

Testing for citizenship: Why tests and why now?

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In recent times there has been a rapid expansion of the number of states requiring applicants for citizenship to take a test of their language proficiency and/or knowledge of the customs and lifestyle of the host country. Many of these are European states. In this paper we examine the reasons for this expansion, and situate this phenomenon in the context of the development of citizenship testing regimes in traditional immigration countries, in particular Australia, and the UK. People have crossed territories in unprecedented numbers in this last half century. It is tempting to view the current interest in citizenship testing in Europe as a reaction to diversity and the manifestation of a continued desire to maintain a culturally cohesive community. The majority of European nation state governments and elites still subscribe to the ‘one language, one nation and one territory’ ideal¹ and have always been enthusiastic nation builders. We might therefore see the recent enthusiasm for testing as a new phase of the nation building process. But could there also be a deeper structural reason for the flurry of tests? Could the turn to testing be indicative of more than the traditional concern that newcomers be incorporated into the nation? Could the tests be interpreted as a desire to nation-build in a situation where the power and reach of the nation state has become less secure? The nation state survives; new nation states have come into being in the recent past and old nation states have consolidated their power. But, on the other hand, the concept of the independent sovereign state whose frontiers are impermeable is clearly disappearing in some parts of the world, and in all parts of the world the defining characteristics of the nation state are under attack. First, we discuss the notions of ‘nation’, ‘language’, and ‘citizenship’.

¹ Although there have been some minor concessions and/or some granting of autonomy to autochthonous minority groups, a linguistically and culturally cohesive state is still the aim of most governments, as their national education systems demonstrate.

Nation

There is no uncontested set of criteria for defining a nation, but most would accept that the nation state classically has some or all of the following attributes: a defined territory with stable borders; a national government which is the sole law giver and law enforcer for its citizens; a domestic market usually protected by quotas and tariffs from foreign competition; a national defence force, sometimes staffed through conscription; a population that identifies with the state through the complex influence of national media, a national education system, a standardised national language and the elaboration of national symbols and icons. To examine any of these characteristics is to reveal the extent to which the nation state system is changing.

First, the territorial integrity of the nation state is routinely challenged in a way that did not happen in the past². This is particularly true in Europe, where devolution and independence have been on the rise (Harty and Murphy 2005). In addition, even where the territory as container may not be altered, its contents are undergoing transformation. Although the difficulties in charting migration are well known and even if we are not able to assess them with total accuracy (Poulain M. and Perrin, N. 2003), we know that migration flows are huge. Populations are ever more mixed within the so-called nation state. The two states that concern us here demonstrate this phenomenon. Australia is recorded as having a population of 17,892,423 with 4,047,807 foreign born and 616,810 of unknown provenance in the period 1995-2004 (UN 2005). The 2001 census reported that 4.9 million (8.3 per cent) of the total population of the UK were born overseas (Office for National Statistics 2005).

Second, the nation state is no longer the sole guarantor of rights. (Risse and Sikkink 1999; Castles and Davidson 2000). Soysal (1994) argues that global human rights hollow out the substance of national citizenship by decoupling rights from membership of the nation. The process may be more advanced in Europe where there are now regional courts of justice to hear cases where citizens challenge their state³. In other parts of the world this is not yet the case. The International Court of Justice in The Hague may only adjudicate disputes among states. The

² Ewin (2003) discusses the assumption of the territorial integrity of the state, and the acceptance that 'we cannot rightly divide up territories that the state has a right to'. He notes that there are now those who challenge this reject state integrity as nothing more than 'another form of property worship'.

³ Individuals may apply to the European Court of Justice if they feel their state is contravening the rights guaranteed by the EU treaties and legislation and to the European Court of Human Rights set up by the Council of Europe if they feel that their state is contravening or not defending their universal human rights.

interesting question here is whether the challenge to state sovereignty in matters of law will spread and increase.

Third, where the free market has been adopted (or imposed), much economic activity has become transnational, outside the control of the individual nation state. Not only is the state less able to protect its national industries, it has little influence on large transnational corporations or international markets for capital, commodities, service and futures⁴.

Fourth, national defence once meant the capacity to remain sovereign. National security required the necessary material resources and manpower to act alone to defend national interests when and wherever necessary. The events of the first decade of the century show that some states maintain this capacity. The proliferation of nuclear capability illustrates this. But many states do not aspire to military independence and thus enter into alliances or trust in the UN⁵ to mobilise members' forces to counter aggression.

Fifth, for many people the imagined society to which they belong is no longer exclusively the nation. According to Anderson's (1983) analysis, the national media are one of the key elements in the construction of an imagined national community. This is no longer the case in so far as the national media are only one of many sources of influence and information. Those who have the language repertoires and who can afford the hardware necessary enter the flows and exchanges of the global Information Society. Powerful technologies permit real time communication and almost limitless access to information from all parts of the world. The Internet generation forms its opinions under a much wider range of influences than its parents or grandparents.

⁴ TNCs will move out of states if they try to enforce unwanted employment, environmental or tax laws. The extent of the power of TNCs whose turnover is of a greater magnitude than the GNP of some small states has long been noted as a cause for concern. The international financial markets also escape the control of national governments. Traders were relatively unfettered by national constraints in the boom years of the 2000s as they moved capital from market to market. It was only in the crises of 2008 and 2009 that companies remembered that they were national enterprises as they turned to the state for help in difficult times.

⁵ This is a somewhat risky position in this era of change. While it is difficult to envisage a situation where there would not be reaction to invasion, it is clear that not all contraventions of state sovereignty will receive equal treatment from a UN dominated by the present Security Council.

It would be possible to continue⁶. For each defining attribute of the nation state one can find examples where it no longer applies to all states or is weakened. Thus the frame that made us respond strongly to the trials and tribulations of our co-nationals is weaker than in the past. The national solidarity that permits the taxation burdens of the welfare state and the willingness to die to defend the national group are disappearing. Will we continue to accept that we should support fellow nationals? Why should we accept responsibility for this group and not sub- or supra-national groups? In the changing situation the answer to these questions is not at all clear.

The legacy of the nation state remains, however, potent and those who come into the nation state are likely to experience its potency rather than its waning in these various developments. A number of commentators argue that nationalism remains a robust player in changing world. Billig suggests in fact that it is “the issue of immigration, more than any other, shows that the state has not withered away in the age of late capitalism” (1995:142). Pujolar (2007) reviewing the birth of new nations and nationalism in Europe suggests that nationality, nationalism or nation-states are still relevant or not receding in favour of an international, transnational or cosmopolitan era. Instead, there are “strong arguments to contend that nationalism is on the increase” (Pujolar 2007:90). Others agree that neither the proliferation of supranational forms of governance, the ascendancy of free market principles of global capitalism, nor expanding flows of transnational migration have unseated the nation state as the dominant form of political organization in the world today (Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008). Many states seek to regulate immigration, and arguments against immigration are invariably expressed in nationalist language (van Dijk 2000, Essed 2000). It is sometimes taken for granted that the concept of ‘diaspora’ is oppositional to nations and nationalism.

The political context is thus difficult to describe. On the one hand we witness some shifts and on the other we witness entrenchment. What is the effect of this for the 100 million people who reside outside the country of their birth (Castles 2005)? Castles asks what nationalism means for people who settle in one country without abandoning their cultural belonging to another. He suggests that the nation-state continues to be ‘based on the obliteration of minority cultures’

⁶ For a full discussion of this, see, for example, Held (1996) who argues that there are seven sources of political power and that five of these are now relocated partially at least to levels above or below the national; Stråth and Skinner (2003) who claim that contemporary states do less than they used to do, and have more rivals that have usurped their power; Castles and Davidson (2000) who contend that globalization has eroded the power of the nation state.

(2005:312), and that immigrant groups are often caught between an urge to maintain “immigrant cultures and languages” and a pragmatic acceptance of assimilation which can lead to marginalization and loss of community solidarity. The contradiction is clear: “the nation-state model...cannot offer an adequate basis for societal belonging in the age of globalization and migration” (2005:314). He argues that continuing attempts to base citizenship on membership of an imagined cultural community leads to political and social exclusion and the racialization of differences. May and Fenton (2003) point out that many states are multinational, comprising a number of national minorities, and/or polyethnic, comprising a range of immigrant groups. If nations are people who see themselves as those already ‘in place’, ethnic minorities are people who may be seen, however begrudgingly, as being in situ, but who still remain, by the exclusivist definitions of nation so often applied, invariably ‘out of place’ (May and Fenton 2003:14).

A number of studies have sought to investigate the complexities of national belonging in increasingly transnational settings. Fenton (2007) interviewed 1100 young adults about social change in Britain, and found that they manifested “a significant element of indifference or disregard for national identity” (2007:335). He speculates that this could signal “the appearance of a non-national generation” (2007:336).. The social relations of migrants and refugees are not confined within nations but are “transnational”, hence a diaspora is a specific form of transnational community (Cox and Connell 2003:330). Glick Schiller et. al. (1992) argued that immigrants are increasingly becoming transnational, creating a single field for social action that encompasses both the home and host societies. In recent years, the extent and degree of transnational engagement has intensified. The degrees to and ways in which today’s migrants maintain identities, activities and connections linking them with communities in other countries are unprecedented (Vertovec 2007). The flows, exchanges and networks of globalization allow cheap and easy maintenance of virtual transnational communities; new transport infrastructure allows cheap and easy travel between country of origin and country of residence. In these new conditions, it is easy to understand Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) argument that assimilation and enduring transnational ties are neither incompatible nor binary opposites. Vertovec (2006) points to a 'bi-focality' of outlooks underpinning migrant lives lived here-and-there, and suggests that such dual orientations have considerable influence on transnational family life and may continue to affect identities among subsequent post-migration generations.

If, as we argue, we are witnessing some weakening of the nation state and new forms of migration where transnational ties are firmly maintained, then, why are testing regimes for citizenship applicants becoming so prevalent? One answer is that, to paraphrase Mark Twain, rumours of the demise of the nation are very much exaggerated. In UK, for example, Government ministers and other senior politicians still underpin policy initiatives by appealing to ‘national unity’ and a sense of ‘Britishness’ (Blackledge 2005, 2006). The nation state may be changing in the objective ways we have described but nationalism retains its emotional, potent force in many places. There continue to exist national territories and nation-states where many people feel discriminated against, threatened, or otherwise embattled by those outside of their territory, and in times of trial the collective around which they frequently group is the ‘nation’ (Castles 2005). Immigration on a large scale constitutes for some of these people that threat.

Language and nation

One of the frequently heard criteria for nation and/or state formation has been commonality of language. Wright (2004) demonstrates how national elites (or proto elites) have used language as the organizing principle for nation formation and as a tool for nation building. Of course, speakers of the same language do not necessarily belong to the same nation-state; but the converse is true. The nation state elites have mostly aimed for linguistic homogeneity and put pressure on autochthonous ‘minorities’ to assimilate linguistically. Billig (1995:29) argues that the creation of a national hegemony often involved a hegemony of language. However, this ideological link between language and nation ignores the diversity and variety of the language(s) spoken within many states. As Rampton’s (1995, 1999, 2006) work has made clear, even the notion of a single ‘English’ language is an over-simplification, as new varieties emerge from different cultural and social contexts. Pujolar (2007) demonstrates that multilingual practices and skills have had an uneasy fit in the national and linguistic order. Bilingual communities have often been seen as a threat to cultural unification. Heller (1999) argues that the concept of a ‘linguistic minority’ only makes sense within an ideological framework of nationalism in which language is central to the construction of the nation. She further proposes that “linguistic minorities are created by nationalisms which exclude them” (Heller 1999:7). At the same time, Moyer and Martin Rojo (2007) point out that migrants are the new social actors challenging the

hegemonic linguistic construction of the nation-state from below in different ways. They argue that migrants from different language backgrounds constitute a challenge for traditional nationalist discourses and ideologies in the institutions of multilingual democratic states, as “multilingual reality comes up against national ideologies of monolingualism and homogeneity” (Moyer and Martin Rojo 2007:156).

If languages and nations are socially constructed, we still need to account for the fact that at least some language users, at least some of the time, hold passionate beliefs about the importance and significance of a particular language to their sense of ‘national identity’. It is now well established in contemporary sociolinguistics (Harris 2006; Rampton 2006) that one ‘language’ does not straightforwardly index one subject position, and that speakers use linguistic resources in complex, sophisticated ways to perform a range of subject positions, sometimes simultaneously. However, whilst accepting this, May (2005) argues that historically associated languages continue often to hold considerable purchase for members of particular cultural or ethnic groups in their identity claims. For some people, in some circumstances, “particular languages clearly *are*...an important and constitutive factor of their individual, and at times, collective identities” (May 2005:330). Whilst it is certainly an oversimplification to treat certain languages as ‘symbols’ or ‘carriers’ of ‘identity’, we are obliged to take account of what people believe about their languages, to listen to how they make use of their available linguistic resources, and to consider the effects of their language use – even where we believe these ‘languages’, and the nations to which they are typically affiliated, to be inventions.

Citizenship

Citizenship as it is most commonly understood refers to a legal status which confers rights and usually some duties. It describes the relationship of the individual to the nation-state (Osler 2009). The nation-state protects citizens, provides collective benefits and, in return, citizens contribute to the cost of those benefits through taxation. Whether or not an individual holds the status of citizen, s/he has the status of a holder of human rights. Citizenship is also a feeling of belonging to a community of citizens. Although democratic nation states aspire to treat all citizens equally, the sense of belonging may depend to a large degree on whether an individual is

able to access the benefits of collective citizenship (for example, schooling, justice, healthcare) on the basis of equality. Citizenship can also be defined in terms of practice, associated with democracy and with human rights. Citizenship in this context relates to an awareness of oneself living in relationship with others. The practice of citizenship is not necessarily confined within the borders of a nation state, but is about participating freely and working with others for political, social, cultural or economic purposes. The practice of citizenship involves solidarity with others and reinforces feelings of citizenship or sense of belonging (Osler 2009).

Bauböck (1991: 11) argues that citizenship is a normative concept, “a set of rights, exercised by individuals who hold the rights, equal for all citizens, and universally distributed within a political community, as well as a corresponding set of institutions guaranteeing these rights”. This is a statist and somewhat passive definition of citizenship, the citizen as a carrier or even recipient of rights. It presents citizenship as guaranteeing individuals’ legal safeguards within the rule-of-law and on an equal footing with all their co-nationals. In foregrounding rights, Bauböck reflects the period in which he was writing. Since T.H. Marshall’s seminal essay on the state and the citizen (1950), rights had become the focus of discussions of citizenship, and in the 1970s and 1980s, the discourse of rights gained ground. Marshall’s work rested on two assumptions: that citizenship is a qualifying condition to gain access to rights and that citizenship is bestowed by the nation state. These statements were legitimate in the late 1940s, but over the six decades since then much has changed regarding the rights of the individual, which are increasingly seen as universal rather than national and attached to personhood rather than to citizenship (Soysal, 1994). However, in the matter of the legal status of citizenship, we are still acting according to the frame of Marshall’s view of the world. The state is still the means by which citizenship is conferred.

We thus have an anomaly: rights are human rights, but guarantors are states. While the citizen will be on the inside, protected by the rights guaranteed by the state, there will be others outside, not within this protection. Citizenship is by definition exclusionary. Until such time as there is a state contiguous with the world, there will always be a need to decide who will have rights guaranteed by a particular state and who will not. The citizenship tests that have been recently introduced in a number of countries are thus complex tools: they can appear to be a fairer and

objective way of deciding who is in; yet they can be a gate keeping mechanism designed to exclude the poor and illiterate or the culturally divergent.

We also have a singular omission in the tradition that links citizenship and rights. The issue of duties is not prominent in this scholarly literature. It does not regularly discuss the price of citizenship and guaranteed rights. It fails to mention what the state will ask of the citizen in return. This is a glaring omission since the cost of citizenship has often been high. In the twentieth century, nation state governments required citizens to fight for national interests as well as national defence, to be prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice of one's life for one's country. The generations from which men were conscripted in large numbers to fight in the two World Wars are a fast disappearing group. However, the narrative of defence of the nation remains strong and politicians and journalists continue to present the casualties of war as necessary sacrifice for the continued safety of the nation. There are of course obvious differences where soldiers are professionals and not conscript citizen soldiers, but their involvement is still regularly presented as duty. The duty aspect of citizenship is therefore coloured by military connotations.

We rarely evoke the other ways that citizenship implies duty, for example the view of citizens' duty developed by Renan (1882). He held that citizenship is a daily plebiscite, a daily renewing of the agreement to uphold the values of the state. However, this aspect of national duty is salient in naturalisation and particularly evident in the new citizenship tests. In the tests there is an attempt to define values and then seek adherence to them. Opponents of Marshall had argued that too much insistence on rights makes for a passive, receptive citizenship (Stråth, 2003). It was likely that there would be a backlash in which the questions of restricting who should have these rights and how they should pay for them in duties would return to the centre stage. Citizenship tests can perhaps be seen as a small part of this backlash. In this paper we investigate the situation in Australia and the UK, two countries where citizenship testing has recently been expanded. These two countries are not exceptional: citizenship tests have been adopted as a means of regulating access to citizenship in a number of states, including The Netherlands, Germany, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Denmark, Slovenia, and Bulgaria.

Testing for citizenship

Governments, policy-makers, and test developers in European and non-European countries have argued for the administration of language tests to citizenship applicants on a number of grounds. First, that the tests are a means of managing migration; second, that they offer a means of ensuring social cohesion in the face of increased immigration; third, they offer migrants the means by which they may effectively integrate; fourth, they contribute to national unity.

The requirement that newcomers demonstrate their willingness to jump through citizenship test hoops before gaining citizenship may be in direct relationship with the state's diminishing control of the defining variables which makes it a nation state. It may well be that the post national situation into which we seem to be slowly slipping is the very trigger for these nation building endeavours. Can tests be seen as part of a profound desire to shore up a system that is changing? To continue to require new citizens to be coached as if they were joining the homogenous monolithic nation state system of the past seems to be an exercise of nation state power simply because naturalisation is an area where the nation does still have sovereign power.

To believe that it is worthwhile to induct new citizens into the nation by testing presupposes a situation where the nation state provides the structure for the political, economic and social worlds. This is the crux of the matter: whether we are still in a situation where it makes sense to persist with nation building or whether the movement and mixing of peoples, the cosmopolitan nature of many societies and the reconfiguration of political and economic power make this endeavour anachronistic and ultimately futile. On the one hand, citizenship has proved to be one of the bastions of the nation state system and an area in which national governments have retained power. On the other hand, citizenship has been instantiated in the nation state system (Dobson 2006) and this system of political organisation appears to be changing. How will citizenship remain unchanged? All enquiry in this area needs to take the *longue durée* perspective and be informed by a consideration of how the national may be becoming the post-national.

Language testing for citizenship in the UK

The *Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009* (Home Office 2009a) reformed the processes of immigration and citizenship application in the UK. This legislation introduced a three-stage process for immigrants, who would move through Stage 1: Temporary Residence, to Stage 2: Probationary Citizenship, and to Stage 3: Citizenship or Permanent Residence. The key feature of the reformed system is that it aims to increase community cohesion by ensuring all migrants ‘earn’ the right to citizenship and asks migrants to demonstrate their commitment to the UK by playing an active part in the community. One of the means by which ‘points’ may be ‘earned’ is through demonstration of a level of English language proficiency. In August 2009 the British government introduced a consultation document in which it proposed “to introduce a new test in the earned citizenship architecture, to determine who will be allowed to proceed along the path to settlement” (Home Office 2009b). The consultation document argues that:

an understanding of English language and our democratic traditions not only aids integration it also provide wider benefits to the migrants and society; help them work, contribute and participate in society

Here understanding English appears to be related to democracy; it is also beneficial to migrants, and to everyone else in society. The consultation document extends the present language testing regime by proposing that there will now be two points at which English language proficiency is tested: at the point of application to move from Stage 1 to Stage 2, and at the point of application to move from Stage 2 to Stage 3. The rationale for this is that while people need practical information when they are recent arrivals to the UK, as they progress on their journey to citizenship their needs will change and evolve. The test at the point of application for Citizenship or Permanent Residence will be “more challenging” than the present ‘Life in the UK’ test, and at a “higher standard of English”. Migrants who are ineligible or fail to qualify for probationary citizenship are expected to leave the UK. In addition, the consultation document announces a further extension to the language testing regime, confirming the introduction in 2011 (despite the fact that “proposals for such a requirement received a mixed response” in a previous consultation) of a pre-entry English test for marriage visa applicants. The rationale for this policy is that it will be an important mechanism for promoting integration:

we believe there are clear benefits to this approach: improving employment chances for spouses who have access to the labour market; raising awareness of the importance of

speaking English; and helping prepare spouses for the English tests they will need to pass to obtain probationary citizenship. A pre-entry English requirement will also lead to reduction in the costs to the taxpayer of translation services for non-English speakers as more spouses speak English on arrival in the UK

This further extension to the language testing regime is held to be good for integration, good for spouses of existing citizens, and good for the taxpayer. It is worth noting that for this group of applicants there will now be three points at which their English language proficiency is tested, and three levels of English (CEFR A1, B1, and “higher”). An alternative route to citizenship application applies to those whose competence in English is below English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Entry 3 level. These candidates can demonstrate that they have progressed from one ESOL level to the next on a language course that incorporates specially commissioned citizenship materials about life in the UK. For this group too the government proposes an extension to the English language requirement, arguing that those people taking the “ESOL with Citizenship” route “should be asked to show further progress when they apply for British citizenship, beyond language progression demonstrated at probationary citizenship stage”. Here too a two-stage testing regime is introduced, because “greater language competence could lead to better employment opportunities, better interaction with UK society and an opportunity to explore topics in which they are interested in greater depth”.

Language testing for citizenship in Australia

The *Australian Citizenship Amendment (Citizenship Testing) Bill 2007* was introduced into Parliament on 30 May 2007 and was passed by Parliament on 12 September 2007. The citizenship test was implemented on 1 October 2007. Successful completion of the citizenship test is the only way people applying for citizenship by conferral under general eligibility criteria are able to demonstrate they meet the legislative requirement of “possessing a basic knowledge of the English language”. The test questions are based on information in the resource book, *Australian Citizenship, Our Common Bond*. As in the UK, the citizenship test is computer based. It consists of 20 multiple choice questions, and replaces the oral test. In response to public

criticism of aspects of the test, the Australian Citizenship Test Review (2008) found that ‘the present test is flawed, intimidating to some and discriminatory’, and ‘needs substantial reform’ (2008:3). The Australian Government responded to the review by launching a revised citizenship test in October 2009. It has distanced itself from its earlier claims that the Citizenship Test ‘promotes social cohesion’ and now focuses on its role in enabling the individual. The booklet states that the test is “designed to assess whether you have a basic knowledge of the English language. English is our national language. Communicating in English helps you to play a more active role in Australian society” (p.4). The Review also recommended that alternative education pathways need to be established for different categories of people seeking citizenship, and that applicants should be able to undertake a Citizenship Education Program. In response, the Government is developing ‘a citizenship course that will provide an alternative pathway to citizenship for refugees and disadvantaged or vulnerable migrants’, although eligibility for the course will be restricted to ‘people who understand English but whose literacy skills will never be sufficient to allow them to sit and pass a formal computer-based test’. This course is relatively brief (about 20 hours of tuition) and became available in late 2009. These courses, like “ESOL with citizenship” courses in UK are currently under-investigated, and there is a present need for studies which examine the assumption that ‘language with citizenship’ courses straightforwardly lead to the knowledge and skills which are required by and of new citizens.

Why tests? Why now?

It is only in recent times that a shift has started to occur in some European countries and beyond towards stricter conditions for people wanting to enter, settle, or apply for citizenship (Extra et al 2009; Hogan-Brun et al 2009; Shohamy and McNamara 2009; Van Avermaet 2009). The rapid expansion of language testing regimes has occurred at the same time as an increase in the movement of people across territories. Governments appear to have become anxious about social cohesion, and have emphasized the need to integrate new arrivals as quickly as possible. The argument for language tests is an easy one to sell to the electorate - it is apparent common-sense that everyone should be able to speak a common language, and that a means of ensuring this happens is to require prospective citizens and long-term residents to take a test.

What can we learn from the cases of the UK and Australia in understanding the expansion of language testing for citizenship? First, they are predicated on the notion that testing leads to proficiency. Shohamy (2009: 51) reviews a wide range of research on language testing and concludes that while language tests may be used as gate-keeping devices to keep out unwanted groups, “they often have a negative impact on learning and lead to narrowing the curriculum and knowledge”. The tests require standard criteria of correctness, and present unrealistic linguistic goals and criteria detached from the ways in which second language adult learners use new languages. Shohamy concludes that “The use of ‘tests’ as a condition of citizenship therefore does not represent a fair criterion for deciding membership” (52). Shohamy suggests in fact that in the language testing for citizenship regime knowledge of language has “turned into a symbolic act of belonging to the nation” (2009: 52). McNamara also reviews the arguments for language tests, and comes to a similar finding, concluding that “the motivation for the inclusion of a language requirement is not primarily about the *communicative* but about the *symbolic* function of language” (2009: 158). McNamara considers that the primary function of the language test is not the welfare of immigrants, but the expression of an ideology associating language use with cultural values. Shohamy argues that language tests require immigrants to symbolically demonstrate their belonging and loyalty to the state. That is, while the explicit rationale for language testing is that such a regime enables migrants to quickly learn the language of the host nation, language tests constitute a means of testing the loyalty and commitment of potential citizens. This echoes both the philosophy and practice of 19th century and early 20th century nation building!

Hogan-Brun et al summarise extensive research on language testing for citizenship and conclude that the long-standing relationship between language and nation is alive and well in the discourse of citizenship testing regimes. Apparently inclusive in its arguments for social cohesion and integration, it is a discourse which insists on the majority language as the language of the nation. Hogan-Brun et al find that the underlying purpose of this discourse “is to re-assert an idea of the integrity of the nation rooted in stable monolingualism, rather than addressing the perceived challenges of a supposedly divisive multilingualism” (2009: 11). They further conclude that this

contemporary manifestation of linguistic nationalism operates as a defensive reaction to the 21st century emergence of transnational and cosmopolitan communities:

Many national governments are, then, claiming the right to impose proficiency in a ‘national’ language precisely as a form of resistance to the loss of national sovereignty in the face of perceived competition from other national languages brought by migrant groups (2009: 11)

The authors argue that this represents an attempt by governments to preserve a public that will remain strong and intact only so long as it is conceived as inherently monoglot. Van Avermaet (2009) reviews language testing regimes in European countries and concludes that language policy is often “two-sided” (21) – on the one hand, in international contexts, governments argue in favour of the added value of multilingualism, while at the same time, at the national level, demanding the use of one national language (e.g France in the European Union).

These political arguments are not simply about language. Rather, they are emblematic of debates about immigration and multiculturalism. They are arguments not about minority languages but about the speakers of those languages. They are also arguments about multilingual, multicultural, and pluralistic societies, and about the power and reach of the nation. As the security and unity of the nation has traditionally been based on its homogeneity, so the new diversity constitutes a threat to the nation. One means of shoring up the nation’s defences against diversity is to require linguistic unification. Debates about multilingualism have become a means of constructing social difference, as the privileging of national languages above minority languages is ever more insistently imposed. Language testing regimes are based on the notion that when all are able to demonstrate proficiency in the national language, it will be possible to achieve national unity and a sense of common belonging. That is, those who have not yet achieved a certain level of proficiency constitute a threat to social cohesion. Furthermore, language testing regimes are gatekeepers designed to welcome the immigrants the state wants (those educated to be able to pass the test and rich enough to pay for it) and to discourage those the state wishes to keep out (the illiterate and those unable to fund the process). Citizenship testing does seem to be playing a role in maintaining Fortress Europe.

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