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Immigrant meanings of citizenship: mobility, stability, and recognition

Simon Roland Birkvad

Institute for Social Research, Oslo, Norway

ABSTRACT

Based on interviews with 21 immigrants in Norway, including both naturalized citizens and ‘denizens’, this article addresses immigrant meanings of citizenship and naturalization. The findings show that the interviewees attributed three meanings to citizenship. First, Norwegian citizenship served as a powerful means of spatial *mobility*, thereby facilitating transnational connections. Second, citizenship signified a legal *stability* that may guard precarious immigrants against ‘liminal legality’, i.e. enduring legal uncertainty. Third, citizenship was conceptualized as a formal *recognition* of equality and belonging, although ‘race’ and ethnicity persisted as salient markers of inequality and alienage. The article contributes empirically to the growing literature on the experiencing side of citizenship and naturalization by delineating what citizenship means to different groups, and to whom it matters the most. Theoretically, it contributes by demonstrating that citizenship acquisition may not only be strategic, but also rooted in needs of symbolic sanctioning of equality and belonging, particularly important to individuals debarred from naturalization.

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Introduction

Citizenship denotes formal status in a nation-state, grants individuals with equal rights and duties within the citizenry, and symbolizes membership in the collective identity of the nation (Joppke 2007). In the wake of increasing political attention to immigration to Western societies, scholars have studied structures and policies that regulate inclusion and exclusion into the nation-state through citizenship laws (e.g. Brubaker 1992; Soysal 1994). The dominance of such ‘top-down’ analyses, however, left a blind spot in the literature, namely how ‘ordinary people’, including immigrants, make sense of citizenship (Joppke 2007; Miller-Idriss 2006). In short, citizenship scholars tended to talk *about* rather than *with* immigrants (Leitner and Ehrkamp 2006).

In the past 10–15 years, however, a growing body of research addressing how immigrants experience, value and attribute meaning to citizenship and naturalization has emerged to fill this lacuna. In-depth qualitative research has demonstrated that immigrants’ decisions to naturalize often are made on ‘strategic’, ‘instrumental’ (Harpaz and Mateos 2018) and ‘pragmatic’ (Mavroudi 2008) grounds. Strategic naturalization is motivated by

desires to gain material benefits, such as mobility rights and protection against deportation, while decoupling it from sentiments of identity and belonging, which are grounded elsewhere (Brettell 2006; Gálvez 2013; Gilbertson and Singer 2003; Golash-Boza 2016; Leuchter 2014). Other studies, however, have documented that citizenship acquisition also may be connected to symbolic and emotional sentiments of national identity and belonging (Erdal, Doeland, and Tellander 2018; Pogonyi 2018; Fein and Straughn 2014), in which policy context seem to influence immigrants' motivation to naturalize (Aptekar 2016).

This article asks how immigrants in Norway, including both naturalized citizens and permanent residents holding foreign citizenship ('denizens'), experience, value and attribute meaning to citizenship and naturalization.¹ The study is based on interviews with 21 foreign-born individuals originating from Afghanistan, Somalia and Russia, holding either Norwegian, foreign or dual citizenship. In the analysis, I draw on a broad range of insights from mobility and deportation studies (i.a. de Genova and Peutz 2010; Mau 2010; Mau et al. 2015), legal ethnography (Chacon 2015; Menjivar 2006) and recognition theory (Honneth 1995; Mouritsen 2012) to illuminate immigrant meanings of citizenship.

The findings show that the interviewees attributed three meanings to citizenship, albeit these meanings were valued differently, depending on migration trajectory, access to other citizenship(s), and 'race' and ethnicity. First, Norwegian citizenship was perceived as a powerful means of mobility. By providing visa-free access to most countries in the world, acquisition of Norwegian citizenship enabled the interviewees maintain and strengthen transnational bonds. Second, to some of the denizens, citizenship signified a stable legal status that would guard them against 'liminal legality' (Menjivar 2006), a condition characterized by enduring uncertainty and mental anguish about one's legal status. Lastly, citizenship acquisition was conceptualized as a recognition of equality. Gaining full rights and receiving formal recognition was perceived as important in producing a sense of equality and belonging. Naturalization, however, does not necessarily translate into full membership and equality with the majority population. As some of the naturalized citizens underlined, 'race' and ethnicity remained salient markers of inequality and alienation, rendering their formal citizenship less relevant.

Based on a heterogeneous sample of immigrants, in terms of country of origin, migration trajectory, legal status (naturalized citizens/denizens), 'race' and ethnicity, this study contributes *empirically* to the growing literature on the 'experiencing side' (Bassel, Monforte, and Khan 2018) of citizenship and naturalization by exploring sense-making among different groups of immigrants. *Theoretically*, it contributes by showing that decisions to naturalize are not exclusively driven by 'strategic' deliberations. Besides gaining material benefits, naturalization can also be motivated by a symbolic need to belong in the nation-state. This may be particularly important to visible minorities who do not fulfil the requirements for naturalization and thereby lack full rights.

I start out by discussing Norway's citizenship regime. Then, I describe the data and methods used in the study, with particular emphasis on sample criteria and characteristics. Further, I conduct a broad (but non-exhaustive) survey of empirical studies and theoretical perspectives that theorizes immigrant meanings of citizenship. The subsequent analysis delineates three meanings of citizenship: mobility, stability, and recognition. The article concludes with a summary of the findings, in which I highlight group differences, and discuss the findings in light of the literature on 'strategic' citizenship.

The Norwegian citizenship regime

Norwegian citizenship gives rights and duties. Citizenship gives a right to a Norwegian passport; it confers unconditional right to live and work in Norway, and provides protection against deportation from the country. Moreover, only citizens can vote in general elections and run for election as a Member of Parliament, and acquire certain public positions. Military service is practically the only duty inhered in citizenship (Brochmann 2013).

There are three basic modes of acquiring citizenship in Norway: by birth (including adoption), by declaration and by application (naturalization). Citizenship acquisition by *birth* is based on the *jus sanguinis* principle, i.e. acquisition by descent, whereby a child automatically become a citizen if one of the parents hold Norwegian citizenship. Citizenship by *declaration* applies to Nordic citizens and former Norwegian citizens. Submitting a declaration is free of charge. Declarants must fulfil requirements of age, residency (seven years), good conduct and renunciation of former citizenship. Non-Nordic citizens are designated to submit an application for naturalization, where stricter requirements and a fee of 3700 NOK (328 Euros) applies. Applicants must fulfil requirements of identity documentation, age, period of residence (seven years), possession of a permanent residence permit, renunciation of former citizenship, good conduct, language training and tests in Norwegian and social studies (Midtbøen, Birkvad, and Erdal 2018). In a Scandinavian context, Norway is positioned somewhere between restrictive Denmark and liberal Sweden, although moving in a restrictive direction (Midtbøen 2015; Jensen, Fernández, and Brochmann 2017).

The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (*Utlendingsdirektoratet*, henceforth UDI) is responsible for processing all declarations and applications for citizenship. UDI also has the power to revoke citizenship, and may do so on two grounds.² First, citizenship may be revoked if a person has not renounced their former citizenship by a set deadline (as a logical consequence of the single citizenship policy). Second, if a person intentionally has furnished incorrect information or withheld information that was decisive for granting citizenship, he or she can be denaturalized, also if this makes the person stateless. No temporal restrictions on citizenship revocations exist, unlike most other European countries that provide for this legal provision (Midtbøen, Birkvad, and Erdal 2018). In practice, this means that UDI can revoke citizenship irrespective of how much time has passed since it was granted. This legal provision has been a point of controversy in the Norwegian public debate, foregrounded by a rising number of citizenship revocations in recent years.

As the legislative regime indicates, access to Norwegian citizenship is based on blood ties/descent and country of origin. The *jus sanguinis* principle is not explicitly racially defined, but, as Erdal and colleagues argue (2018, 708), ‘it is based on blood ties, on descent, and therefore implicitly has sanctioned a particular racial – as well as ethnocultural – vision of the nation’. The mode of citizenship by declaration, whereby easy access is granted exclusively to Nordic citizens, is also premised on the idea that ‘ethno-culturally close Nordic brothers’ belong more ‘than alien, ‘non-Nordic’, others’ (Wickström 2016). Lastly, revocation of residence permits and citizenship primarily targets naturalized citizens originating from particular countries, such as Afghanistan and Somalia (Brekke, Grønningsæter, and Larsen 2018), groups that face suspicion for claiming protection and citizenship on false grounds. It is likely that differential access

to citizenship (in terms of acquisition and the possibility of retaining it), and thereby national membership, influence how the status is valued between different immigrant groups.

Theorizing immigrant meanings of citizenship

Statistical studies of naturalization have shown that immigrants from medium- or under-developed countries of origin are more likely to naturalize than immigrants from highly developed countries, as the perceived pay-off, in terms of rights and benefits, are greater (Vink, Prokic-Breuer, and Dronkers 2013). In line with these statistical findings, in-depth, qualitative studies have demonstrated that immigrants tend to frame citizenship acquisition in their country of residence as ‘strategic’, ‘instrumental’ (Harpaz and Mateos 2018) or ‘pragmatic’ (Mavroudi 2008). Harpaz and Mateos (2018, 2) argue that ‘the global hierarchy of nationalities provides the context within which individuals pursue a second citizenship’. The predominant motivation for non-Western immigrants to seek a second citizenship, they contend, is to gain material benefits, such as mobility rights, a sense of security or a higher social status.

Global mobility is arguably *the* greatest material benefit of acquiring a citizenship in a Western country (Harpaz and Mateos 2018). Securitization post 9/11, concerns about visa over-stayers and irregular migration, and anxieties over the influx of ‘bogus’ asylum seekers have led to comprehensive efforts to control mobility in Western states (Coutin 2015; de Genova and Peutz 2010; Mau 2010). Visa policies regulate mobility from afar by issuing visas to wanted travellers, while denying them to unwanted ones, and thereby serve as an efficient system of ‘selective border control’. Citizens of rich democracies are exempted from visa restrictions, enjoying ‘generalized trust’ by virtue of their citizenship status. Conversely, citizens of ‘suspect countries’ (Shamir 2005), i.e. emigration-prone, poor and undemocratic states, are subject to comprehensive, individual measures. This divide between citizens of the ‘Global North’ and the ‘Global South’, results in ‘transnational inequalities’, i.e. differential abilities to move across international space (Mau 2010). Obtaining a passport in the ‘Global North’ therefore constitutes an important motivation to naturalize (Coutin 2010; Gálvez 2013; Leitner and Ehrkamp 2006; Leuchter 2014).

Research from the US has also shown that citizenship is valued highly due to the protection it offers against deportation, particularly salient in restrictive immigration policy climates (Aptekar 2016; Gilbertson and Singer 2003; Golash-Boza 2016). The right to *genuine* permanent residence remains a privilege of citizens, distinguishing them from settled non-citizens (Anderson, Gibney, and Paoletti 2011; Mouritsen 2012), which ultimately are ‘deportable’ (de Genova 2002).

Settled non-citizens’ is, however, a heterogeneous group, as immigration policies confer a wide range of legal statuses with varying levels of protection (Abrego and Lakhani 2015). ‘Liminal legality’ (Menjívar 2006) captures the grey area between undocumented and documented immigration categories. Liminal legality is a tenuous legal position with more protection than undocumented status, yet stopping short of the stability offered by permanent residency and citizenship (Abrego and Lakhani 2015; Menjívar 2006). The liminal state can serve as a freeing and empowering social transformation, but if it extends indefinitely, it may produce enduring uncertainty and anxiety. Chacon, however, argues that liminal legality is not inherently tied to a *marginal* legal status, as Menjívar’s case study

implies. Entire immigrant communities may experience instability, regardless of legal status of individual members, because of 'governance strategies designed to regulate, monitor, and (where possible) banish) its liminal legal subjects' (2015, 730).

The literature on dual citizenship practices and strategic citizenship suggests that immigrants seek citizenship in their country of residence primarily to gain material benefits, while notions of identity, national and cultural belonging remain rooted in birth citizenship (Brettell 2006; Leuchter 2014; Mavroudi 2008; Yanasmayan 2015). Yet, it may be argued that the legal *recognition* inherent in naturalization is vital in shaping sentiments of equality and belonging (Mouritsen 2012). T.H. Marshall characterized citizenship as 'a kind of basic human equality associated with the concept of full membership of a community' (Marshall and Bottomore 1992, 6). Citizenship, according to Marshall, works as an inclusionary institution that ensures every member of society equal rights, irrespective of social class. Along the same lines, Honneth (1995) argues that having full rights is a precondition to rank ourselves as equal with other members of society. The status itself arguably makes citizenship desirable as a symbolic marker of equality and belonging. Conversely, citizenship is externally exclusive to those who do not possess the status (Brubaker 1992). Deprivation of full rights may then lead to sentiments of inequality and second-class membership.

Marshall's theory has, however, been criticized for equating citizenship with full membership, and thereby disregarding 'race', ethnicity and religion as persisting markers of structural inequality (Bloemraad, Korteweg, and Yurdakul 2008). National membership is not only governed by the state from above, but also between ordinary people, employing tacit understandings of belonging (Brubaker 2010). Visible and audible traits such as 'race', ethnicity, religion and accent may supersede formal citizenship in daily negotiations over national membership (Bloemraad and Sheares 2017; Lynnebakke and Fangen 2011; Erdal, Doeland, and Tellander 2018). Thus, acts of *social* recognition (and misrecognition), taking place in the horizontal sphere of citizenship between majority and minorities, also shapes immigrants' sense of equality, belonging and membership (cf. Blackwood, Hopkins, and Stephen Reicher 2015).

This (non-exhaustive) literature review indicates that acquisition of citizenship may on the one hand be material or strategic (for instance, seeking to maximize global mobility and protection against deportation), and, on the other hand, motivated by desires to be formally recognized as members of the nation-state. A survey among immigrants in Norway indeed corroborates this multi-layered picture: the respondents' main reasons for naturalizing was to feel a greater sense of belonging to Norway, to improve their prospects in Norwegian society, and to ease international travel (Pettersen 2017). As some scholars have argued (e.g. Bassel, Monforte, and Khan 2018; Pogonyi 2018), and as the findings in this study supports, material meanings of citizenship may exist alongside emotional and symbolic ones.

Data and methods

The study is based on interviews with 21 immigrants in Norway. Eighteen participants were interviewed individually and three participants in a focus group. The sample construction was guided by three criteria: Citizenship status, years of residence, and country of origin.

First, I wanted to interview both immigrants who have naturalized *and* permanently settled immigrants holding *foreign* citizenship. Immigrants in the latter category, referred to as ‘denizens’ (Hammar 1990), held permanent residence permits, which according to the UDI (The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration 2018a) gives them a right to ‘live and work in Norway indefinitely’ and ‘extra protection against expulsion’. By including denizens, who presumably are eligible to naturalize, but have not done so – rather than focusing on naturalized citizens alone – gives a more complete picture of what citizenship means to immigrants (Aptekar 2016). The *second* criterion was therefore a minimum of *seven years of residence time* in Norway, thereby excluding immigrants who did not meet the residence requirement.

Third, I focused on immigrants from *countries of origin* that exhibit a high interest in naturalization. For this purpose, I chose Afghan, Somali and Russian immigrants, as they have been among the top ten groups in terms of annual naturalizations in recent years (Pettersen 2012; Statistics Norway 2017). In terms of migration trajectory and access to other citizenship(s), however, these three groups are significantly different. Russian immigrants are predominantly work migrants already in possession of a relatively valuable, European passport. On the other hand, nearly all Afghan and Somali immigrants come to Norway as refugees or family migrants from states with poorly functioning bureaucracies, making it difficult to attain an Afghan and Somali passport at all. Hence, they lack mobility rights and are *de facto* stateless outside Norway. This may partly explain why the naturalization rate among refugees are much higher than among work migrants (Pettersen 2012). In general, Afghan and Somali immigrants also differ from the Russians by being ‘visible’ minorities in terms of ‘race’, ethnicity and religion, thus to a stronger degree deviating from predominant ideas of ‘what a [Norwegian] national looks like’ (Antonsich 2018).

The final sample consists of twelve naturalized citizens (three originating from Afghanistan, three from Russia and six from Somalia), and nine denizens (three from each country of origin). Notably, three interviewees (two Russians and one Afghan) carried dual citizenship, and were thus exempted from the general requirement of renouncing former citizenship(s) in order to acquire Norwegian citizenship (because of the single citizenship policy). The residence time in Norway spanned from eight to 29 years, and the sample was nearly gender-balanced (comprising eleven men and ten women). The Afghan and Somali interviewees came to Norway as refugees and family migrants, while the Russian interviewees’ expressed purpose to settle in Norway was to study or work (except for one asylum seeker from Chechnya).

Three of the Somali interviewees faced possible revocation of their Norwegian citizenship because of alleged ‘asylum fraud’. UDI suspected the Somalis of furnishing incorrect information about their identities to obtain asylum, residence permits and ultimately Norwegian citizenship. Their situation, facing possible denaturalization and statelessness, underscores the fundamental role of citizenship in yielding security or insecurity in individual lives (Erdal, Doeland, and Tellander 2018), a point I will delve further into in the analysis.

Various strategies were used to recruit interviewees. I contacted different immigrant organizations, posted requests on ‘ethnically’ based Facebook groups, utilized my personal network, and eventually used the ‘snowballing’ method. The interviews took place in the greater Oslo region between September and December 2016. Interview questions centred

on reasons to naturalize or refrain, perceptions of the Norwegian citizenship legislation and possible (dis)connections between citizenship, belonging and national identity.

The interviews were subsequently transcribed and coded in Hyperresearch. Initially, I coded the material deductively according to predetermined categories derived from the interview guide. To check the validity of the preliminary findings, I also conducted an inductive coding. The aim of the second coding was to capture what the interviewees actually *say* rather than what they talk *about* (Tjora 2017). Using this technique, 500 codes were generated, and these were subsequently compartmentalized into 20 different ‘code groups’. Ultimately, I boiled these groups down to three analytical categories that form the basis of the analysis: mobility, stability and recognition. The categories were developed through a continuous interplay between data and theoretical perspectives.

Do the experiences, attitudes and meanings of citizenship in this study reflect the general views of immigrants in Norway? Selecting groups who tend to naturalize in high numbers limits the possibility of generalizing (in a non-statistical sense) the findings to immigrants in general. Previous research has shown that citizenship in the country of residence seems to matter less to immigrants from developed, Western countries since they already hold valuable citizenships (Bevelander et al. 2015; Bloemraad and Sheares 2017; Vink, Prokic-Breuer, and Dronkers 2013). Furthermore, most of the denizens interviewed were not denizens by *choice* but by *constraint*; they wanted to naturalize but were legally ineligible because of insufficient identity documentation (a requirement to naturalize). The findings may thus not be transferrable to Western immigrants, and/or individuals who *opt* not to naturalize. Nevertheless, I argue that the heterogeneous sample elucidates both universal and group-specific perceptions of citizenship. Group differences, in terms of migration trajectory, ethnicity, ‘race’, alongside policy context, seem to influence the degree to which the three meanings of citizenship identified – mobility, stability and recognition – are valued.

Mobility

Increased spatial mobility was central in all interviewees’ claim to Norwegian citizenship, regardless of their country of origin. Norwegian citizenship was valued highly because of its promise of eased international travel and thereby facilitation of transnational bonds. Holders of the Norwegian passport enjoy visa-free access to 160 countries throughout the globe (Passport Index 2018). The *degree* to which the Norwegian *passport* was valued, however, varied between the interviewees originating from Russia on the one hand, and those originating from Afghanistan and Somalia on the other hand.

The Russian citizens already enjoyed a certain degree of travel freedom, being able to travel visa-free to 113 countries in the world. Nevertheless, they still valued what they conceptualized as a ‘mobility bonus’ of naturalization. Igor, a citizen of both Norway and Russia, stated the main reason for his decision to naturalize was: ‘(...) the freedom to travel’.³ The Norwegian passport would ‘open the world’ to him, as he put it. Similarly, Natasha said, ‘(...) then I started travelling a lot, and it’s much easier to travel with a Norwegian passport, then you don’t need visa in most countries’. The statements from Igor and Natasha reflected a pattern among the Russian interviewees to equate the *citizenship* institution – *en bloc* – with the Norwegian *passport* as merely a travel document (cf. Leuchter 2014).

While the Russian interviewees already held a valuable passport in a global context, the Afghan and Somali interviewees did not. Somali citizens have visa-free access to 33 countries, while Afghan citizens only 25 – ranking these passports in the bottom five in the Passport Index (2018). As citizens of fragile states with poorly functioning state administrations, some of the interviewees did not have a passport, let alone a valid travel document, when they arrived in Norway. To travel at all, they were dependent on obtaining a Norwegian passport. Muhammed, a naturalized Norwegian citizen, emphasized the vast difference between a Somali and a Norwegian passport in terms of global mobility:

If I had a Somali passport (...) It is quite limited where I can travel and experience the world. With a Norwegian passport, I can travel anywhere. If I apply for visa in another country, I only get it because I have a Norwegian passport (...) In addition to getting a travel document I got one that is totally up there [i.e. a highly ranked passport in a global scale].

Muhammed rightly pointed out that the Norwegian passport is not only a valid travel document, but also something that would give him access to virtually every corner of the globe.

Easing visits to their countries of origin, and thereby nourishing transnational bonds, was important to the Afghan and Somali interviewees' need for increased mobility. The Afghan and Somali denizens, who lacked passports or other valid travel documents, faced a range of mobility constraints, which inhibited visits to their countries of origin. To be able to travel to Afghanistan or Somalia, they were reliant on UDI to issue a Norwegian 'immigrant's passport' for a single journey. However, only exceptional cases, such as funerals or family illness, qualify for granting immigrant's passport for travels to the country of origin (The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration 2018b). Yusuf therefore considered himself lucky, as UDI had granted him two journeys to Somalia during the past few years. He, however, pointed out another restriction that inhibited denizens from travelling to Somalia; corrupt visa systems in African countries:

You can't travel if you don't have [Norwegian] citizenship. I applied several times for a visa in Kenya and Uganda. I was rejected. (...) if you [really] need visa, you have to double the amount.

Facilitating visits to Somalia was by Yusuf described as a strenuous affair without Norwegian citizenship. Obtaining a visa entailed financial costs – through formal and informal channels – but with no guarantees of acquiring it.

In addition to UDI's travel restrictions and arbitrary visa policies, Afghan and Somali citizens faced a third mobility constraint: Selective border controls. Holders of EU-passports go through an automated gate, while non-EU citizens are subject to individual scrutiny and control. Saad, a Somali citizen, underscored the difficulties of crossing international borders as a non-EU citizen:

I have been here [in Norway] longer than them [Norwegian-Somalis holding Norwegian passports], but they go to EU passport control, that's very easy. They just put their passport like this [in the machine] and the doors open automatically. When I get there, the doors close. They ask me many questions because they think that I've just been here two or three years or one year (...) I sat at Heathrow for four hours. They checked me because of that passport [immigrant's visa passport]. (...) they took my fingerprints because they believed I was seeking asylum in England.

Of course, Saad's experiences may reflect the process of racial profiling, in which 'racialized others', particularly Muslims, are subject to in European airports – regardless of passports held (cf. Blackwood, Hopkins, and Stephen Reicher 2015). However, Saad here suggests that the distinction between 'safe' and 'risky' travellers were drawn on the basis of *citizenship* (cf. Shamir 2005). Unlike his Somali acquaintances holding Norwegian passports, who passed the border control with a simple swipe in the machine, Saad was held back for several hours, subjected to security and control measures, treated as a potential asylum seeker. The closing of the automated passport gates thus both symbolized and materialized Saad's lack of formal membership in Norway.

The differential travel restrictions made up a hierarchy of mobility rights between the interviewees. Naturalized Norwegian citizens were positioned on top of the hierarchy, enjoying unrestricted access to most countries in the world, countries of origin included. Second, Russian citizens were able to travel visa-free to most countries in the world, naturally including Russia. The Afghan and Somali citizens were placed in the bottom of the hierarchy, whose movements were constricted by UDI's travel restrictions, arbitrary (and occasionally corrupt) visa policies, and selective border controls. The differential citizenship statuses thus amounted to substantial 'transnational inequalities' (Mau 2010) between the interviewees.

Stability

Norwegian citizenship does not only give immigrants a right to enter and *leave* Norway; it also grants an unconditional right to *stay* in the country. Therefore, it provides a legal stability that immigrants in precarious situations, such as denizens originating from Afghanistan and Somalia, may be eager to obtain. The Afghan and Somali denizens deemed permanent residence, a privileged permit type compared to temporary ones, as insufficient in terms of legal protection and stability. Over the years, they had tried to acquire Norwegian citizenship multiple times, but their applications were rejected by UDI. Because they originated from failed states with poorly functioning bureaucracies, UDI did not deem their identity documentation to be valid. Failing to naturalize engendered a sense of *liminal legality* (Menjivar 2006), namely a profound, enduring uncertainty about their right to stay in Norway. Saad, who said he had applied three times for Norwegian citizenship during the past ten years, clearly expressed sentiments of legal and emotional instability:

When you don't have [Norwegian] citizenship you feel worried, maybe I'm not safe (...) when I go to sleep I expect the police will come barging through the door and send me back to Mogadishu (...) what I got, is only [for a duration of] two years, then you have to renew it. If you become a citizen, then you will be here all the time.

Saad's everyday-life seemed to be shaped by a fundamental uncertainty about his future, feeling situated on shaky legal grounds. As the expiration date of his permanent residence permit drew closer, the temporariness of Saad's legal status became clear to him. Acquiring Norwegian citizenship would put an end to this liminality because then he would have a right to stay in Norway 'all the time', as he said. Saad repeatedly stressed the hardship of waiting, and characterized his current life situation as 'indefinite imprisonment': (...) my situation should have a boundary. This feels like indefinite imprisonment. I don't know

how long it's going to be like this, is it 20 years or 25 years?' It is the temporal uncertainty, expressed by Saad here, that stands at the core of liminal legality. Ten years had gone by since he first applied for citizenship. Nothing had changed since then, and he saw no prospect of change in the near future.

The increased use of citizenship revocation in Norway recent years, however, blurred the lines between 'stable' citizens and 'liminal' denizens. At the time, UDI investigated a high number of cases in which they suspected that asylum seekers had claimed protection – and later citizenship – on false grounds. Amina, Jamilah and Muhammed, three naturalized citizens originating from Somalia, were subject to such suspicion. In the fall of 2016, they received a letter from UDI notifying them about possible citizenship revocation. As Muhammed's following statement illustrates, the prospect of denaturalization and statelessness, produced an acute sense of liminal legality:

Now we don't know, we're uncertain (...) we're just standing here in some kind of no man's land (...) We have seen many Somalis (...) being stripped of citizenship (...) without evidence, they have been deprived [of citizenship] because of a [political] directive (...) we feel they are playing with human destinies (...) Even if nothing happens now, we go there [to the police] and they say, 'No, it's just a misunderstanding, sorry'. What do we know in ten years? We can get another letter because a new game is set in motion. We are shuttlecocks without belonging (...) Tomorrow they can delete our identity numbers and then we're no longer here.

Unlike the liminal denizens, Amina, Jamilah and Muhammed said they had received no signs of legal ambiguity prior to receiving the letter from the Norwegian immigration authorities. In fact, their claims to Norwegian citizenship had never been questioned before. Suddenly, they realized that the lives they had made for themselves and their children in Norway were jeopardized by a piece of paper. They risked losing their jobs, apartments and other assets. The fear of denaturalization, however, also induced questions of existential character. 'We're in no man's land', 'we are shuttlecocks without belonging' and 'we're no longer here' are vehement expressions of legal and existential liminality.

In contrast, the Russian interviewees, both denizens and naturalized citizens, seemed less anxious about their right to stay in Norway. The need for protection against deportation was rarely mentioned or explicitly rejected as a reason for naturalizing. Tellingly, when I asked Natasha if there were other reasons for naturalizing besides travelling, she replied, '[Only] because of travelling (...) I could stay here *as long as I wanted* because I had a permanent residence permit' [emphasis added]. The immigration authorities had never questioned her right to stay in Norway, unlike that of several of the Afghan and Somali interviewees, and consequently, it seemed she took this security for granted. The connection between citizenship and stability thus varied greatly between the interviewees. Afghan and Somali denizens, who were debarred from naturalizing, expressed the greatest need for stability, as they felt legally liminal. At the same time, naturalized citizens in the Somali community also experienced instability because of ongoing citizenship revocations, thereby destabilising the link between citizenship and legal stability.

Recognition

Legal recognition was imperative to several of the denizens in order to conceive themselves as equal members of society. Lack of formal citizenship entailed mobility constraints, legal

liminality, and a range of practical issues that signalled inequality. Farhad, a denizen originating from Afghanistan, stressed the connection between practical problems and sentiments of inequality:

[Citizenship] gives me possibilities that brings me closer to equality with all the others in society. Now I'm sort of a secondary member. If I for example apply for a job, they always require that I enclose my work permit. Of course, they won't do that with you or other citizens. If I contact (...) NAV [the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration] or other institutions, they always say, 'You have to show your [residence] permit'. When I get – if I get citizenship – I avoid all those things. [Now] I have to collect documents all the time, show up repeatedly because they treat me different from others.

Farhad's lack of formal citizenship entailed material constraints, such as having to disclose his work permits to the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration (NAV) and prospective employers. The fundamental problem, however, seemed not to be the material constraints *per se*. Rather, these situations affected Farhad because they symbolized his lack of full rights in Norway. Sahra, a Somali denizen with 19 years of residence in Norway, also expressed notions of second-class membership and alienation:

I feel different, like am not with the others (...) although I have lived more than half of my life in Norway, I feel like an alien here, because I don't have the same rights as everyone else. When I travel, I long after Norway. So, I feel I belong [to Norway], but (...) when I get back, I feel like an alien here.

Both Farhad and Sahra highlighted the disjuncture between their perceived *de facto* belonging in Norway – rooted in long-term residence, working and participation – and the lack of equal rights and *de jure* belonging. Their feelings of belonging was constricted by the letter of the law, as Farhad underlined:

In cultural terms, I can think that I am Norwegian, because large parts of my socialization were here in Norway. Otherwise, I feel like an Afghan. What the law says affects me very much mentally. That's all I think – no, I'm Afghan, even though I feel culturally more Norwegian. (...) Every time someone asks me where I am from, naturally, I say I'm from Afghanistan. If I travel to another country I cannot say that I'm from Norway. Because legally, that is correct. That's why I feel Afghan.

Similarly, Yusuf's answer to what 'Norwegianness' meant to him was the following:

You must have nationality [i.e. citizenship] (...) When I fill out forms, I write my nationality. Then I think about how long I have been here in Norway. When I fill it out, I don't agree that I am from there [Somalia].

In terms of 'culture' (Farhad) and length of residence (Yusuf), they contested their legal belonging to Afghanistan and Somalia. In the end, this *de jure* belonging seemed to supersede their *de facto* belonging to Norway. To them, who were unable to naturalize, Norwegian citizenship signified an important recognition of equality and belonging.

While *legal* recognition was important to denizens that were denied Norwegian citizenship, some of the naturalized citizens called for *social* recognition. In everyday negotiations over national membership, their formal status was devalued. Visible and audible traits such as 'race', ethnicity, religion, and 'foreign sounding' names and accents, seemed to discredit their claims to national membership. The Russian interviewees, despite 'cultural affinity' with Norwegians (as Natasha put it), and being white Europeans, were not exempted from

getting their Norwegian membership questioned from time to time. For instance, Anna and Vladimir said that it was common among Russian immigrants to change their last name to a Norwegian-sounding one in order to blend in with the majority population. Anna also said that she could ‘pass as a Norwegian, because she looked ‘like a national’ in certain contexts, but once she started talking with a Russian accent, her ethnic background was made relevant.

For the Afghan and Somali interviewees, ‘race’ and ethnicity seemed to be the most salient markers of inequality and non-membership. The story about Ibrahim’s friend illustrates how formal and informal belonging, and equality on paper and equality in practice, were explicitly separated:

After we [his friend and himself] acquired Norwegian citizenship – he travelled abroad, and when he came to the airport in Norway, the custom officers checked him. (...) he took out his passport and said, “Look, I’m Norwegian”. Do you know what they said? They [the custom officers] told him, ‘No, the passport is Norwegian, not you’

Even though Ibrahim’s friend was a full-fledged member of society, legally as a naturalized citizen, the custom officers did not recognize him as Norwegian, presumably in a racial or ethnic sense.

Legal recognition seemed to be most important for those who wanted to acquire citizenship but were barred from getting it. Naturalizing to them would provide full rights and solidify their belonging to Norway. As visible minorities, it seemed like they had a need to ‘prove’ their membership and belonging (cf. Bloemraad and Sheares 2017; Erdal, Doeland, and Tellander 2018), perhaps more so than the Russian interviewees, who could more easily ‘pass’ as Norwegians by virtue of being white Europeans. Despite being legally recognized as full members of society, some of the naturalized citizens indeed emphasized racializing acts as sources of exclusion and inequality. Thus, naturalization is a *necessary*, but not *sufficient* recognition of equality and belonging.

Conclusion and discussion

A central point in this article is that citizenship acquisition is not equally important to all immigrant groups (cf. Vink, Prokic-Breuer, and Dronkers 2013), as different groups have unequal access to the status. Based on a heterogeneous sample of immigrants in terms of migration trajectory, country of origin, legal status, ‘race’ and ethnicity, this article has teased apart what citizenship and naturalization means to different groups of immigrants in Norway. It contributes to the literature by delineating what citizenship in the country of residence means and to whom naturalization matters the most (cf. Bloemraad and Sheares 2017). The analysis showed that the interviewees assigned three meanings to citizenship, albeit in differing degrees.

First, citizenship acquisition in a Western country frees immigrants from a multitude of travel restrictions, enables vast spatial *mobility* and thereby facilitates transnational connections. International mobility is highly stratified on citizenship status, globally and internally between different immigrant groups within the same country. In this case, naturalized Norwegian citizens and Russian citizens enjoyed visa-free access to most countries in the world by virtue of holding European passports. The Afghan and Somali citizens, on the other hand, faced a range of constraints, such as UDI’s travel restrictions,

visa policies and selective border controls. Indeed, as de Genova and Peutz (2010) argues, national citizenship remains the main determinant of an individual's ability to traverse international space.

Second, citizenship denotes a legal *stability* that may be comforting to immigrants in precarious positions, particularly to those who are legally ineligible for naturalization. The right to genuine permanent residence thus continues to be an important privilege reserved for national citizens (Anderson, Gibney, and Paoletti 2011). In principle, denizens, like all non-citizens, are deportable (de Genova 2002). Naturalization may thus relieve immigrants from legal liminality, i.e. enduring uncertainty and mental anguish about one's legal status, resembling the dynamic of 'defensive naturalization' (Aptekar 2016; Gilbertson and Singer 2003). On the other hand, citizenship revocations blurred the legal distinction between permanent legal residents and citizens. Revocation demonstrate that certain categories of immigrants and entire immigrant communities, such as the Somali, are not exempted from experiencing liminal legality, regardless of the legal status of individual members (cf. Chacon 2015). Contrarily, the Russian interviewees hardly expressed feelings of insecurity or legal ambiguity. This emphasizes policy context as a central factor in moderating and shaping different immigrant groups' perceptions of citizenship and its connection to security (cf. Bloemraad 2006; Aptekar 2016; Gilbertson and Singer 2003).

Third, naturalization was conceptualized as a formal *recognition* of equality and belonging. Lacking full rights seemed to engender sentiments of inequality, alienation and second-class membership. However, naturalizing does not necessarily lead to full membership, as naturalized citizens experienced lack of social recognition in daily encounters with the majority population. Foreign accents and names, 'race' and ethnicity could discredit their claims to national membership and belonging.

Are the findings in this study a testament to predominantly 'strategic' views of citizenship among immigrants in Norway? I will answer this by problematizing two assumptions that undergird the concept of strategic citizenship. First, strategic naturalization, as Harpaz and Mateos (2018) conceptualizes it, is based on those immigrants *choose* to acquire a *second* citizenship in their country of residence, in order to gain *added* benefits. This argument may be applicable to the Russian interviewees in this study, who already held a valuable citizenship and in some cases were allowed to hold dual citizenship (despite the single citizenship principle). The situation for the Afghan and Somali interviewees, on the other hand, was quite different. As refugees from two failed states, they had no civil, political, social and mobility rights, practically leaving them stateless outside Norway. Acquiring a Norwegian citizenship was essentially a matter of 'having the right to rights' (Arendt 1979) *at all*, rather than a *choice* of gaining *extra* rights and benefits or not.

Second, the intergroup differences in this study adds nuance to the assumption that citizenship is sought only to gain material benefits, and disconnected from membership and belonging, which are anchored elsewhere. On the one hand, the Russian interviewees exhibited a clear 'instrumental attitude' towards naturalization, by equating Norwegian citizenship with mobility rights, while refraining from investing symbolic and emotional currency into the status. The Afghan and Somali interviewees, on the other hand, also valued the material benefits of naturalization (mobility and stability), but simultaneously tied it to identity and belonging. As racialized immigrants, deviating from predominant conceptions of what a 'national look like' (Antonsich 2018), they seemed to have greater need than the Russian interviewees to 'prove' membership and

belonging in the Norwegian nation-state (cf. Erdal, Doeland, and Tellander 2018). Instrumental and strategic conceptions of citizenship may therefore be expressed alongside, and not necessarily preclude, symbolic and emotional meanings of the status.

Notes

1. In this article, immigrant refers to foreign-born individuals who have migrated and settled in Norway permanently, and covers *both* those who have acquired Norwegian citizenship by naturalization *and* those still holding foreign citizenship. I refer to permanent residents with foreign citizenship as ‘denizens’ (Hammar 1990).
2. In May 2017, the Norwegian parliament decided that the power to revoke Norwegian citizenship should be transferred from UDI to the court system. A legal provision providing for citizenship revocation in cases of engaging or supporting terrorist acts is also to be introduced in the Norwegian Nationality Act from 2019.
3. All interviewees have been given pseudonyms. The interview excerpts are translated from Norwegian to English.

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Notes on contributor

Simon Roland Birkvad is currently a PhD candidate in Sociology at the Department of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo. His PhD project examines the practice of citizenship revocation in Norway.

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