has remained marginal in studies of contemporary politics of migration and citizenship. The only place it has been taken up is the emerging scholarship on the politics of family migration. Analyses of family migration policies have long been ignored by scholars, who tended to think of family migration as a side-effect of ‘autonomous’ migration flows such as labour or refugee migration (Kofman 2004). Since the mid-2000s however, a small but growing research community has emerged which has opened up new theoretical pathways (for an overview see D’Aoust 2018). In particular, this scholarship has shown that family migration policies are shaped in fundamental ways by gender and family norms (cf. Strasser et al. 2009; Van Walsum 2008; Wray 2011; Bonjour and de Hart 2013), i.e. that contemporary politics of migration and citizenship should be analysed as the product of intersecting politics of belonging and intimacy.

In this special issue, we deploy the concept of ‘intimate citizenship’ to highlight the crucial relation between citizenship and intimate life. Our focus on mixed-status families sheds an important new light on citizenship as a lived practice which shapes and is shaped by meaningful social relations, in particular by family relations. This is especially the case as migration law is a field of law that citizens normally are not affected by, if it were not for the relationships with their migrant partner. This private choice for a migrant partner is seen as – potentially – colliding with state interests; thus connecting citizens’ private interests to state interests, and challenging the public/private divide. For the people studied in the different contributions to this special issue, as for most people, caring for and being cared for by significant

others is an important, perhaps the most important, part of a meaningful, fulfilling life. State intervention in their family life through migration law directly affects their relationship with the state. It is not as isolated individuals that they experience the status, rights and identities tied to citizenship, but as members of the web of meaningful relationships that we call ‘family’. Our analyses of their perceptions and experiences of citizenship, membership and belonging reveal that citizenship is indeed, in essence, intimate.

We also build on the literature on ‘performative citizenship’, that considers citizenship not as a stable legal status but as the product of ‘ongoing political and social struggles over not only the content of rights but also who are or are not entitled to them’ (Isin 2017). Citizenship is conceptualised not as something that people *are* or *have* but as something that people *do*: by formulating political claims, people act as citizens and thereby *perform* citizenship. The concept of ‘performative citizenship’ draws our attention to the fact that as a product of political contestation, citizenship is constantly subject to change: by making claims about citizenship and rights, people contribute to shaping the functions and meanings of citizenship in present-day societies (Clarke et al. 2014). People who are not formal citizens, including residents without legal right to reside, may perform citizenship. Those who belong to dominant groups of society have a much better chance of performing citizenship successfully, i.e. of formulating political claims and being heard, than marginalised groups. This begs the interesting question how this plays out in mixed-status families: while citizen family members may be expected to ‘perform citizenship’ more successfully than non-citizen members, this might be mitigated by the effect of other axes of power such as gender, class, and race. To understand how these social positionings shape experiences and practices of citizenship, we apply an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw 1990) throughout.

In this Special Issue, we look at how citizen sponsors ‘perform intimate citizenship’ in their dealings with family migration policies. For many citizens, especially but certainly not only those without migrant background, the obstacles posed by immigration regulations to their living together with their family members is a first, often shocking confrontation with state intervention into the very heart of their private lives. This experience has a profound impact on their sense of citizenship, membership, and belonging. Both Block (2020) and Griffiths (2019) show that upper-class and middle-class citizens are especially shocked and resentful at state interventions in their private life. Conversely, citizens may draw on their sense of citizenship, or construe a new sense of citizenship, by responding to immigration law and authorities in strategic ways, e.g. presenting their family life so as to fit policy categories; mobilising collectively; or going to court (Block 2020; Odasso 2020). According to Block (2020) German citizen sponsors participate in the struggle over the meaning of citizenship by claiming an individual right as

citizens to be allowed to live with their partner in Germany, and by emphasising their insider position as German citizens.

When NGOs take to the streets to protest income requirements carrying banners that state ‘family life is a right not a privilege’; when a lawyer argues that her client is a hard-working citizen who should be entitled to bring his wife and children over; when an individual citizen tells a story of sadness and anger about being separated from her beloved foreign husband by her government: they are at once making claims about who belongs and about what ‘proper’ family is. Thus, in responding to family migration – be it through collective mobilising, individual litigation, or narrating their experience – citizens and their non-citizen family members ‘perform intimate citizenship’: they express what citizenship is and should be, by mobilising intersecting conceptions of intimacy and of belonging.

This does not necessarily mean that they challenge migration policies and dominant discourses on migration and citizenship. The literature on performative citizenship emphasises that people inevitably relate to dominant discourses and conventions, often confirming them but also challenging them in subtle or more radical ways (Zivi 2012; Isin 2017). Isin (2012, 109–110) sees performing citizenship as a ‘creative, inventive and autonomous’ practice, through which people ‘break away from norms, expectations, routines, rituals’. However, as Roseneil et al. (2012, see also De Graeve 2010) have argued, individuals with experiences ‘outside the conventional family’ may still reproduce conventional narratives, rather than challenge dominant discourses. Citizens may claim inclusion by pointing to their ‘exceptional’ individual circumstances or their qualities as ‘deserving’ citizens rather than by calling for structural policy change (Block 2020), sometimes to the exclusion of other mixed-status families, which are not seen as equally ‘deserving’, such as supposedly ‘bogus’ relationships, or older white citizen men with younger Asian wives (De Hart and Besselsen 2020). In this special issue, we explore to which extent citizens’ ‘performance of intimate citizenship’ challenges and transforms dominant discourses, or rather confirms them.

The special issue

The contributions in this special issue are based on empirical research of the everyday world of intimate citizenship, largely through interviews with mixed-status family members, but also through content analysis of archival material and newspapers. They investigate how immigration policies affect discourses, experiences and strategies of citizenship and belonging of citizens with foreign family members in different national contexts (Netherlands, Germany, France, Belgium, United Kingdom) within the European Union. We look at different family configurations: citizen women with migrant husbands (Griffiths 2019; De Hart and Besselsen 2020); and citizen families who

transnationally adopt children (Schrover 2020). We investigate the interaction of citizens with foreign spouses with migration authorities (De Hart and Besselsen 2020; Block 2020) as well as their collective mobilisation in social movements (Odasso 2020). Regrettably, the issue does not touch upon same-sex couples (see however Chauvin et al. 2019) and only sheds limited light on the experiences of citizen sponsors with a migration background or male sponsors (Odasso 2020; Block 2020). We hope to spur further research on how intimate citizenship is performed by mixed-status families and how their experiences differ based on gender, sexuality, class and ethnicity.

The contributions in this issue demonstrate how failing to fulfil the necessary requirements can inhibit a mixed-status couple or family from living together for long periods of time or even permanently. They explore the coping strategies that couples develop in order to overcome these hurdles as smoothly and quickly as possible. On the other hand, they also demonstrate the privileges of citizen family members within mixed-status families and their abilities and willingness to extend these privileges to the migrant family member.

One central theme is how intimate citizenship is framed by those affected by family migration policies. The findings seem at times contradictory. Block (2020) and Griffiths (2019) delineate the outrage and hurt that sponsors express when they are confronted with family migration policies that threaten to divide their families. On the other hand, De Hart and Besselsen (2020) find that although female sponsors criticise the increasingly restrictive Dutch migration policies, they also express considerable support for these restrictive policies. Part of the explanation may be that De Hart and Besselsen mostly interviewed women who successfully completed the procedure, even if it had been long and complicated. Block, on the other hand, analysed reactions shortly after the introduction of the pre-entry language test in Germany, when people were shocked and apprehensive and had not yet devised strategies to deal with this new obstacle to their family life. Griffiths explores the most intrusive part of migration policies: the increasingly strict deportation regime in the UK and its effects on British citizens with foreign husbands. These respondents were in the midst of procedures that they feared would not end well for their families. She argues that the female sponsors she interviewed became acutely aware of longstanding gendered and classed barriers to their citizenship privileges. It led them to reconsider their relationships with their government as well as to reformulate their understanding of the institution of citizenship itself. In contrast, Block as well as De Hart and Besselsen note how citizen sponsors frequently claim rights by appealing to rather conservative and dominant norms on gender, family and 'deserving citizenship'. De Hart and Besselsen argue that rather than call for a change of policies, their respondents claim an exception to the rule in their individual case, leaving the overall policy framework intact. Odasso even found citizens

who had experienced break-up of their mixed-status couple participating in NGOs lobbying for more restrictive family migration policies. We therefore do not share Isin's confidence (Isin 2017) in the potential of performative citizenship to challenge dominant discourses and break away from conventions. Rather, we take our findings to confirm those of Roseneil et al. (2012) and De Graeve (2010) that those claiming inclusive citizenship often do so based on dominant norms.

As this special issue includes different time periods and national contexts in Europe, this raises the question of how time and place matter. Varying national contexts may have significantly different effects on how intimate citizenship can be lived. Migration law in different countries may offer varying opportunities to citizens to bring over extended family members, due to dominant notions of what constitutes a family, but also because of the different legal status of migrant partners. We suggest that differences in national discourses also matter for how mixed-status families perform citizenship. As stated above, Block (2020) observes much stronger criticism of restrictive family migration policies among German citizen sponsors than De Hart & Besselsen (2020) find in the Netherlands. Can some of this difference be explained by the fact that in Germany, citizens still maintain privileged family migration rights, while in the Netherlands, they do not? Is the norm that citizens are entitled to family migration rights stronger in Germany than in the Netherlands, not only in law and politics but also in citizens' perceptions? Further research of this link between national policies and discourses and citizenship experiences is needed. This is all the more urgent as national migration policies are ever changing, catalysed by major political developments such as Brexit, and by the growing influence of nativism and far-right politics on migration law (Kilkey 2017).

Schrover, in her historical contribution on public debates on transnational adoptions, shows important continuities over time in discourses on parenting/care and belonging/citizenship. She shows how from the beginning of the twentieth century the state took on the responsibility of bringing children 'home' to good, white, Christian middle-class families. Her contribution also demonstrates how such discourses were not confined within national borders, but created in transnational and international debates between 'sending' and 'receiving' states.

Within the European context, it becomes increasingly difficult to determine what is 'national' about national discourses: we found considerable similarities in the dominant discourses on mixed-status families and family life in the national contexts involved. For instance, our contributions show that mixed-status families in Belgium, France, Germany, the UK and the Netherlands face suspicions from migration authorities based on almost identical and highly gendered discourses on marriages of convenience, sham or bogus marriages. Citizen women interviewed by both Griffiths

(2019) and De Hart and Besselsen (2020) recount feeling patronised by migration officials who perceived them as hapless victims of cunning migrant men. Even if citizenship and migration policies no longer discriminate directly, female citizen sponsors still feel that their rights claims are seen as less legitimate than those of citizen men, that their choice of spouse is questioned and their application therefore treated less favourably. The contributions also show that these discourses are not limited to immigration offices, but are also employed by mixed-status couples themselves. Interestingly, Odasso demonstrates how both in France and in Belgium, organisations have been established that lobby for more restrictive family migration policies, framing the citizen sponsor as the more vulnerable member in mixed-status families, susceptible to abuse and deception by the migrant partner who is after a residence status and the sponsor's money. De Hart and Besselsen also demonstrate how even those citizen sponsors involved in a long-lasting and stable relationship reproduce the discourse of threatening and abusive male migrants that is part of dominant discourses on migration (Charsley and Wray 2015).

This frame of the citizen sponsor as the vulnerable partner is problematic and we should not lose sight of the other side of the picture. In their role as 'membership intermediaries' or 'gatekeepers', citizen sponsors offered valuable forms of economic support, legal advice, housing, knowledge of the local context and language, and so on. However, the will of citizen partners to play this role should not be taken for granted, and migrant partners still remain highly dependent on the citizen sponsor. Although as Griffith (2019) shows, citizen partners may feel that their citizenship and belonging do not matter at all to the state when it fails to acknowledge their family life, citizen sponsors still remain in a position of privilege and power in relation to their migrant partner. If intimate relationships become 'toxic ties', this position of power and privilege may result in abuse and everyday violence from the sponsor towards the migrant partner (Del Real 2019; Liversage 2013). Further research within a more diverse group of mixed-status families, using an intersectional approach, may provide more insights in these varying positions of vulnerability and power, as expressed through the performance of intimate citizenship.

Note

1. However, for a considerable time, this applied primarily to male citizens. See the ECtHR decision *Abdulaziz*, 1985, that condemned British family migration policies for discriminating on grounds of gender, in violation of article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

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