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# Becoming and Belonging? Lived experiences of naturalization and the implementation of citizenship law in Germany and Canada

Bliersbach, H.

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# 3 'I'm not German. I'm a Naturalized German.' Lived Experiences of Citizenship Acquisition in Germany

## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Citizenship is a disputed concept as scholars have failed to agree upon a single definition of the term (van Steenbergen, 1994; Lupien 2015; Yanasmayan, 2015; Dvir et al. 2018). One of its most prevalent contemporary characterizations was coined by English sociologist Thomas H. Marshall, who defined citizenship as an expanding set of rights bestowed upon an individual by the state (Marshall, 1950). Since his post-war analysis, the Marshallian model has been extensively criticized due to its focus on a white, male working-class perspective and its failure to take immigration into account (Joppke, 1999; Normanand Kymlicka 2005; Benhabib, 2004). In an effort to expand the definition of the term, scholars have referred to citizenship as membership of a political community, which is marked by rights but also duties, participation and identity (Delanty, 1997; Lupien, 2015).

In the second half of the twentieth century, globalization had a significant effect on citizenship law and consequently nationalization practices. It ushered in a number of 'technological and political developments that [facilitated] the mobility of people (...) across national borders' (Aharonson and Ramsay, 2010: 183). Increased migration meant an increase of individuals holding dual nationality, an effect amplified by the fact that through a number of bilateral agreements obligations of loyalty concerning dual nationals (such as military service) were arranged to only concern one country of nationality (Spiro, 2017). Allegiance was therefore no longer an essential duty of the citizen as an individual could hold a dual nationality without being expected to choose one over the other in times of conflict. Dual citizenship has become even more common due to three factors: policies introducing gender-neutrality into citizenship distributions (allowing children to inherit the nationality of their mothers); the inclusion of ius soli principles into ius sanguinis regimes to accommodate second and third generation immigrants; and fewer regulations requiring the renunciation of one's nationality of origin upon naturalization (Brubaker, 1998; Gerdes et al., 2007; Vink and de Groot, 2010).

This growing embrace of dual nationality by Western liberal democracies poses a stark contrast to the long-held citizenship principle of mono nationality. The nation state had grounded its existence on the uniqueness of its nation and the 'special bond' between citizen and state. As more and more people hold bonds with multiple nations, states have had to grapple with the chal-

lenge of finding a new denominator for their citizens' loyalty towards the political community. This tension has resulted in a change of how citizenship is defined both in the political and public discourses. Recent literature has coined the term 'culturalization' of citizenship, denoting a trend 'in which what it is to be a citizen is less defined in terms of civic, political and social rights, and more in terms of adherence to norms, values and cultural practices' (Tonkens and Duyvendak, 2016: 2). It is a development that is reflected in the increase in naturalization requirements, focusing on the cultural and civic dimension of citizenship such as citizenship tests, integration courses and ceremonial oaths (Goodman, 2010; Verkaaik, 2010; Huddleston, 2020).

The social and formal inclusion of migrants into society is no longer seen as a tool of integration, but rather as a security risk (van der Woude et al., 2017; Graebsch, 2019). While becoming a citizen was long seen as an essential part of the process of integration, culturalization of citizenship has further put greater emphasis on integration as a prerequisite for legal membership and hence made a lack of integration a sufficient justification for the deprivation or denial of said membership (Joppke, 2010; Gerdes et al., 2012; Hainmueller et al., 2017; Mantu, 2018). This fundamental change in governance is a reflection of the increased perception of immigrants as a risk factor. An individual is only allowed to gain full formal membership of a citizenry once they have proven to be worthy of it.

The sum of these aforementioned developments regarding the concept of citizenship have resulted in significant changes in the naturalization requirements – the conditions set by a nation state for an individual to become a member of its citizenry – instituted by Western liberal democracies (Hainmueller et al., 2017; Orgad, 2020). The formal requirements of legal membership within a citizenry have become more open or liberalized, but migrants are simultaneously increasingly asked to demonstrate their worth as states 'grant citizenship [... depending] in part on perceptions of their membership and contribution' (Bloemraad et al., 2019). This change is demonstrated by the growing number of economic requirements for naturalization and the attempts of enforcing cultural assimilation by including citizenship tests and integration contracts in the process of citizenship acquisition (Stadlmair, 2018; Orgad, 2020). Sara Wallace Goodman views these shifts in naturalization policy and in the access to citizenship as broadening in one sense (who has access?), but also as narrowing in another sense (under which conditions?) (Goodman, 2010).

Contrary to the extensive array of theoretical and structural studies predicting the downfall of citizenship as an institution, qualitative studies have found that citizenship still holds significance in people's lives (Hurenkamp et al., 2011; Yanasmayan, 2015). Studies such as Miller-Idriss' 2006 analysis of 'ordinary Germans' understandings of citizenship' emphasize that a uniform perception of citizenship encompassing all members of a nation cannot be assumed (Miller-Idriss, 2006: 541). Therefore, especially qualitative studies exploring the perceptions of individual citizens still bear great scientific signi-

ficance: They uncover attitudes and views most other research approaches are unable to.

However, there are only few of these qualitative studies and they tend to focus either on one state or a minority across states (Conover-Johnson et al., 1991; Hurenkamp et al., 2011; Lister et al., 2003; Miller-Idriss, 2006; Yanasmayan, 2015). The scientific as well as the political debate of citizenship has paid only little attention to the experiences of migrants (Yanasmayan, 2015) – although they arguably possess a more detailed perception of citizenship than most natural-born citizens, who typically do not have to spend much time reflecting on their status of nationality. Even fewer studies concentrate on naturalized citizens (Badenhoop, 2021). Current citizenship studies lack the comparative analysis of the individual effects of naturalization policies and procedures (Orgad, 2020). This study examines the lived experiences of those moving through the process of acquiring citizenship based on 15 semi-structured interviews conducted in the fall of 2021 in the governmental district of Cologne. The thematic analysis of these interviews offers unique insights into (1) the motivations of those choosing to apply for citizenship and (2) the sets of bureaucratic and societal structures influencing these motivations. The analysis finds that the acquisition of German citizenship is especially potent for third-country nationals, who wish to become or remain (in case of British migrants) European Union (EU) citizens and who are highly aware of the freedoms and securities granted to citizens of the EU. Those acquiring German citizenship, who already hold an EU nationality, report identifying rather as a 'European citizen' than as a national of either country specifically. For these individuals, naturalization is often not strictly necessary, but nonetheless a freeing step as citizenship law does not only affect migrants through the bureaucracy and greater state system, but also through small indignities in everyday life.

## 3.2 Methodology

This chapter is based on the thematic analysis of 15 semi-structured interviews conducted with 12 new German citizens and three individuals, who were still in the process of naturalizing. The interviews took place in the fall of 2021 with 13 being conducted in person in the district of Cologne and two taking place as video calls via Whatsapp and Webex. The in-person interviews were conducted in various places including parks, cafes, interviewees' homes or their place of work – always based on the preference of the respective interviewee. Out the of 15 participants seven were women and eight men. Their ages ranged from 24 to 63 years old with an average age of 38 years and a median age of 35. 11 out of the 15 participants were third-country nationals before naturalizing, holding Azerbaijanian (2), Cameroonian, Georgian, Israeli, Serbian, Syrian (2), and Turkish citizenship, respectively. The remaining EU

citizens held Romanian (2) and Spanish (2)[1] citizenship. The interviewees were recruited by contacting the available migrant support institutions in the greater region of Cologne, calls for participants through social media networks as well as snowballing once a couple of interviews had taken place. An average interview lasted between 60 to 80 minutes and consisted of two parts: Firstly, it chronicled the participant's migration history starting either when and why they entered German territory or at birth if they had been born in Germany. Secondly, and depending on how much the respective interviewee had already said on the matter, participants were asked to take the interviewer through their memories of the naturalization process.[2] The interviews were transcribed and coded using an inductive approach through Atlas.ti. All interviews were conducted in German. Any quotations in this chapter have been translated by the author.

## 3.3 Naturalization in Germany: Prior Work on Motivations and Quotas

Germany constitutes an interesting case for the examination of naturalization as it is often characterized as the prime example of an 'ethnic' nation due to its citizenship policy being based on the principle of *jus sanguinis* up until the late 1990s (Miller-Idriss, 2006: 543).

Before the reforms of the Citizenship and Nationality Law of 1913 and the Alien Act of 1965 in 1999, German citizenship was passed down by descent (Anil, 2005). Germany had publicly defined itself as 'not a country of immigration' with naturalization only being considered 'if a public interest in the naturalization exists' (Koopmans, 1999). The 2021 coalition agreement between the Social Democratic Party of Germany, the Greens and the Free Democratic Party describes Germany as a country of immigration (Bundesregierung, 2021). As of 2022, when the data collection for this chapter was completed, naturalization in Germany requires proof of unrestricted right of residence; proof of habitual, lawful residence in Germany for at least eight years; proof of independent means of securing a living for one's self and one's family; proof of adequate German language skills; passing the naturalization test; one's commitment to the free democratic constitutional order of the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany; the relinquishing of any other (non-EU) nationalities (with certain exceptions) and a fee of 255 Euro (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2018). The residence requirement can be shortened from eight years to seven or six years through by participating in an 'integration course'

1 One of the originally Spanish citizens also holds a UK citizenship.

2 'Would you take me through the naturalization process as you remember it?'; in German: 'Würden Sie mich einmal durch ihre Erinnerungen an den Einbürgerungsprozess mitnehmen?'

and special 'integration achievements'. These achievements can constitute volunteer work or exceptional achievements by the applicant in their work or education.

While, after some hesitancy, Germany now allows migrants to gain citizenship, its naturalization rates remain low compared with other countries even though many immigrants fulfill the requirements for naturalization (Courtman and Schneider, 2021). According to the Federal Statistics Office of Germany, less than 2.5 percent of those fulfilling the requirements for citizenship actually naturalize (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2022). The share of those who acquire German citizenship differs significantly per nationality of origin. Previous research has sought to understand why some migrants do not apply for citizenship and why the differences per nationality are so stark. Thränhardt (2017) identifies the required relinquishing of the applicants' nationality of origin as the main reason why Turkish nationals hesitate to naturalize. Similarily, Weinmann et al. (2012) find that those exempted from renouncing their nationality of origin – such as Iranians, Afghans or Syrians – are more likely to naturalize. Anschau and Vortmann's (2020) survey study shows that the majority of the nationalities that are more likely to naturalize, are those exempted from relinquishing their original citizenship. Furthermore, participants that stated that they had decided against naturalization cited having to give up their first citizenship as the main reason for their decision. When third-country nationals chose to naturalize despite the relinquishment requirement, they reported a significantly higher desire to be seen and accepted as German by mainstream society compared to third-country nationals that chose not to naturalize (Anschau and Vortmann, 2020). Weinmann et al. (2012) found that the willingness to apply for German citizenship increased across nationalities of origin if the immigrant un question. Believed they would be recognized as a German holding the same rights as everybody else.

Besides the issue of dual nationality, scholarship on naturalization in Germany has identified a set of factors affecting an immigrant's decision to apply for citizenship including political interest, a secure residence status, improved labor market opportunities, and the ability to travel for an extended time without losing their rights in Germany (Prümm, 2004; Wunderlich, 2005; Witte, 2018). One such factor is the relationship between the migrant and the street-level bureaucrats they encounter throughout their migration trajectory. Anschau and Vortmann (2020) illustrate that the perceived treatment of applicants by street-level bureaucrats during the naturalization procedure had a notable impact (both positively and negatively) on whether a migrant identified with Germany. The perception of caseworkers as representatives of the German state means that any discriminatory action or felt inequality was seen as direct rejection by the state and hence impedes the migrants' ability to identify with Germany. Dornis (2001) finds that long relationships between applicants and caseworkers have a positive impact on the naturalization procedure.

Caseworkers hold a certain amount of discretion regarding the implementation of citizenship law, the *Staatsangehörigkeitsgesetz* (StAG) in German. The application of the StAG is delegated to the states (*Länder*) within Germany's federal system. Said application requires the interpretation of indefinite legal concepts, which means that the street-level bureaucrats are both interpreting and applying the law – often in consultation within their department (Courtman and Schneider, 2021). Under these circumstances, caseworkers have to use discretionary powers when processing applications for citizenship, which can lead to the development of unintended practices. For the evaluation of whether an applicant is sufficiently financially independent, some naturalization offices include not only reporting on whether someone is receiving social benefits, but also a prognosis as to whether someone will continue to do so in the future. The legal text does not require such a prognosis, but it has become a common practice (Hofmann and Oberhäuser, 2013). Developments such as these indicate that the migrant-caseworker relationship deserves greater scholarly focus. The following analysis will delve into the motivations for naturalization as voiced by the participants of this interview study and connect them to the previously discussed literature.

## 3.4 Analysis

Each naturalization trajectory holds its own unique set of circumstances and motivations as to why the process was initiated in the first place and how it unfolded. It would be easy to categorize the personal reasons the interviewees mention into 'practical' and 'sentimental' ones. However, this dichotomy would oversimplify the complex sets of reasons most participants have worked through. In the majority of cases, the practical and the sentimental were both present during the decision-making process leading up to a citizenship application. The following sections will take a detailed look at some of the interviewees' sets of motivations and aim to gather them into common themes. The prevalence of bureaucracy and its role throughout the process of naturalization demonstrates just how overbearingly present the bureaucratic state and its representatives are in the lives of migrants. At the same time, the everyday experiences of the exclusivity of citizenship illustrate that it is not only state actors enforcing immigration policy.

### 3.4.1 Paperwork and Practicalities

> 'It was during my university studies that I decided to [naturalise] actually. (...) At that time, you couldn't get a proper license to practice medicine as a doctor if you were a non-German citizen, only a partial license. (...) That would have meant that I probably wouldn't be able to have my own practice, etc. So, I thought, I'm here anyway and I'm staying here so I might as well naturalise and so... well, I did it.

> That was the actual reason why I did it, because it didn't bother me otherwise, which passport I had. It didn't matter to me.' – Salih[3], 2021

Salih was born and raised by Turkish parents in Cologne. He did not choose to become a German citizen for sentimental reasons, but rather because a set of laws forbid him to practice the job he is qualified for. His reasoning for acquiring citizenship falls into the category of what Prümm (2004) and Wunderlich (2005) describe as labour market opportunities. This case illustrates a person not making a decision based on any emotional motivation, but rather because a set of laws forbid him to practice the job he is qualified for to the full extent. In order to acquire a proper license as a physician, Salih had to relinquish his Turkish citizenship and apply for German nationality instead. At the end of the interview, however, Salih conceded that would he be asked to relinquish his German citizenship now in favour of another one, he would not want to do so. Even though practical reasons were at the forefront of how he remembered his decision to naturalise, a certain emotional connection to Germany was also present. Being forced to make a decision concerning one's citizenship due to changing circumstances, such as Salih was, is not an uncommon occurrence.

Hila moved to Germany from Israel to study psychology and to stay with her partner, who is German. She wanted to become a German citizen for a while, but had been reluctant to apply for naturalization, because she did not want to relinquish her Israeli citizenship. However, a number of administrative as well as personal developments compelled her to re-evaluate:

> 'The problem started when I had the Israeli passport and I think it was always valid for five years with a possible extension of another five years. So, 10 years in total. But then suddenly that wasn't possible anymore, so it was only five years. The embassy was here in Bonn, but then it moved to Berlin. You could take care of everything via mail, but then that wasn't possible anymore either. That was really annoying, especially because my children – I have three girls – also had their passports and of course that wasn't all synchronized, meaning we had to travel to Berlin nearly every year to renew someone's passport. That was really annoying, I've got to say. And... (...) then I got cancer. (...) And then I thought, what happens, when I'm sick and I cannot go to Berlin? Then I don't have a valid passport. (...) And by then it also wasn't nice to go to the Foreigners' Office anymore. It was always so full and... suddenly there where these giants, security guards you know, because people sometimes weren't... well, staying polite... waiting in line and always checking who was there first and that wasn't a nice feeling, really, to be scanned like that. It didn't use to be this way. And then I thought, okay, I don't want to go there every few years. And then I said, okay, I will give up my [Israeli] passport.' – Hila, 2021

3 All names of interviewees have been changed.

In Hila's case, it becomes clear how practical and sentimental motivations interact with one another. The reason for her reluctance to naturalise – having to give up her Israeli citizenship – increasingly outweighed by the bureaucratic hurdles involved in maintaining a valid passport. When these hurdles threatened to become insurmountable due to her cancer diagnosis, she was forced to re-evaluate the worth of her Israeli citizenship. She describes the changing atmosphere in the Foreigners' Office, where she dreaded to go, as her last straw. Wanting to avoid any interaction with the Foreigners' Office is a frequent motivation mentioned by respondents:

> 'Not having to go to the authorities anymore and just being done with it; all that time spent on that was always annoying. That was a great feeling.' – Rohat, 2021

Interestingly, these quotes responses indicate that in some cases feeling fed-up with the bureaucratic system did not hinder the naturalization process as Anschau and Vortmann (2020) had found but acted as a catalyst in a participant's decision to apply for citizenship. In their study of what they coin as the 'bureaucratic trajectory', Haller and Yanaşmayan (2023) similarly highlight that intense or 'turbulent trajectories' can produce a tipping point either pushing migrants to disengage from further bureaucratic procedures or to engage the system one final time to gain citizenship. An extreme case of both being forced into a citizenship decision and wanting to forgo any future interaction with the immigration authorities was recounted by Filiz. She was also born and raised in Germany to Turkish parents, much like Salih. When she applied for a job after turning 16 years old, she realized her residence permit had lapsed 18 months prior. Confused as to what would happen to her, Filiz went to the local immigration offices and was told by the department head that he would do everything in his power to deport her.

> 'I got out of there and – I don't like to cry in front of people – but I got out of there and cried for a while, because I thought that my life was now over. I thought about what I was supposed to do in Turkey. I have, I mean, of course, I have relatives there and I know them maybe from holidays spent with them, but I don't know the life there at all! I don't know what it's like to live there and most of all, I speak Turkish, but not well enough that I could go to school there or anything. I was just like 'fuck, what am I going to do?? My entire life is going to be destroyed if I am deported' and most of all, why would this person speak to me in such a way?!' – Filiz, 2021

Having been frightened by the idea that she might soon be deported to a country she had only visited, Filiz describes doing everything in her power to naturalise as soon as possible – a few years earlier than her older siblings had done. In this case, the interaction with the migration authorities becomes a traumatizing event triggering an emotional motivation to naturalise next

to the practical reasons: never having to interact with that part of the state ever again.

### 3.4.2 Status and Security

Being subjected to the perceived whims of bureaucracy takes a mental toll on many migrants. Elena came to Germany over 16 years ago but spent about four years living under sufferance (*Duldung*), which constitutes a temporary suspension of deportation. Sufferance status is not a legal residence permit meaning the time spent living in Germany under it does not count toward the eight years of residence required for naturalization.

> '[Living under sufferance] – it feels as if you're in prison. That sounds harsh but that's 100 percent what it is. I felt as if I lived in a prison, but my prison did not have a door.'

> '[Waiting to hear back from the Foreigners' Office] it's the worst feeling. (...) until we had our permanent residence permit, we did not know what would happen. Will they allow us to stay or not? (...) We couldn't take a step forward and we couldn't take a step backward.'
> '[Citizenship] has a good meaning for our family, because we could move freely and easily. That is our goal, to live like normal people.' – Elena, 2021

For those who have not spent their childhood in Germany or hold another EU citizenship, acquiring citizenship is a move towards freedom and personal sovereignty. Being a citizen means no longer having to question the very basis of living in Germany: being allowed to stay. The feeling of having to depend on the bureaucratic system is also perceived as burdensome. For Elena, the waiting periods between submitting an application and awaiting a decision were especially hard. This lack of a consistent relationship with the bureaucrats responsible meant Elena felt powerless and unable to predict the outcome of her status applications.

At the same time, some migrants are sceptical of the stability of the policies they live under. Consequently, citizenship constitutes the most stable type of status to them. Najim fled from Syria to Germany in 2014 and gained German citizenship in 2021 after a two-year long administrative process.

> 'You feel comfortable living here, once you have German citizenship. You feel safe. No danger that you might be... deported or something like that. (...) in Germany, if you work, you're safe [from being deported]. But you never know if the government... *he makes the sound of something collapsing* or you never know when a new government might take power, who might be, for example, against refugees, like now in Denmark. Refugees in Denmark are not safe: Many Syrians were deported and arrested straight away when they arrived back in Syria. And so, you never know... You feel safe once you have the citizenship of the country [you live

> in]. Otherwise, you remain uncertain. (...) Citizenship is the safe option for us, for foreigners, for refugees.' – Najim, 2021

For Najim, the security of his family and being certain that their lives in Germany were secured was his priority. Once he and his wife realized the war in Syria would not be over within a couple of years, they decided to centre their lives in Germany, also because two of their three children were born in Germany and, according to Najim, 'know the German language better than Arabic and so we had the idea to apply for German citizenship':

> 'They are only Syrian by name, but they do not have any Syrian documents. Our documents as well, the Syrian ones, are all void by now and we could do nothing about it.' – Najim, 2021

He describes a main factor as to why Syrian nationals tend to naturalise more often than other nationalities: They still hold Syrian nationality formally, but as they are unable to return home safely to renew their identification, they are not required to relinquish their Syrian citizenship. The security of German citizenship is also perceived by new citizens not only in the status itself, but also in the quality of citizenship. For many interviewees, having German citizenship matters just as much, if not more, outside of German territory. As a German passport allows its holder to enter 194 countries visa-free, it is understandable why so many new citizens are aware of theses privileges as has been documented in the literature (Prümm, 2004; Wunderlich, 2005).

Besides the freedom of travel, new citizens also view holding German citizenship as being under the protection of the German diplomatic services when abroad. Rohat came to Germany when he was three years old with his parents, who were Kurdish Alevis fleeing political tensions in Turkey. He grew up knowing he could naturalise once he turned 18 but only did so when he was in his mid-twenties.

> 'I nearly did an exchange semester in Istanbul. It was all organized, I only needed an apartment, but then the Gezi protests started and that got me thinking. (...) I had read that they were arresting students, who had voiced criticism [against the government]. And then I thought, if anything happens while you're there, then you don't have the German consulate behind you (...) so I cancelled [the semester abroad]. (...) That was definitely one of the reasons to naturalise, this protection from persecution.' – Rohat, 2021

In Rohat's case, his confrontation with the possibility of being arrested during a stay in his country of origin triggered his application for citizenship. He saw himself as better protected when traveling in Turkey as a German citizen, not a Turkish national. This striking trust in German diplomatic strength demonstrates that security through citizenship status does not only matter to migrants when they are on German territory but that it might matter even more when

they leave it. Another interviewee, Carlos, was similarly impacted by the possibility of the protection of a German passport abroad. Carlos held both British and Spanish citizenship, when the United Kingdom voted to leave the EU in 2016. Brexit was the main reason for him to acquire German citizenship, but being able to travel as a German was still an advantage to him.

> 'I would have never applied for a German passport if England hadn't left the EU. (...) My family had put me a bit under pressure to get German citizenship, because of my trips to India. They said that if something happened to me while I was there, it would be easier for them if I had German citizenship. That's the only true advantage, really.' – Carlos, 2021

Hence, new citizens identify German citizenship as the safest status for them to hold both because it secures their right to reside within the country and because it offers them protection when traveling abroad. As far as practical advantages go, security is the most fundamental one. These associations of protection and thus trust into the German state system speak to a deep confidence in the status of citizenship.

### 3.4.3 Indignities and Implicitness

So far, I have identified cases where the bureaucratic or legal system pressured individuals into making a decision concerning their citizenship status: be it due to job regulations, traumatizing interactions with the immigration services or simply struggling to manage the administrative labour of being a foreigner. Other motivations for citizenship acquisition voiced by interviewees had to do with security of their status within Germany and when travelling abroad. This section of the analysis moves away from these overarching structures to focus on the daily interactions in migrants' lives that reinforce their position as an outsider and can compel them to become German citizens.

Raquel moved to Germany with her family from Spain when she was two years old. She naturalised in 2017, more than fifty years later. During the interview, she recounts an interaction with a postal worker, who refused to hand her a package due to a difference in how her name was stated on the package and how it was documented in her Spanish passport – a frustration she encountered multiple times:

> 'And then sometimes you have a post office worker or a caseworker who will go:
> – 'That doesn't say [her husband's last name]'
> – 'Yes, but I'm married to him.' (...)'
> [She tries to explain the situation to the clerk, but they ask:] 'Well, do you have a certificate documenting that that is really you and that you're allowed to pick up the package?' and I say 'but that's ME!'
> – 'Yes, but you still need a letter of authorization.'

– 'For my own package?'
– 'Yes, how am I supposed to know that that's really you'' – Raquel, 2021

These types of interactions were unpleasant for Raquel. Additional comments about the 'pictures' in her passport and the disbelief at her being Spanish while not having a Spanish accent when speaking German illustrate a routinely infantilizing reaction to her status as a foreigner she experienced. This cycle of having to explain herself repeatedly whenever she had to show any proof of ID, homed in on a feeling of never being fully accepted, not in Germany and not in Spain. Having to show her passport during everyday interactions like accepting mail and still being identified as 'the Spanish girl' made it difficult for her to also represent the German part of her identity. Raquel had instead found a comfortable identity in seeing herself as a European citizen, not forced to decide between the two countries she was otherwise connected to. Even though her nationality was that of an EU member state, Spanish citizenship did not afford her the same degree of social inclusion as German citizenship would. The prior anecdote is starkly contrasted with how Raquel describes running her errands now that she has a German ID to identify herself with:

'Whenever I go to the post office now, I put down my German ID. Then I never get the standard question 'oh you're a foreigner; you're Spanish!' *[she claps her hands gleefully]* no 'wow, aren't these pretty pictures in your passport!' or stuff like that. Those things are okay on good days, but on days when I'm already annoyed then I don't need that. (...) I feel much better now, different somehow.' – Raquel, 2021

Being able to simply exist and participate in society without having their belonging questioned based on the form of ID they provide, offers a relief to new citizens. This relief is felt even more strongly by those who emotionally feel that they already are a member of the German citizenry. Filiz describes her realization of not formally belonging into German society, even though she grew up feeling a part of it:

'In school, (...) when I had gotten the best grade in German class, the teacher might go 'you lot should be ashamed of yourselves! [Filiz] grew up bilingual, she's Turkish, and yet she writes better German essays than all of you!' and I just thought 'what's going on with you? like... internally?' (...) 'Because of me being politically active, even my *friends* were reproaching me like 'why are you even volunteering? You can't even vote here; you can't change anything. We don't get it'. (...) In those moments I think to myself, I was reduced to [her nationality].'

(...) 'I was really shocked. It was the first time in my life that I realized that I need a legal *title* to just be *here*, in order to *live* here. In the country, that I was *born* in, where I go to school, I still have to proof myself like that? That was hard for me. That really– it truly, truly dawned on me that I am not a part of this society after

> all. Even though I saw myself as part of the community... That was hard in a way. It felt gross. Unpleasant.'
> '(...) If you don't have the citizenship, you're immediately reduced to your origins. Even when you have it, it still happens, but mostly *not. anymore.*' – Filiz, 2021 [emphasis as made by interviewee]

Not holding formal membership meant for Filiz that some accomplishments were mocked. She had to push back against others wanting to deny her her right to volunteer politically: it reduced her identity to a 'country of origin' she had little emotional connection to and erased her identity as a person born and raised in Germany. These experiences demonstrate that the exclusionary power of citizenship is not solely enforced by state actors but pervades everyday interactions between citizens and non-citizens.

> 'I was just happy to do it. Finally, because... a lot of the time it felt like 'ok this is the last time I have to prove anything. Nobody can accuse me now of not being a member of this society'... even though I still get accused of that even now with German citizenship. But for me it was a 'ok, now it's official and no one can take that certainty away from me, which I have, of being formally accepted into this society, because I now have, on all levels, the same rights and duties as everyone else.'

> '[Besides her fears of getting deported], the naturalization went rather smoothly. All the feelings and emotions were the more problematic part of it. This... being confronted with it all... it was the manifestation of my entire conflict of identity within a bureaucratic process. And you were basically told by the system that that is a conflict that you have and *must* have, because you have a migration background. That was the horrible thing about it. The hard thing, because the feeling of being different and not fitting in had mostly come from other people, but not necessarily from a public authority.' – Filiz, 2021

Especially for migrants who had spent their formative years in Germany, being part of German society had become an implicit fact. They saw themselves as a member of the community and expected their membership to be reflected by others. For Filiz, the confrontation with the bureaucrat at the immigration authorities offered her yet another reflection of herself that she did not recognize. People had excluded her verbally from their notions of German society before, but having this exclusion echoed by a public authority figure revealed a whole new level of exclusion to her. These instances of mismatching ideas of membership illustrate that citizenship and the identity tied to it are not only constructed on a formal level, but also in the everyday exchanges between members and non-members of a given society. In Filiz and Raquel, we also see examples of individuals naturalizing with a strong desire to be fully accepted as German similarly to what Anschau and Vortmann (2020) illustrated concerning, specifically, third-country nationals. The wish to be recognized as an equal member of German society functions as a central motivation for

those individuals who already perceive themselves as being part of the German citizenry.

The 'conflict of identity' mentioned by Filiz is another factor that plays into the types of motivations behind individuals choosing to naturalise. Each choice to apply for a new citizenship – particularly when an individual has to relinquish another in return – is always also a question of identity. Some, for example Salih, who stated that it did not matter to him which passport he had do not perceive their formal membership to be constitutive to their identity. Still, a complete removal of citizenship from a person's identity does require the individual to understand and work through what then constitutes their identity. These choices of belonging are often not made by future citizens alone, but are connected to their social surroundings, their families, and their perspectives on the matter:

> 'I don't think I would have done it if my father had been still alive, because... my father was very– I am also very proud of my Spanish citizenship, but for my father this would have been a betrayal. As in, you've betrayed your homeland. Even though you still have it. Even though I still have my Spanish citizenship... But for him it was like that.' – Raquel, 2021

## 3.5 Conclusion

The motivations behind citizenship acquisition are not easily filed into boxes or categories. For each new citizen, a set of motivations, both practical and sentimental, interact with one another. As the participants' recollections illustrate, when making the decision whether to apply for citizenship, this is not solely done for sentimental reasons relating to a love for one's county of residence or due to a practical calculation of wanting to gain greater rights. Interviewees repeatedly state that one of the reasons for their decision to naturalize was the wish to simply interact less with the bureaucratic system. Some are pushed to make a decision due to changes in regulation or their inability to fulfill certain administrative tasks they used to fulfill easily. To many, the renewal of passports as well as residency permits constitutes more than a simple administrative process. It involves travel (and its costs), emotional capacities to deal with the stress of gathering paperwork and hoping to have done everything according to the rules, as well as time, which has to be dedicated to collect documents, travel, and the actual time facing the public official. Time also has to be taken into account when planning ahead since some applications or extensions can take months if not years to go through. This period of time spent waiting requires further mental facilities to navigate the uncertainty of these waiting periods. Even if the outcome of an application is sure, interviewees still felt stress at not having the official confirmation of the outcome yet since a bureaucratic system reemphasizes the importance of having tangible proof, certainty on paper. New citizens'

reasons for acquiring German citizenship are also often rooted in a hope for greater security. In particular, third-country nationals perceive German citizenship as the safest status for them to hold. From their point of view, formal membership secures their right to reside within the country's territory and offers them protection when traveling abroad.

The motivations and reasonings voiced by the participants of this study corroborate the findings of previous research into the motivations for naturalization. Being able to keep one's first nationality, easier travel, and labor market opportunities all play into the decision whether to naturalize. However, they also demonstrate that the bureaucratic system and in particular the relationship between migrants and caseworkers is highly influential concerning the naturalization process. Studying naturalization from the perspective of the new citizen is not only essential for understanding their relationships with citizenship and the society that they live in, it also offers us an opportunity to examine street-level bureaucracy from the perspective of the client. Research on policy implementation and especially the role of discretion of street-level professionals most often takes the perspective of the bureaucrat. Clients' lived experiences are greatly underrepresented within the scholarship, which results in a lack of knowledge on, firstly, whether clients actively feel bureaucrats' discretionary power and secondly, if so, how they navigate this clear power-imbalance (Bartels, 2013). As we have seen with cases like that of Filiz, a single bureaucrat can have a huge impact on how an individual navigates the questions of formal membership. These findings only further illustrate that further research on discretion from the perspective of the client is highly necessary, particularly in the context of naturalization.

Lastly, examining these narratives of naturalization shows the construction of citizenship and of whether or not someone belongs does not only happen through the administrative apparatus. Everyday interactions between members and non-members of a community hold a similar dynamic able to display both the inclusive as well as the exclusive powers of citizenship:

> 'I'm not German. I am a naturalized German with Spanish citizenship. I don't know, I guess that if you're thinking about it realistically, then that's nonsense, but I think at the end of the day... I am over 50 years old now (...) and I was up till then always only the Spanish girl and I want to still be that until the end of my life. And of course, the Germany nationality is... it makes my life easier. I don't have to explain all they time why I'm Spanish.' – Raquel, 2021