

A Test that Both Fixes and Mobilises

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I've not really relaxed for the entire flight across the pond. I know my ninety-minute layover at JFK is not enough time to make my connecting flight to Columbus. I've researched my course of actions thoroughly online to make my transfer as smooth as possible. I'll need to clear immigration and customs at Terminal 4, and then I'll need to hand over my baggage at Delta's transfer check-in counter, before taking the Air Train over to Terminal 2, where I'll need to clear security and then run onto my flight as its gate is about to close, before landing in a heap onto my seat. I shall then order a glass of wine and weep with relief. I reason with myself that despite JFK's notoriously long passport control queues, surely Delta wouldn't have let me buy this ticket if the transfer *wasn't* feasible. And so, my faith in human reason keeps me going through my flight from London to New York. I also watch *Wonder Woman* for the second time.

Much to my utter relief my flight arrives thirty minutes early. I am out of the aircraft in ten minutes, leg it over to passport control and am waved into the queue for 'returning ESTA travelers', which is moving quickly towards the automated machines. I am hopeful this will be quick as the machines have always worked for me during past visits to the US. Alas, this time, like everyone else at the machines, my printed slip appears with a huge cross over it. I now must join the queue that is snaking across the entire terminal and moving e-v-e-r-s-o-s-s-l-o-w-l-y, what feels like a centimeter every 15 minute or so. A cynical British man behind me in the queue tells me 'that's it, I think you're fucked.' I stand in this queue texting my daughter in the UK, who keeps me grounded and consoled. But I am also feeling increasingly nauseous. I see an immigration officer walk by, an American South Asian man, who is performing his maintenance of bodily order in the queues at this nation's border control with much care. I walk up to him and explain my circumstances. He spots my UK passport and see a flicker of change in his eyes. He decides to help me after checking my boarding pass for the next flight. He moves me to the front of the queue. I wait for another twenty minutes, but then I am through. I have been allowed to enter the land of the free. The rest follows exactly as I have rehearsed it in my head, and due to the continued kindness of a series of JFK personnel, all people of colour, I make my Columbus flight with five minutes to spare before the gate closes.

I buy myself that glass of wine to calm my adrenaline on this final leg of my journey. I can't help but accept the mobility and credibility lent by my red British passport, and am certain that my hairy transfer would not even have transpired on my previous blue Indian passport. Ten years ago, as part of naturalising as a UK citizen, I sat the Life in the UK test to demonstrate my understanding of constitutes living within British borders. Ten years later, it is only when I am sitting on that flight to Columbus, exhausted and relieved at once to have made it, that the test's actual relevance strikes me. It seems that it wasn't so much about demonstrating my knowledge of constitutes life within the UK, as it was about granting me the license to cross borders *beyond* the UK, aided by the credibility of the red British passport. While I have always theoretically known this, almost a decade later on this occasion I experience the realisation that alongside granting me a permanent Life in the UK, passing that test sanctioned me the mobility to move across borders in ways than I had never been allowed to before as an Indian citizen. I experience this in an intrinsically embodied way. Life in the UK has thus simultaneously enabled me a Life Beyond the UK in ways that I both benefit from and feel extreme discomfort about, every time I travel.

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