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

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5 | ‘Am I really a full Canadian? I’m not’ Immigration Experiences of New Citizens in Canada

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Canadian citizenship is not as in demand as it used to be. The Institute for Canadian Citizenship released new data in February 2023 indicating that the number of recent immigrants choosing to become citizens has been in ‘steep decline’ with 45.7% of eligible permanent residents naturalizing within 10 years compared to 67.5% in 2011 and 75.1% in 2001. (Hasan, 2023). The Institute’s report does not offer any concrete explanations for the outlined decrease but sees the trend on par with similar developments in other *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD) member states, namely the United States (US), Australia, France, and the United Kingdom (UK) – even though the Canadian trend constitutes the steepest decline out of the group. The institute’s prepared comparison of naturalization requirements across these states seems to provide only small differences between these cases. This points towards a difficulty prevalent in studies (particularly comparative ones) of naturalization, namely, that taking citizenship policy at face value limits the validity of said analysis as citizenship outcomes, in this case, naturalizing or not naturalizing, are not solely determined by the formal naturalization process. The observation of naturalization only from the point of the application for citizenship onwards means disregarding, at best discounting, the previous stages of an individual’s migration trajectory such as entry and temporary stay within the destination country (Bliersbach, 2024). A naturalization procedure that requires the applicant to hold permanent resident status, as is the case in Canada, has to be evaluated in conjunction with the requirements for permanent residence.

In an effort to combat curtailed analyses of naturalization and to expand existing studies of citizenship acquisition in Canada, this chapter examines experiences of naturalization beyond the formal process of applying for citizenship, thus highlighting the crucial role of permanent resident status regulations. Canadian citizenship policy operates under the broader human-capital citizenship paradigm (Ellermann, 2020), which shapes not only the naturalization procedure but all immigration related regulations. While the literal Canadian citizenship policy can be interpreted as liberalized over the years, it is permanent residence (PR) that presents the main challenge to those wanting to become Canadian citizens. This chapter’s analysis of 15 in-depth interviews with new and prospective Canadians conducted in Toronto in the fall of 2022

points to a narrowing of citizenship into its dimension as a legal status at the cost of its dimensions of belonging and political participation and rights (Bloemraad et al., 2008). While none of the immigrants interviewed regretted their decision to come and naturalize in Canada, their experiences throughout their migration trajectory highlight the 'econocentric' character of Canada's immigration policy (Winter, 2021). Their experiences underline a 'human-capital citizenship' (Ellermann, 2020) in which immigrants see themselves reduced to their set of skills and less as a politically empowered new citizen exercising a feeling of belonging.

This chapter aims to extend the limited list of studies examining citizenship acquisition 'from below' focusing on the experiences of those going through the naturalization process (see also: Aptekar, 2016; Badenhop, 2021; Winter, 2021). Previous studies have often focused on the formal naturalization process as such, but as I have previously argued (Bliersbach, 2024), there is ample reason to extend the scope of analysis to not just begin at the moment of the formal application for citizenship, but even earlier at the outset of a person's migration trajectory. This way, one is able to glean a more comprehensive picture of the challenges and dynamics experienced throughout the naturalization process. Questions of access to a state's territory and the accessibility of a status that provides a legal right to remain in said territory are crucial in determining whether an individual will ever be able to apply for citizenship. With migrants moving through a legal system that is increasingly interwoven by crimmigration dynamics (Sklansky, 2012; Stumpf, 2006), scholars cannot take citizenship policy alone at face value but have to examine the broader immigration policy framework. Apart from the expansion of the frame of analysis beyond the formal naturalization process, studying the acquisition of citizenship 'from below' allows for insights into which notions and dimensions of citizenship are most prominent to new citizens. These dimensions are distilled by examining the reasons and motivations given for naturalization as well as interviewees' reflections on the connection between their citizenship status and their self-awareness of 'being Canadian'.

Furthermore, this chapter adds to the existing literature by providing evidence that defensive citizenship (Aptekar, 2016; Gilbertson, 2006; Ong, 2011; Van Hook et al., 2006) calculations are a driving force behind why people choose to naturalize in Canada. The erosion of security from deportation under Permanent Resident status is what motivates many migrants to apply for citizenship in order to minimize their own deportability with some acknowledging that even citizenship no longer constitutes an entirely safe status due to recent policy advancements concerning denationalization in Canada (Macklin, 2014).

The following sections first outline the broad developments in citizenship policies across Western democracies and how those policies impact the character of citizenship as such; second, an introduction to the Canadian immigration system and its requirements for formal membership including their

rationale; third, the methodological section, which is followed by section four analyzing the experiences of naturalization by new Canadian citizens.

5.2 THE DIMENSIONS AND DEVELOPMENTS OF CITIZENSHIP

5.2.1 General Trends

The historical development of citizenship policies is very much connected to how citizenship is construed. Usually defined as a form of membership in a geographic or political community (Norman and Kymlicka, 2005), citizenship can be divided into four core dimensions: 1) citizenship as a legal status; 2) rights and duties equally imbued to each citizen; 3) political participation; and 4) a sense of belonging (Bloemraad et al., 2008). The legal status dimension centers on who is entitled to the status of citizen and how this status is acquired – be it by birth (*ius soli*), descent (*ius sanguinis*), or naturalization (Bauböck, 2001; Bloemraad, 2006; Odmalm, 2005). A second dimension studies the legal rights and duties of citizens and questions of equality before the law for all members of a citizenry (Bauböck, 1994; Janoski, 1998; Somers, 2006; Tilly, 1995; Yuval-Davis, 1997). The political participation dimension of citizenship examines who within a state may take part in the governing of the territory from both a historical perspective, highlighting the developments in enfranchisement, and through a contemporary lens, inspecting the interdependences of one's ability to use political rights with social and economic inclusion (Marshall, 1950; Somers, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 1999). Citizenship's fourth dimension, belonging, focuses on the paradoxical constitution of being included and belonging to a group: the exclusion of others without whom a 'we' is not possible (Bosniak, 2001). In their review of normative and empirical debates on (Western) citizenship, Bloemraad et al. outline these dimensions as '[cutting] across each other, reinforcing or undermining the boundaries and content of citizenship' (2008: 156). The authors endorse the utilization of these separate dimensions of citizenship to enable researchers to examine how far immigrants are incorporated into receiving societies.

The regulations and requirements concerning the acquisition of citizenship – and hence the access to its four dimensions – have developed over the past century as naturalization has become a more common phenomenon. Increased migration meant an increase in individuals holding dual nationality, an effect amplified by (1) policies introducing gender-neutrality into citizenship distribution, (2) the inclusion of *ius soli* principles into *ius sanguinis* regimes to accommodate second and third generation immigrants, (3) fewer regulations requiring the renunciation of one's nationality of origin upon naturalization, and (4) a number of bilateral agreements through which obligations of loyalty concerning dual nationals (such as military service) were arranged to only

concern one country of nationality (Brubaker, 1998; Gerdes et al., 2012; Spiro, 2017; Vink and De Groot, 2010).

As more and more people hold bonds with multiple nations, states have grappled with the challenge of defining a new denominator for their citizenry. Some literature has pointed to the ‘culturalization’ of citizenship meaning that civic, political and social rights have come to define a citizen less than the adherence to certain norms, values and cultural practices (Duyvendak et al., 2016). This development is reflected in the increase in naturalization requirements focusing on the cultural and civic aspects of citizenship such as citizenship tests, integration courses and ceremonial oaths (Goodman, 2010; Huddleston, 2020; Verkaaik, 2010). These new requirements point towards states’ efforts to ‘re-nationalize’ citizenship (Joppke, 2019; Winter and Sauvageau, 2015).

While the formal requirements for legal membership within a citizenry have been generally liberalized by most Western nations, migrants are increasingly asked to prove their worth as states ‘grant citizenship [... depending] in part on perceptions of their membership and contribution’ (Bloemraad et al., 2019: 96). This change is demonstrated by the growing number of economic requirements for naturalization. Citizens are no longer seen as the bearers of rights concerning welfare and employment – as first imagined by social citizenship – but as bearers of human capital, denoting ‘the skills and psychocultural attributes associated with high-status and highly paid positions in the global knowledge economy’ (Ellermann, 2020: 2516). In a human-capital citizenship system as outlined by Ellermann, the link between membership and its benefits becomes ‘conditional and tenuous with rights being transformed into earned privileges’ (ibid.). Regarding the four dimensions of citizenship, this means that greater emphasis is put on the legal status dimension of citizenship while especially the aspects of belonging and political participation are deprioritized in favor of economic calculations of an individual’s fiscal contribution in exchange for formal membership of the citizenry. The following section will relate the broader developments in Western citizenship policy to the case of Canada.

5.2.2 Naturalization in Canada

In 2021, 405,000 immigrants were admitted to Canada with the federal government aiming to take in 1.3 million migrants by 2024 (Sangani, 2022). In order to apply for Canadian citizenship, prospective applicants must (1) be permanent residents, (2) have been physically present on Canadian soil for at least three out of five years (1095 days) since becoming a permanent resident, (3) have filed an income tax return at least three times out of the last five years prior to the application, and (4) not be under a removal order or inadmissible on security or criminal grounds. Applicants between the ages of 18 and 54

must also take the citizenship test and demonstrate adequate knowledge of English or French (Government of Canada, 1985).

Immigrants entering and wanting to remain in Canada are generally separated into three categories: the economic class, which accounts for about 58% of migrants that have permanently settled on Canadian soil in 2021, the family class, and the humanitarian class (Statistics Canada, 2022; Winter, 2021). The economic class is admitted as skilled workers based on a points system, which was established in 1967 in a move away from Canada's previous 'unabashedly racist' immigration system as a settler colonial state (Nakache et al., 2020; Satzewich, 2016: 240; Winter, 2021). Some scholars have argued that this new 'universal' or 'merit-based' immigration selection policy has done away with racist immigration restrictions by pointing towards the increasingly diverse list of countries of origin of permanent immigrants (FitzGerald and Cook-Martín, 2014; Joppke, 2005; Reitz, 2012; Triadafilopoulos, 2012). Other scholarship, in particular coming from a critical race perspective, points towards still existing racial biases among immigration bureaucrats, the geographically unequal distribution of visa processing centers as well as the discrepancies in resources like personnel (Aiken, 2007; Anderson, 1995; Jakubowski, 1997; Simmons, 1999). Racial exclusion is further directed through the focus on education and skills as selection criteria since educational and occupational opportunities are not equally distributed between the Global North and Global South (Elrick, 2021).

Still, the establishment of the points system in the late 1960s marked a liberalization of citizenship policy in Canada that predates the general trend of liberalization in the early 2000s among Western states (Nakache et al., 2020). Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, the majority of migrants arrived through the family and humanitarian immigration streams. In an effort to alter the balance between economic and family immigration, the 1980s–2000s saw a number of policy reforms expanding economic admissions while establishing restrictions for family sponsorship. In addition to policy reforms, administrative resources were also redirected from processing family immigration applications to those of business entrepreneurs (Ellermann, 2021).

Recent changes in policy have prioritized economy-driven migration (Dufour and Forcier, 2015; Ellermann, 2020) and efforts to 'strengthen' Canadian citizenship by tightening naturalization requirements and introducing regulations enabling the denationalization of citizens (Winter, 2015) similarly to other North American and European states. While some of the Conservative government's restrictive turn under Prime Minister Stephen Harper was watered down by the liberal Trudeau administration, many policies have remained in place, at least partially (Griffith, 2017). One example concerns when physical presence in Canada counts towards the residence requirement for citizenship: The Harper government had disallowed counting any time spent in Canada prior to becoming a permanent resident towards citizenship. Under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, applicants may now count 12 hours

of each day within the preceding five-year period that they were present in Canada as a temporary resident or protected person, up to a maximum of 365 days (Government of Canada, 1985). Furthermore, allowing for the revocation of Canadian citizenship has ended the total security of status formal membership used to offer. The rights dimension of citizenship has been thus reduced to set of fickle rights – especially for dual citizens who would not be left stateless if denationalized.

The question thus remains what constitutes citizenship – what is its content? What are its boundaries? – within a system as thoroughly impacted by the human-capital paradigm as in the Canadian case? The subsequent analysis seeks to answer this query. In conjunction with the rise of human-capital citizenship, the developments in Canada point towards a narrowing of citizenship to its legal status dimension at the cost of its dimensions of belonging, political participation, and rights.

5.3 METHODOLOGY

The scientific as well as the political debate of citizenship has paid little attention to the experiences of migrants (Yanasmayan, 2015) although migrants arguably possess a more detailed awareness of citizenship than most natural-born citizens, who typically have less cause to reflect on their status and nationality. Even fewer studies concentrate on naturalized citizens (Badenhoop, 2021). This case study contributes to the citizenship and naturalization literature that studies the acquisition of citizenship ‘from below’, focusing on the experiences of migrants (see also: Aptekar, 2016; Badenhoop, 2021; Winter, 2021). It is based on the thematic analysis of 15 semi-structured interviews conducted with 15 new Canadian citizens and one individual who was still in the process of naturalizing. The interviews took place in the fall of 2022 with seven interviews being conducted in person in the city of Toronto, Ontario, and eight taking place as video calls via Zoom. The in-person interviews were conducted in various places including parks, cafes, interviewees’ homes, or their place of work – depending on the preference of the respective interviewee.

Ten out of the 16 interviewees identified as women and six as men. Their ages ranged from 24 to 80 years old with an average age of 41 years, which matches the average age of Canadian citizens, 42.8 years of age (Statistics Canada, 2022). Participants previously held citizenship of Albania (1), Columbia (2), Croatia (1), Ethiopia (2), Germany (1), Ghana (1), Serbia (1), Sri Lanka (1), Turkey (1) the United Kingdom (3), and the United States (2). The interviewees were recruited by contacting the available migrant support institutions in the greater region of Toronto as well as contacting possible gatekeepers through the University of Toronto’s criminology and socio-legal studies network, calls for participants through social media, as well as snowballing once

the initial 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 with when and why they entered Canadian territory. 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. Subsequent questions also focused on when interviewees had first become aware of their new citizenship in their daily lives and to what extent they felt Canadian. All interviews were conducted in English and then transcribed and coded in Atlas.ti using an inductive approach.

The subsequent analysis of their naturalization experiences highlights new Canadian citizens' struggles with their deportability and the increasing erosion of security of statuses such as permanent residence and citizenship as well as the difficulties with feelings of belonging in a system that prioritizes economic factors and skills.

5.4 ANALYSIS

5.4.1 Deportability and Belonging

Any individual's formal status apart from citizenship comes with a certain level of deportability and thus precarity. Concrete thresholds for deportation vary by state legislation and said state's level of crimmigration as well as the ethnic or racial background of the migrant in question due to crimmigration's inherent interaction with racialization (Bliersbach, 2024; Törnngren et al., 2021). On an individual level, deportability puts an omnipresent stressor on migrants and their families (Bean et al., 2011). In her 2016 study of motivations for naturalization comparing the United States and Canada, Aptekar found a stark contrast between new US and Canadian citizens concerning 'defensive naturalization'. Defensive naturalization occurs when 'immigrants seek citizenship to protect themselves from criminalization and anti-immigrant policies' (Aptekar, 2016; Gilbertson, 2006; Ong, 2011). While defensive naturalization was a common theme in interviews with new US citizens, Aptekar states that none of her Canadian interviewees mentioned something relating to becoming a citizen for protective reasons (2016). This finding was not reproduced by this study. While some interviewees reported having felt safe once they had acquired PR, many also spoke of the goal of naturalization being connected to acquiring a secure status and to protect themselves from possible future changes in immigration policy.

Their deportability and dependence on the immigration authorities is omnipresent for migrants. Venera, who followed her sister to Canada from Albania for her last years of high school in 2013 and has lived in Toronto ever since, explains that 'the first thought that comes to mind [is]: 'I'm getting

deported!' That's like the first (...) thought that comes with everything. You know, anytime you hear anything from immigration: 'I'm getting deported!'" (2022). For her, becoming a permanent resident meant 'peace' from a lot of these stressful moments: 'I don't have the passport yet – and that is the end goal (...) to become a Canadian citizen, but now I feel like I have security' (Venera, 2022). She describes fears connected to health care, which is only free for Canadian citizens and permanent residents, and the awareness of having a temporary status, 'I can be kicked out for anything' (ibid.). For Venera, getting PR was the decisive moment in her migration trajectory that offered her relief from deportability. While other interviewees agreed that PR was the more difficult hurdle to clear on the path towards citizenship, many did not share Venera's sense of security. Isaac, who had come to Canada from Ghana describes PR as 'the crucial critical moment' (2022). At the same time, when asked whether he feels like his life has changed in any tangible way since becoming a citizen, he reports:

'Nothing has changed (...) apart from that (...) feeling at home now, nobody's going to throw me out, things like that. That would be the only thing, I would say is different. Because when you're a permanent resident, you can still, under some circumstances (...) become a security issue and things like that.' – Isaac, 2022

For Isaac, PR meant a set of new rights such as health care and access to a new range of jobs, but security from deportation was still reserved to citizenship status, in his perception. Isaac's experience indicates that the rights dimension of citizenship has thinned in the sense that also non-citizens can access many decisive rights apart from political ones once they acquire PR. At the same time, the legal status aspect of citizenship takes center stage in migrant's minds as security of status becomes a growing priority in light of their deportability. Other interviewees describe similar 'defensive' motivations for naturalizing. Kamran's family moved to Canada from the United Kingdom when he had just finished secondary school. According to him, becoming a citizen in Canada 'was always the goal' (Kamran, 2022). The young lawyer cites security of status as the motivation to apply for citizenship as soon as possible:

'In Canada, the rules are pretty strict, you know. They recently, for example, made a change where even someone convicted of drunk-driving, that becomes a serious criminal offense, which okay, as abhorrent as drunk-driving is, I don't necessarily agree that that should be reason that someone should lose their immigration status in the country, you know, just automatically because of the way the law works. (...) The amount of cases I've come across where people [had] been [permanent residents] in Canada for like a decade, and then they've had the one stupid mistake in their life, which okay, it's a grave mistake, but that shouldn't be reason that suddenly they are being deported from the country, back to a country, which they

might not even have ties to or might have problems with. So, that was the motivation, just really protection'. – Kamran, 2022

With criminal offenses triggering the revocation of an immigration status being a common occurrence in modern crimmigration systems (Armenta, 2017; Macklin, 2014), Kamran's awareness and worry about being punished through deportation demonstrates the erosion of the supposed security of permanent resident status. The legal status dimension of citizenship is thus again emphasized as the central reason for acquiring formal membership.

The emphasis of citizenship's legal status dimension also affects the other dimensions of citizenship, most clearly the dimension of belonging. Interviewees described having difficulties feeling like they fully belonged to Canada. Asked how far she feels Canadian, Lochani's answer comes fast and clear, 'Not a lot. And (...) that's actually a really nuanced thing because I don't know how many immigrants actually feel fully Canadian. I think their children will. But for me, I don't belong anywhere' (2022). She recounts her time living in the Middle East as a Sri Lankan citizen on temporary status. Talking about Canada again, she says, 'And then here, it's funny but I don't think I'll ever feel free. Maybe I will one day but in my opinion it's difficult for me. Because even in the last 10 years I always carried myself as someone that can get kicked out' (ibid.). She describes seeing fellow immigrants' struggle with depression and other mental health issues that kept them from attending university and ended with them being deported. 'I was still aware of, like, I can't let my depression [take over], like I'll get kicked out' (ibid.). She says she is afraid to jaywalk having seen fines of hundreds of dollars impede a migrant's ability to stay in Canada. Working in immigration, she knows 'too much' to feel fully secure in the North American state: 'See, most people don't know that citizenship can be revoked, and it can. (...) I'm a citizen, yeah, but you can take it away. So, am I really a full Canadian? I'm not' (Lochani, 2022). Lochani's elaborations point to a development in which citizenship is not only increasingly defined by its legal status dimension but is narrowed into it at the cost of – in particular – the dimension of belonging. If an individual's status remains tenuous, or is at least perceived as such, said person is impeded in establishing a feeling of belonging, of being an equal member of the citizenry. The aforementioned experiences of new Canadian citizens also show that defensive citizenship is not only a US phenomenon, but also occurs in Canada.

5.4.2 Human-Capital Citizenship

With the majority of permanent residents in Canada having acquired permanent status through the economic immigration stream, it is important to examine the possible effects of such an econocentric immigration system on how citizenship is valued and perceived by migrants. As outlined above, a

citizenship regime centered around human capital creates a conditional and tenuous membership where rights have become earned privileges (Ellermann, 2020). But what does this mean for the every-day experiences of new citizens? The skill-based point system through which Canada administers most of its selection of immigrants creates first and foremost competition between immigrants. PR is not granted once a person amasses a certain number of points but depends on the entire cohort applying for said status since only a set number of immigrants have their applications approved per round. Interviewees that had gained permanent status through the economic stream outlined their strategic choices in how and when to apply in order to not only maximize their points but to also decrease the likelihood of too many fellow immigrants submitting applications boasting higher point scores.

'It's like a Hunger Games sort of thing. (...) You literally have to prove like (...) why are you worthy of this? (...) you have to prove like, why am I better than the next migrant? Which is a very messed up mentality, if you think about it. (...) the point system, like that's what it creates. It creates this competitiveness.' – Venera, 2022

Venera's description of the competition between migrants fostered by the so-called point system corresponds to what Ellerman outlines at the desirability of immigrants coming 'to correspond to their rank in the labour market hierarchy' (2020: 2515). As a safer immigration status and thus reduced deportability is closely tied to an economic sense of deservingness, becoming an equal citizen becomes inextricably bound to one's economic contribution. This condition for inclusion does not necessarily create a significant bond between immigrant and destination country. Coupled with its competitive component between migrants, basing an individual's deservingness to be included on their human capital means impeding them from developing a sense of belonging beyond their economic contribution.

When asked whether she sees her future based in Canada, Venera states,

'I don't really have anything that's tying me down (...) I definitely have a life in Canada and belonging in Canada. And things that tie me down, like to a degree, but not a hundred percent. And like, I would also be open to moving from Canada. And that's what I kind of feel like, like, yes, the goal is getting the citizenship. And this is going to sound kind of like, selfish. Yeah, it could be selfish. But like, that was really just the goal. The goal is like, I want the citizenship. Because it will give me like, the stability that I want and the ability to, like, come in and out of Canada whenever I want. But not necessarily to live here forever.' – Venera, 2022

Venera describes a tension between acquiring a formal status that is meant to connect one individual to a certain state and what Canadian citizenship actually does: It offers immigrants a new freedom of movement that also allows them to leave Canada after becoming citizens without losing the ability to

return. The transactional character of Canadian naturalization closely tied to its prioritization of economic requirements in the immigration process once again impedes a sense of belonging to be developed and new citizens considering leaving as soon as their status allows for it.

Rahel had come to Canada in 2016 from Ethiopia through the humanitarian stream. Even though human capital was not the central requirement for her being granted permanent residence, economic factors seem to dominate her considerations of where to reside:

H.B.: Do you see yourself moving to another country at some point or do you think, like, 'really Canada, is it for me right now'?

Rahel: I think if you asked me this question five years ago, I would tell you yes. Now half, half.

H.B.: Okay.

R: So, I think when you grow older, you travel with purpose. If I get a job at a different country, or if I get school opportunities at a different country, yeah, I don't mind relocating. Yeah, but with nothing, no, somebody has to pay the bills. [she laughs]' – Rahel, 2022

Rahel's deliberations clearly focus on her ability to financially sustain herself or to gain additional skills. A feeling of belonging to Canada or ideas of 'home' are not decisive. These prioritizations indicate that a citizenship paradigm focusing on economic factors risks constructing a sense of citizenship in its new citizens that remains void of emotional connection and belonging and is instead built on the transaction of contributions to the state's economy for political rights and security from deportation.

The aforementioned hierarchy established between immigrants within a human-capital citizenship system also exists between Canada's immigration categories of 'economic class', 'family class' and 'humanitarian class'. Zafer had come to Canada from Turkey together with his then boyfriend, first as a student and then later claimed refugee status as it became clear that due to a previous employment working on a project related to the Armenian genocide, he would most likely be imprisoned if he were to return to Turkey.

'...when I was applying for refugee status, I didn't know there is a huge stigma on being a refugee, maybe I did, but I didn't want to think about it, because I realize that years later, I confess, I was so ashamed of becoming a refugee, because I wanted to be like an economic immigrant, right? (...) like you don't know why I'm ashamed of feeling ashamed, because it was my legal right. (...) And I felt like, you know, I was stealing something from these people, like, you know, I had that one-bedroom apartment, you know, [thinking:] 'I'm renting this apartment and a beautiful white Québécois cannot rent an apartment'. I know it doesn't make sense and I never ever thought I would think like that.' – Zafer, 2022

Zafer's feelings of shame towards his immigration status are clearly related to a logic of deservingness that values individuals based on their economic

contributions. Even though he knew he had the legal right to claim refugee status, he still felt lesser than an economic migrant. Zafer further describes the relief brought by being granted PR: not because it meant a safer status, but because he now could show his PR card and no longer needed to disclose being a migrant when having to identify himself. He further illustrated his frustrations with the role of deservingness within the immigration process when talking about studying Canadian history for his citizenship test:

‘that’s so funny, you feel like, you know, you are a newcomer, so, do you really deserve to be here? They always make you question that because, you need to deserve it, right? I need to be educated, young, have money, so and patience, and etc., etc. So, and after that, like, you know, when you reach 400 points, ding, ding, ding, ding ding, now you deserve to be here. So, but you [colonial settlers] came here, like, 500 years ago’ – Zafer, 2022

Zafer describes the incongruity of being made to feel like he did not deserve to be in Canada when the people that made him feel this way never asked for permission when they arrived. In Zafer’s case, while the stigmatization of his refugee status is still painful to him, he does see Canada as his home and feels ‘existentially grateful for Canada’ (Zafer, 2022) due to the Canadian state recognizing his same-sex partnership. Here, a sense of belonging was bolstered by Canadian citizenship offering him additional rights that he was not able to access as a Turkish citizen. It becomes apparent that while a focus on the legal dimension of citizenship can hinder the dimension of belonging, the latter can be strengthened through a strong dimension of citizens’ rights.

The analysis of these new citizen interviews clearly indicates that naturalized Canadians are aware of and impacted by the human-capital paradigm dominating Canada’s immigration structures. Immigrants’ reduction of their sense of self to their economic contribution produces a hierarchy between the migration classes as well as stark competition between economic migrants. Consequently, interviewees reported a lessened sense of belonging as they viewed their naturalization in transactional terms.

5.5 CONCLUSION

The analysis of 15 in-depth interviews with new and future Canadian citizens finds that both deportability and defensive citizenship constitute major factors in a migrant’s decision to naturalize. The focus on the dimension of legal status and the awareness of being disposable to the Canadian state impede feelings of belonging. At the same time, ‘earning’ formal status is perceived as an increasingly transactional procedure with interviewees noting that once they have gained citizenship, they feel a ‘selfish’ urge to leave and make use of their new passport by accessing yet another state’s territory they were unable to travel to before. These findings align with what Winter formulates as ‘the

attribution of citizenship as an earned privilege on the basis of citizenship candidates' successful demonstration of individual human capital' (2021: 302). The analysis further offers extensive evidence for the pervasiveness of the human-capital citizenship paradigm impacting migrant's feeling of deservingness that establishes a hierarchy between classes of migration as well as a sense of competition between individual immigrants.

The findings of this study are limited by the fact that an above-average number of interviewees were lawyers or involved in immigration law. It can thus be assumed that they were more aware of certain complications and obstacles of the immigration system in Canada than the average immigrant might. Interviewing only those who are in the process of naturalizing or already have naturalized of course limits this study's view on possible factors that hinder immigrants from becoming citizens. However, this analysis demonstrates the advantage of expanding the frame of analysis beyond the formal naturalization process. As PR is a requirement for citizenship and the application for PR is much more extensive than citizenship applications, the real bottleneck moment towards formal membership is not the naturalization procedure, but everything that precedes it. Citizenship – at least administratively – is being clearly denoted as a grant given once integration has been accomplished, not as a catalyst of integration. The naturalization procedure is thus institutionally deprioritized leading to long waiting times for what feels for many interviewees like a foregone conclusion since they have already 'earned' their permanent residence. These waiting times and paperwork headaches in turn lead to frustration for new citizens who report having felt less emotional about their naturalization than they expected due to the number of bureaucratic frustrations. An administrative devaluation of the naturalization procedure can thus affect how far becoming a citizen and thus crossing that final boundary towards full integration is meaningful to new citizens. Further research should pay closer attention to these effects of the administrative procedure of naturalization as such on the potential citizen. It also remains to be determined why exactly immigrants in Canada are naturalizing at a lower rate than before.

