

Unwelcome Home: Managing Migration and Constructing Citizenship

Mujina Kaindama

Department of Law

Housing has become a contentious fault line for migration in the UK. In 2012 when then Home Secretary Theresa May announced a new approach to immigration designed to make Britain a “really hostile environment” for illegal immigrants, she marked a shift from central government immigration enforcement to reliance on indirect immigration control. Thus, the frontlines of border control became everyday social interactions, including accessing a doctor, opening a bank account, applying for a job or crucially for this study – finding housing.

In its simplest form migration entails leaving home. Whether home is understood as a house or local community. Setting up a new home however temporary, for migrants necessitates a navigation of notions of home, identity and

belonging. With landlords now required to verify immigration status to ensure tenants have the Right to Rent or risk facing a fine, discrimination against foreigners and British citizens, from black and ethnic minority communities is rampant. Through an ethnography of private renting organisation Advice4Renters’ work with low-income migrants, this research investigates how differing conceptions of the citizen, migrant and the purpose of law affect the navigation of the societal borders of solidarity and integration.

For individuals to make claims on a state legal system, it is found that they must first conceive of themselves as part of the community. In this context citizenship takes on a social status and legal subjectivity is linked to a sense of self as a member of the national community.