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Making Sense of Naturalization: What Citizenship Means to Naturalizing Immigrants in Canada and the USA

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Abstract Immigrant naturalization is both a barometer of inclusiveness and immigrant incorporation and a mechanism of social reproduction of the nation. This article reports on an interview-based study in suburban Toronto and New Jersey that investigated how immigrants explain their decisions to acquire citizenship. It analyzes respondents' understandings of naturalization in light of different theories of citizenship and different dimensions of the concept. The study contributes to the literature by showing how many American immigrants interviewed while going through the naturalization process resisted framing naturalization as identity-changing, situating it instead as a common-sense move following permanent settlement and belonging. In contrast, Canadian respondents were more likely to characterize naturalization as an active process that tied them to a positively valued nation. While immigrant respondents in both countries were interested in voting and travel benefits of citizenship, only American respondents sought the protection that citizenship would afford in an anti-immigrant policy climate. I discuss how naturalization as a tool of civic integration and political empowerment resonates with immigrants' own understandings of the process and consider the role played by the institutional contexts around naturalization and immigration more generally.

Keywords Naturalization · Citizenship · Immigration · Identity · Canada · USA

Acquiring formal citizenship status is as close as an immigrant in Canada or the USA can come to native-born status, legally and politically. By crossing the citizenship boundary, immigrants acquire the right to vote, security from deportation, access to some jobs, and a passport that makes travel easier. In the USA, naturalized immigrants also gain access to federal welfare benefits and a much improved ability to sponsor the

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migration of family members. Given these rights and benefits, citizenship is a social category that stratifies the immigrant population and serves as an indicator of immigrant inclusion as well as a measure of social reproduction of the nation through immigration. In recent comparisons between Canada and the USA, this indicator raises a red flag due to the drastically lower levels of naturalization in the USA. But aggregate naturalization rates or analysis of factors associated with naturalization do not tell us how immigrants themselves understand naturalization or their motivations in seeking citizenship. Are they attracted by the positive qualities of their new nation and want to solidify their affiliation with it? Are they seeking to gain the benefits of citizenship? Or are they trying to protect themselves from increasing infringement on immigrant rights?

It is not rare for the motivations of immigrants to be examined in the public sphere in Canada and the USA, with concerns about the cheapening of citizenship by immigrants who ostensibly naturalize for the 'wrong' reasons. In Canada, for instance, there is worry about split loyalties and dual citizenship, highlighted during the 2006 crisis in Lebanon, when the Canadian government provided assistance for its citizens to escape the conflict (Winter 2014). There is also suspicion of East Asian 'astronaut' families (Waters 2003). In the USA, where access to certain means-tested benefits is contingent on citizenship, much of the questioning of the motivations of immigrants to naturalize rests on the notion that they naturalize in order to access welfare benefits, which has scant empirical backing (Balistreri and Van Hook 2004; Van Hook et al. 2006).

Existing research, most notably Bloemraad's (2006) comparative study of naturalization in the USA and Canada, has examined the process of naturalization as experienced by immigrants in their communities and considered immigrants' motivations in naturalizing (see also Brettell 2006; Gilbertson 2004; Howard 1998; Marger 2006; Plascencia 2012; Waters 2003). Much of this research is concerned with immigrants from particular countries of origin who are in various stages of the naturalization process. This paper relies on a different methodological approach, recruiting study participants at immigration offices in Canada and the USA as they were actually transitioning to citizenship. In this way, I was able to get the perspective of a diverse cross-section of immigrants becoming citizens of their host countries, rather than those who were preparing for naturalization or reflecting on the past. In addition, the paper considers a broader set of questions than immigrants' motivations to naturalize, investigating how immigrants understand the transition to host country citizenship within the context of their life trajectories.

Analysis of what motivates immigrants to seek American or Canadian citizenship, as well as the broader question of what naturalization and citizenship mean to them, contributes to the theoretical debates on citizenship and immigration. As scholars ponder the emergence, prevalence, and competition between traditional, transnational, and post-national models of citizenship, it is important to see how salient these models are for immigrants themselves. At the same time, the naturalization process is used by nations as a tool of civic integration (Joppke 2007; Paquet 2012; Wallace Goodman 2010), in which case studying immigrants' own understandings of naturalization illuminates the resonance of such tools, highlighting inconsistencies and sets of ideas falling outside the parameters of integrationism. Finally, in national contexts where voting is reserved for citizens, scholars of political participation (and incorporation) point to the connection of naturalization to political empowerment for some immigrants (Pantoja et al. 2001), further supporting the need for empirical investigation of meanings associated with citizenship acquisition.

In investigating how immigrants understand their transition to citizenship, I focus on three primary questions: (1) How do their understandings of citizenship and naturalization align with models of citizenship? (2) In what ways does the use of naturalization as a tool of civic integration resonate with the meanings of citizenship acquisition for immigrants? And (3) to what extent do immigrants associate naturalization with political empowerment? Below, I provide a background on naturalization in the two countries, describe the methodology, present results, and discuss their implications for understanding the meaning of citizenship acquisition in Canada and the USA.

Naturalization in Canada and the USA

Canada and the USA have similar naturalization processes and immigration histories, especially when juxtaposed with a comparison of either to a European nation receiving immigrants. Both are settler nations with significant histories of immigration. Both lifted race- and ethnicity-based immigration policies in the 1960s (Bean and Stevens 2003; Wilson 2003). Canada has a smaller population than the USA and fewer immigrants but the foreign born comprise a higher proportion of its population, at 21 % compared to 13 % in the USA (Statistics Canada 2013; Migration Policy Institute 2014). While family reunification provisions are the major route to permanent residency in the USA, skill-based migration is more important in Canada, although immigrants in both countries have similar average levels of education (Bloemraad 2006). Sources of contemporary migration differ as well: Asian countries are the primary source of immigrants in Canada, and Latin American immigrants, particularly immigrants from Mexico, are the largest foreign-born group in the USA (Migration Policy Institute 2014; Statistics Canada 2013).

Access to American and Canadian citizenship has been similar since the post-World War II period (Bloemraad 2006; Weil 2001). In both countries, the primary qualification is holding permanent residency (USA) or landed immigrant status (Canada), which serve as precursors to citizenship. Immigrants on various temporary visas and those without authorization are not eligible for citizenship. Permanent residents in the USA are able to apply for citizenship after 5 years of residence, 3 years if they are married to a citizen, and immediately if they are a member of the military under special provisions for wartime, still in effect in 2015. Landed immigrants in Canada are eligible for citizenship after 3 years of residency. In both countries, applications for citizenship require extensive paperwork, fees, language and civics testing, and administration of an oath. However, there are some differences in the naturalization procedures. For instance, American applicants undergo individual interviews with immigration officials, during which their fitness for citizenship is evaluated along several dimensions, and which could result in an order of removal if irregularities in earlier steps of the immigration process are found (Aptekar 2015). Most current Canadian applicants sit for a multiple choice citizenship test after all other requirements have been cleared and do not undergo an individual in-person evaluation (Paquet 2012).

Major differences emerge in the uptake of citizenship, which is higher in Canada, at 73 % citizens among the foreign born, compared to 44 % in the USA (Statistics Canada 2013; US Census Bureau 2012). The dramatic gap cannot be explained entirely by the lower residency requirement (3 vs 5 years), differences in the mix of origins, or

presence of undocumented immigrants ineligible for citizenship (Aptekar 2014; Bloemraad 2006). More significant are institutional factors that frame the naturalization process in each country, such as Canadian programs that actively encourage and support citizenship acquisition, treating it as a right, contrasted with the less interventionist American approach that leaves citizenship up to the individual (Bloemraad 2006; Mahler and Siemiatycki 2011).

The disparity in naturalization rates is in the opposite direction from what can be expected given greater benefits of citizenship in the USA. In both countries, citizenship status protects increasingly vulnerable immigrants from deportation, although the rights associated with Canadian and American citizenship have themselves been eroded after 9/11 (Aitken 2008; Barnes 2009; Bauder 2008). Immigrants who have become Canadian or American citizens can vote and run for office. Travel is often easier with Canadian or American passports, which also ease restrictions on living abroad. In addition to these benefits of citizenship, naturalization improves immigrants' ability to sponsor the migration of their family members to the USA. (Landed immigrants in Canada are equal to citizens in their ability to sponsor relatives.) American citizenship also means much improved access to welfare benefits (after 1996 reforms, Balistreri and Van Hook 2004; Van Hook et al. 2006) and government jobs and contracts. Although there are a few career limitations for non-citizens in Canada, access to social benefits, including health care, is not limited to citizens. Given the greater benefits of citizenship in the USA, it would be reasonable to expect higher levels of naturalization there. Canada officially recognizes dual citizenship, although there is a de facto dual citizenship regime in the USA[1] (Bloemraad 2006; Kivisto and Faist 2007).

Citizenship, naturalization, and integration

Immigrants' understanding of citizenship and its acquisition engages several theoretical debates in the literature. Citizenship itself is a concept with multiple meanings, including legal status, rights, political participation, and belonging (Bloemraad et al. 2008). These meanings intersect with three main models of citizenship: traditional, transnational, and post-national. Traditional citizenship denotes an exclusive connection between an individual and a nation-state, with corresponding rights and sense of identity and belonging (Bloemraad 2004). Hence, if immigrants naturalize for the 'wrong' reasons, such as to access welfare benefits or to make it easier to live abroad, that can be seen as undermining the institution of citizenship (Honig 2001).

The transnational model of citizenship expands beyond attachment to one nation to highlight the multiplicity of connections between people and nation-states in the globalized world. Thus, migrants may identify with and participate in their sending and receiving countries, facilitated by multiple formal citizenships (Basch et al. 1994) and relatively tolerant attitudes towards multiculturalism (Waldinger 2015). Dual citizenship can enable transnational ties, although it does not necessarily undermine political participation in the receiving country (Jones-Correa 1998). Nor is interest in

[1] More important than official dual citizenship policies of receiving countries are the policies of sending countries, which may make it impossible to give up citizenship or rescind citizenship upon naturalization elsewhere (Bloemraad 2004).

political participation in the new homeland incompatible with continuing identification with sending country (Monsivais 2001). Immigrants may separate the meaning of citizenship as legal status from citizenship as belonging, in which case naturalization does not interfere with the nurturing of dual identities (Brettell 2006). That legal status of citizenship may not be connected to ideas about belonging becomes evident when even those immigrants who have access to dual citizenship in Canada do not claim it on census forms (Bloemraad 2004).

In addition to the traditional and transnational models of citizenship, some scholars argue for the post-national model, which underlines the growing salience of human rights inhering in individuals and identities that go beyond nation-states (Soysal 1994). Ironically, such an orientation towards citizenship among immigrants themselves may have been more prevalent during an earlier era of mass migration, when labor internationalism combined with relatively weak or new nation-states (Waldinger 2015). More recently, there is evidence of flexible citizenship (Ong 1999) among the affluent globalized elites who crisscross the globe to maximize business opportunities and living standards (Massey and Akresh 2006). These globalized elites may acquire additional citizenships as needed, or they may elect not to become American or Canadian if it is not advantageous. In the case of the USA, there is evidence that immigrants with the highest levels of education are less likely to have acquired citizenship than those with less education (Aptekar 2014). However, this may not be the case in Canada, where Waters (2003) shows that the quintessential representatives of such elites, East Asian 'astronaut' families in Vancouver, nevertheless demonstrate some traditional orientations to citizenship. Using interviews with naturalizing immigrants, I show how their understandings of citizenship and naturalization align with models of citizenship. I find support for the traditional model in Canada and a set of ideas about belonging and citizenship in the USA that indirectly supports the traditional model while raising additional questions.

The second question I address in this paper is whether immigrants' understandings of citizenship align with the use of naturalization for civic integration. Civic integration refers to the rise of "mandatory measures focused on the acquisition of language and on the demonstration of individual alignment with a set of national—often presented as liberal—values" in Western immigrant-receiving nations (Paquet 2012, 244, see also Joppke 2007 and Wallace Goodman 2010). Paquet (2012) argues that naturalization in Canada—citizenship tests in particular—is being used as such a tool of civic integration by verifying immigrants' commitment to mainstream values, such as tolerance for diversity. Likewise, the American naturalization process can be seen as an even more powerful tool of civic integration, as it includes screenings of good moral character. With naturalized citizens given positive moral valence, particularly in opposition to 'illegals', naturalization functions not just as a screening mechanism to select for those who best embody the ideal of a hard-working, upstanding citizen. It is a discursive tool that helps fold immigration into the larger construction of the nation. The characterization of immigrants as morally upstanding and carefully selected supports the framing of the nation as exceptional and desired.

There is evidence that immigrants' own understandings of citizenship can be compatible with civic integration imperatives. In an interview study with a special class of business immigrants in Toronto, Marger (2006) found that many naturalized out of a sense of civic obligation and desire to be full participants of society, although

convenience was also a factor. Immigrant civic leaders interviewed in Ontario referred to citizenship acquisition as a meaningful and emotional event, associating being Canadian with such traits as moderation and tolerance (Howard 1998). In a study of how immigrants felt about the new multiple choice Canadian citizenship test, Joshee and Derwing (2005) found that new Canadians actually criticized the naturalization process for not emphasizing civic integration enough. In the USA, Brettell (2006) found that naturalized and non-citizen immigrants from four ethnic groups in Texas associated naturalization with showing commitment to the USA and pride in being an American, as well as gaining access to rights. As I show below, I found more evidence of a stronger connection between naturalization and civic integration in Canada than the USA, where some immigrants showed signs of defensive naturalization. Defensive naturalization takes place when immigrants seek citizenship to protect themselves from criminalization and anti-immigrant policies (Gilbertson 2004; Ong 2011; Van Hook et al. 2006). While it has been documented in the USA, it may not be as prevalent in Canada, where the deportation regime is less draconian, and there are more similarities between landed immigrant status and citizenship.

The final question concerns political participation: Do naturalizing immigrants view citizenship acquisition as a pathway to political participation? In both Canada and the USA, immigrants who successfully complete the naturalization process are able to vote and run for office. In the context of growing deportation regimes, particularly in the USA, citizenship also means a sense of security when engaging in other forms of political participation, such as demonstrations. Studies in both countries have found that immigrants express interest in voting when naturalizing, but often mixed with multiple other motivations. By considering a broader understanding that immigrants have of citizenship, this study examines how political participation fits into the naturalization process.

Below, I present a comparative analysis of how immigrants explain their decisions to naturalize in Canada and the USA. I found that the oft-asked-about benefits, such as voting, travel, jobs, and family reunification (the latter two more relevant for the USA) mattered, but other factors were at play. In Canada, but not in the USA, immigrants said they wanted to be citizens because of the great qualities of their new country. In the USA, but not in Canada, immigrants were naturalizing defensively, to protect themselves in an anti-immigrant climate. Perhaps most intriguingly, respondents in the USA were more likely to frame naturalization as something natural and normal, even though statistically, naturalization is far less of a norm in the USA than in Canada.

Data and methodology

Like Bloemraad (2006) and other researchers of naturalization mentioned above, I worked with particular research sites (suburban Toronto and New Jersey) and non-representative samples. Unlike previous research, however, I focused on a subset of immigrants who were successfully advancing through the naturalization process, in particular those who had just completed the citizenship interview in the USA and the written citizenship exam in Canada. I conducted 72 interviews in the USA and 69 interviews in Canada. American interviews were conducted in the US Citizenship and

Immigration Services waiting room in suburban New Jersey in 2007 and 2008, following respondents' successful completion of naturalization interviews and prior to their oath ceremonies. Everyone who acquires citizenship in southern New Jersey has to pass through this particular waiting room. While I make no claims regarding the representativeness of those I interviewed, the methodological approach allowed me to speak with a wide range of naturalizing immigrants, varying by country of origin, migration trajectory, age, and socioeconomic status.

In Canada, I was unable to gain access to the interior space of the Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) offices. Together with a research assistant, I approached naturalization applicants immediately outside the CIC office in suburban Toronto, subsequent to the administration of citizenship tests. My research assistant interviewed 24 out of the total of 69 respondents in Canada. On the days that she assisted me, we stood together outside the CIC office and took turns approaching potential respondents as they left the building. The assistant was a naturalized Canadian, and the author is a naturalized American. Both of us emigrated from Eastern European countries as children, and both of us were in our twenties at the time. There did not appear to be systematic differences in responses given to the two interviewers.

Canadian citizenship tests are multiple choice and are given free of charge to large groups of applicants. While I only interviewed American applicants who had successfully completed their citizenship interview, I was not able to ascertain whether the applicants had passed the test in Canada at the point of the interview. The passing rates for the Canadian citizenship test are very high and take place after all other requirements have been met (Joshee and Derwing 2005), while an interview with local immigration officials in New Jersey indicated that as many as half of those going in for their citizenship interviews in that location did not pass. How immigrants understand citizenship is shaped by the immigration system and their experience of the naturalization process. The fact that this process is likely more stressful in the American context than in Canada undoubtedly influenced the results. In other ways, the two research sites are roughly comparable due to high proportions of foreign born residing in the area, similarity in composition of the immigrant populations and proximity to major metropolitan areas.

Each interview lasted about 10 min and was recorded. We first asked immigrants to reflect on their decisions to become a citizen: *Please tell me how you decided to become a citizen. What were you thinking when you decided to naturalize*? We also asked them to consider what citizenship acquisition meant to them. If in their responses, the immigrants did not specifically mention becoming American or Canadian, voting, travel, jobs, and sponsoring family members (the latter in the USA only), we prompted them specifically on those topics with close-ended questions, such as *Did you think it would be easier to travel when you decided to apply for citizenship*? *Do you think getting citizenship makes you more American/Canadian*? The structure of the interview allowed me to gather a variety of responses, rather than a ranking or selection of the most commonly considered reasons for naturalization. At the end of the interviews, we gathered basic demographic information, such as age, level of education, and family status. The response rate was 79 % in the USA and 77 % in Canada. These relatively high response rates were likely reached due to the positive emotional state of many of the respondents, who appeared relieved at having completed a crucial part of the naturalization process and were willing to talk about it. In an attempt to reduce social

desirability bias, we assured the respondents of anonymity (following an Institutional Review Board-approved protocol) and told them that we were naturalized citizens.[2]

Interviewing immigrant populations raises methodological concerns, particularly in regard to language. All interviews were conducted in English. Although the respondents in both countries had to have demonstrated a proficiency in English to get to that point in the naturalization process, for most it was not their native language, and there was a range of comfort level in conversing in English. The research assistant and I attempted to assure informed consent and provided written information about the study to the participants. In several cases in both sites, we did not continue with interviews when the initial contact revealed doubts that the respondent would fully understand the questions and the study. Like other researchers working with immigrant populations, we found that some participants were glad to converse in English with sympathetic listeners, in our case non-native speakers ourselves (Koulouriotis 2011). Of course, many respondents in both countries were fluent in English, and some were native speakers. Nevertheless, I cannot rule out the possibility that some concepts were lost in translation for some of the respondents, despite our preparation for interviewing individuals with limited English proficiency.

Table 1 presents selected descriptive characteristics of those interviewed. Half of the respondents in the USA came from Asia, many from India and the Philippines. New Jersey has a much higher proportion of naturalizing immigrants from India and far fewer new citizens born in Mexico than the USA as a whole. A higher proportion (78 %) of the Canadian respondents was originally from Asia, primarily from India and Pakistan. There were other differences between the Canadian and American respondents. The Canadian point system of immigrant admission resulted in a much higher share of respondents arriving as professionals or students and a lower share arriving through family reunification provisions. Education levels differed somewhat between the two populations of respondents; although there were comparable numbers of immigrants with high school or less and some college education, there were more American respondents with completed college education. There were almost equal shares, however, of people with advanced degrees. The respondents in New Jersey were far more likely than respondents in the Toronto suburbs to have lived in their host country for longer than 15 years and tended to be older.

Results

Why naturalize?

The respondents were asked to reflect on their decisions to acquire citizenship and were prompted to consider the role of voting, ease of travel, access to more jobs, and ability to sponsor the migration of family (American respondents only). Most respondents cited multiple reasons for naturalization, with voting and travel being the most common

[2] Despite assurances that talking to me and the research assistant had nothing to do with their citizenship application, I cannot rule out that some informants may have felt pressured to participate or were influenced by the setting, which can feel threatening, particularly in the USA. At the same time, responses presented below indicate that many of immigrants interviewed were not intimidated, and minimized the significance of naturalization.

Table 1 Respondent Characteristics

	Number and percent of respondents	
	USA	Canada
Region of origin		
Asia	36 (50 %)	44 (64 %)
Africa	5 (7 %)	3 (4 %)
Former USSR	4 (6 %)	1 (1 %)
Europe	5 (7 %)	6 (9 %)
Canada	4 (6 %)	–
Caribbean	7 (10 %)	11 (16 %)
Latin America	10 (14 %)	3 (4 %)
Oceania	1 (1 %)	1 (1 %)
Mode of entry		
Refugee	3 (4 %)	2 (3 %)
Family reunification	45 (63 %)	37 (54 %)
Student	7 (10 %)	7 (10 %)
Professional	10 (14 %)	22 (32 %)
Other	7 (10 %)	1 (1 %)
Education		
HS or less	18 (25 %)	15 (22 %)
Some college	20 (28 %)	15 (22 %)
College	19 (26 %)	25 (36 %)
College plus	13 (18 %)	11 (16 %)
Unknown	2 (3 %)	3 (4 %)
Came as a minor	18 (25 %)	14 (21 %)
Came as 18–34 years old	36 (50 %)	43 (62 %)
Came as 35+ years old	18 (25 %)	11 (16 %)
In country <15 years	48 (67 %)	64 (93 %)
In country 15+ years	24 (33 %)	5 (7 %)
Current age		
18–34	32 (44 %)	42 (61 %)
35–54	33 (46 %)	25 (36 %)
55+	7 (10 %)	2 (3 %)
Total	72 (100 %)	69 (100 %)

combination. Among Canadian respondents, 28 % cited the right to vote when asked why they were naturalizing, compared to 46 % of American respondents[3] (see Table 2). This difference disappeared once respondents were asked directly whether they considered voting rights when deciding to naturalize: over 80 % said that they considered voting.

[3] The presidential election was particularly salient in the minds of American respondents, given the much publicized 2008 primaries and the presence of a television tuned to CNN in the waiting room where interviews were conducted in 2007 and 2008. These factors may have had a priming effect, resulting in a higher proportion of American respondents than Canadian respondents who said they wanted to vote when asked how they decided to naturalize.

Table 2 Reasons for Naturalizing

	Open-ended # (% of total)		Close-ended # (% of total)	
	USA	Canada	USA	Canada
Voting	33 (46 %)	19 (28 %)	62 (86 %)	60 (87 %)
Travel	32 (44 %)	30 (44 %)	52 (72 %)	54 (78 %)
Jobs	23 (32 %)	6 (9 %)	42 (58 %)	28 (40 %)
Sponsoring family	11 (15 %)	–	20 (28 %)	–
Become American/Canadian	3 (4 %)	4 (6 %)		
Lived here for X years	22 (31 %)	12 (17 %)		
Children/family life here	16 (22 %)	8 (12 %)		
Decided to stay/settle/work here	20 (28 %)	12 (17 %)		
Natural/why not/part of the process	16 (22 %)	10 (14 %)		
Normative/ought to	5 (7 %)	7 (10 %)		
It is a good country	7 (10 %)	20 (29 %)		
Social benefits	3 (4 %)	0 (0 %)		
Other	4 (6 %)	6 (9 %)		

Almost half of the naturalizing immigrants brought up easier travel unprompted as one of their reasons for seeking citizenship, and over 70 % total when prompted. Some respondents were speaking of travel in general, while others were looking specifically to facilitate travel to their home countries, or, in the case of Canadian respondents, travel to the USA. A few highly skilled Canadian respondents were thinking ahead to the possibility of using their citizenship to find more lucrative work in the USA or another country, employing naturalization as a strategy for career advancement.

American citizenship status allows access to most federal government jobs, jobs requiring security clearance, federal grants and scholarships, as well as some licensed professions, including police officers and state troopers in most states (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2002, p. 346; Plascencia et al. 2003; Sumption and Flamm 2012). In Canada, citizens, along with veterans, are preferred for federal government positions, but many more job opportunities, including police work, are open to landed immigrants in Canada than to permanent residents in the USA (Public Service Employment Act, section 39). A third of American respondents brought up jobs as the reason they were naturalizing, and many others responded affirmatively once asked directly whether access to jobs was something that played a role in their decision. Only 9 % of the Canadian respondents mentioned jobs as a reason they sought citizenship without a specific prompt, although 40 % agreed that it mattered when prompted. In the USA, citizenship makes it easier to sponsor migration of family members. Fifteen percent of the American respondents mentioned their desire to bring a family member—most often a parent or a child—to the USA when first asked how they decided to seek citizenship. Altogether, 28 % said that family sponsorship was part of their decision to naturalize.

What is striking is that the advantages of naturalization such as voting, travel, jobs, and ability to sponsor family migration were *not* immediately mentioned by many respondents in either country without a specific prompt. In fact, 43 % of the Canadian

respondents did not mention voting, travel, or jobs at all until prompted, and 15 % of the American respondents did not mention any of these reasons, nor the ability to sponsor family, until prompted. Why, then, did people naturalize?

Canada: a good country

In Canada, it was common for the immigrants to refer to positive qualities of their new country as the reason they decided to naturalize. Almost a third of the respondents (29 %) said that they were naturalizing because they *liked* Canada:

> *How did you decide to become a citizen of Canada*?
>
> Well, it's a multinational country [sic] and because of the freedom, of the religion, of the speech, and everything. I think it is good to live here, health care and other advantages, I like to live here. (Canada—female, 24, Pakistan)
>
> It's a great country and I've never met anybody who said that they are not proud to be a Canadian citizen so it is something that I wanted. It will be a privilege and I will be proud to call myself a Canadian citizen… In my opinion the worldview of Canada is one of high esteem and regard. Just to be part of such a country that is viewed by the world as a peaceful, fair, equal and just country is something that everyone will be proud of. (Canada—male, 32, Guyana)

Others cited tolerance, peacefulness, acceptance, political stability, high living standards, extensive social services, and a government that cares about the people. But as we can glimpse in the second quote, some respondents were looking forward to Canadian passports so they could enjoy what they felt was widespread goodwill towards Canada and its citizens around the world. This is in contrast to what some respondents in the USA noted about American citizenship: that it can be a liability because of the country's image abroad during the war on terror.

Immigrants speaking of how great Canada is may not seem especially significant: after all, we expect immigrants to produce a properly patriotic answer in response to such questions. We cannot be certain of the extent to which this plays a role in Canada, but, notably, mention of positive qualities of the USA as a reason for acquiring American citizenship was far rarer, at only 10 %. Those few who did mention naturalizing for this reason were vague in their responses, mostly referring to freedom and opportunity available in the USA, rather than to enumerating particular services or protections. This was despite the fact that interviews in the USA were conducted inside immigration offices, which might push people to express patriotism, while interviews in Canada took place in a more informal setting outside.

USA: the natural in naturalization

Few American respondents explained their decision to become citizens by referring to good qualities of the USA. Instead, a third of respondents referred to the number of years they lived in the country:

> I've been staying here for over fifteen years. It's about time I decided finally to be American citizen. From living here for that long. That's why. (USA—male, 40, Philippines)

Referring to the number of years one has lived in the host country as an explanation for naturalization was twice as common among the American respondents as among Canadian respondents.

Twenty-two percent of the American respondents explained their decision to naturalize by referring to their children growing up in the USA, or more generally, their family being there:

> Well, my wife is a citizen. My daughter is a citizen. She was born here. We live here. I work here, I go to school here, I live here, so why not? (USA—male, 29, Egypt)

The immigrants mentioned length of stay and family life in the host country alongside simply settling there as reasons to seek citizenship. Again, this was twice as common in the USA as in Canada. In fact, 28 % of the American respondents said they were naturalizing because they decided to stay. Permanent settlement in the USA was strongly associated in people's minds with other aspects of life, such as having children, owning a home, working, or going to school. These, in turn, were used to explain the decision to naturalize.

Over a fifth of the American respondents went beyond explaining their naturalization through settlement and said that acquiring citizenship was a natural step to take:

> I simply wanted to be a citizen. <laughs> Yes, I was a permanent resident and it was something natural, you know, to go ahead applying for citizenship. And I did it.
>
> (USA—male, 42, Afghanistan)

The reaction of 10 % of American respondents to the question of why they applied for citizenship was simply 'why not?' Again, far fewer Canadian respondents said that naturalization was natural or responded with a 'why not?' Instead, as we saw earlier, they connected it more explicitly to perceived positive qualities of the Canadian nation. This is surprising because the almost universal nature of naturalization in Canada would lead us to expect that naturalization would be viewed as natural there. Yet, naturalization in Canada appeared to be a more active affair, and it was the new American citizens who viewed naturalization as obvious.

USA: defensive naturalization

There was also evidence that for some of the American respondents, naturalization was a defensive move meant to protect their rights in an anti-immigrant climate. A few said that citizenship protected them from future changes in immigration policy:

> You see, with not having your citizenship, you may be at mercy of further changes in immigration policies… With the citizenship you are trying to hedge against that risk… Hopefully there are no changes but citizenship covers the risk

> of further change that you are less vulnerable as a citizen than as an alien resident. (USA—female, 40, India)

A middle-aged Chinese immigrant was worried that social security laws would change to exclude permanent residents. An immigrant from the Dominican Republic noted that the backlash against illegal immigrants may one day extend to permanent legal residents. A Panamanian immigrant felt that after 9/11, citizenship would bring her more security than permanent residency status. A young woman from Korea worried about being deported if falsely accused of a crime. Unlike their American peers, Canadian respondents did not manifest signs of defensive naturalization or seemed to worry about potential future changes in immigration policies that would make their lives as permanent residents more difficult.

Canada: dual citizenship

We might expect immigrants in Canada to factor in Canada's dual citizenship laws in their decision to become citizens. However, a quarter of the Canadian respondents said dual citizenship provisions did not play a role in their decision to naturalize in Canada:

> Yes, we can get a dual citizenship, but I'm not sure if I would do that, it's not really necessary for me right now because I[am] living here. (Canada—male, 32, India)

In fact, some respondents were concerned about the paperwork and/or fees and taxes that are sometimes involved in maintaining their first citizenship. Immigrants from India comprised a large portion of interviews in Canada. India offers emigrants a form of dual citizenship. Nevertheless, some respondents from India said that they would not keep their Indian citizenship because they did not want to bother with the lengthy process.

Many of those who said that they did not think of dual citizenship provisions when applying for naturalization remarked that they would have naturalized regardless of ability to keep their home citizenship. Another quarter of respondents said that they *did* consider dual citizenship provisions when naturalizing, although they would have gone ahead with the process even if Canada did not allow dual citizenship. Many other respondents did not have a choice in the matter of dual citizenship, as their home country did not allow it. This was the case for immigrants from China, for example. In all, the ability to maintain two or more citizenship did not seem to be a particularly salient factor in the naturalization of most immigrants in Canada. Even when Canadian immigrants considered dual citizenship provisions as a benefit, they viewed it as a side benefit, and one that many would be willing to bypass in their quest for Canadian citizenship.

Identity and belonging

Very few respondents in either country said they were naturalizing in order to become American or Canadian unprompted. In follow-up questioning[4], 42 % of the American respondents associated citizenship with becoming more American, compared to 55 %

[4] I am drawing a distinction between naturalization in order to become American or Canadian and naturalization making the respondent feel American or Canadian.

of the Canadian respondents feeling more Canadian. In Canada, the respondents who migrated as children felt that citizenship made them Canadian less often than the respondents who migrated as adults. However, in the USA, many of the child migrants were just as likely to connect being American to acquiring citizenship as were adult migrants. In both countries, there was a handful of people who understood being Canadian or American in essentialist cultural terms—and therefore, did not feel that citizenship could change who they were:

> I don't think a passport makes a difference. You are still the same what you are, it won't change who I am and my culture and what I left, everything. So everything is the same for me. (Canada—male, 32, India)

> Well, I think it depends on which side of the aisle you are in the US, I would say. If you define being an American as having a paper to show for it, yes. But if you are talking of culture, it doesn't make you an American. Because the past makes you who you are. So there is no way you can change your more than twenty years of culture. Even if you are immersed. You can't just do it overnight. American ways are unique to Americans. Ok. African ways are unique to Africans. So in terms of culture, no. In terms of paper, yes. (USA—male, 28, Nigeria)

These immigrants did not think that naturalization would make them Canadian or American because they felt that culturally, they were still very much of their sending society.

What about the roughly half of the respondents who did *not* connect citizenship to becoming American or Canadian? Many of these specified that they already felt American or Canadian *before* acquiring citizenship:

> Truly speaking, in my opinion, being a citizen of any country just means respecting that country, respecting all the laws, obeying all the laws, respecting people, overall respecting the nationality, and I have been doing all those things before, so it wouldn't really change a lot, it's just formalizing what I've been doing before. (Canada—male, 19, Ukraine)

> I've been more American before I became an American. <laughs> I've been living here, I've been earning here, I raised my family here. I talk the language, I speak the language. Basically, more American. (USA—male, 40, Philippines)

Some respondents pointed out that becoming a landed immigrant or permanent resident—or more broadly, just moving and settling down—made them Canadian or American. Altogether, ten American respondents and 12 Canadian respondents explained the lack of change naturalization would produce in their identity by referring to citizenship as a piece of paper or a formality.

Discussion

The most significant set of results in this study of immigrants' understandings of citizenship and naturalization emerges after extending beyond the narrow list of

motivations for acquiring citizenship. When considering these motivating factors—voting, travel, jobs, and family reunification—the differences between my respondents in Canada and the USA were either minor or predictable. The immigrants in both countries were highly interested in voting and travel. The American respondents were more likely to think of access to jobs that citizenship would bring, likely because more jobs are closed to non-citizens. And the ability to sponsor relatives played a role for a significant minority in the USA. What is more interesting are the differences in understanding naturalization as an affirmation of bonds to positively valued nation versus a formality that marks a natural transition.

The Canadian respondents spoke of positive qualities of Canada, including government services, as reasons to naturalize. This echoes and elaborates the findings of Bloemraad (2006), who described her Vietnamese Canadian and Portuguese Canadian respondents as being interested in 'government protection and support,' while her American respondents focused on economic and legal benefits of citizenship (p. 10). Beyond government services and protection, however, the positive global reputation of Canada was a common theme. Meanwhile, the American respondents framed naturalization as something natural and associated with settling in the USA. This framing of naturalization as something that *follows* settlement, belonging, and even becoming American is an important contribution to the existing literature, which is often focused on naturalization as a determinant of integration outcomes. While that may be the case, it is significant that many immigrants I interviewed reversed this relationship. The structure of the interviews, which consciously allowed for open-ended responses before inquiring about common benefits of citizenship, helped bring to light this counterintuitive discovery. There was also evidence that defensive naturalization, or naturalization in order to secure one's rights in an anti-immigrant climate, is a factor in the USA. Some respondents worried about the eroding rights of permanent legal residents and possible future legislative changes that may affect the lives of immigrants. The naturalizing immigrants in Canada exhibited a more active construction of the naturalization process, in the sense that they connected citizenship acquisition to joining a nation with many positive characteristics, rather than describing it as normal. Although we might expect immigrants in both countries to say Canada or America is great because it is a properly patriotic response and such formulations likely came up in both the citizenship tests and interviews, American respondents rarely did so. Instead, their answers linked citizenship acquisition to a natural culmination of their immigrant journeys, following settlement and social and economic integration.

The findings provide support for the resilience of the traditional model of citizenship, albeit in a complicated manner and with evidence of other ways of imagining citizenship. Only about half of the respondents in either country said that naturalization made them more American and Canadian. Almost no one said they were seeking citizenship *in order* to become American or Canadian. However, given that many respondents insisted that they were already American and Canadian due to settling down, raising families, working, and paying taxes, their ideas about legal citizenship as a formality did not so much undermine the traditional conception of citizenship, as focused on an alternative set of ties between the individual and the nation, redefining membership. Interviews with immigrants indicate a separation between the meaning of citizenship as a legal status and citizenship as belonging. While some immigrants were seeking citizenship to facilitate travel to their home countries, the relative lack of

interest in dual citizenship in Canada failed to highlight significant transnational orientations, corroborating Bloemraad's (2004) quantitative findings. At the same time, a few highly skilled immigrant respondents in Canada did seek citizenship in order to facilitate a cosmopolitan lifestyle that transcended national boundaries. This is in line with Waldinger's (2015) recent formulation of cross-border connections that points out the tension between the maintenance of cross-border ties and activities and imperatives of both receiving and sending nation-states, as well as the resources necessary to engage in transnational activity (Waldinger 2015).

Naturalization appeared to be more strongly connected to civic integration for respondents in Canada than the USA. Many interviewed Canadian immigrants referenced positive values connected with the Canadian nation, including the Canadian way of life, when explaining how they decided to seek citizenship. Such sentiments were largely absent among those interviewed in the USA, although some respondents pointed out their ability to speak English and do things the American way. However, they did so in arguing that naturalization did not make them civically integrated; rather, they were already integrated before naturalizing. Here again, we see a separation of formal citizenship acquisition from other meanings of citizenship, such as belonging. Finally, the vast majority of respondents in both countries did connect naturalization to an interest in voting. Although no one spoke of acquiring citizenship in order to run for office or engage other forms of political participation, it is possible that the experience of living as a citizen may result in more political empowerment in the future, particularly in Canada, where a sizable proportion of elected officials are naturalized citizens (Mahler and Siemiatycki 2011).

In weighing the results, it is important to consider the differences in the contexts in which the interviews were conducted, differences that are reflective of the larger disparities in naturalization processes and immigration systems, and are likely responsible for some of the ways in which immigrants articulated their ideas about citizenship to interviewers. Both sets of respondents were interviewed after situations in which the desirability and greatness of their new nations were emphasized. But the Canadian respondents were interviewed after a multiple choice exam on Canadian history, civics, and values and did not know whether they had passed. Although we can imagine that this uncertainty, albeit small since all other requirements for citizenship had been fulfilled and most applicants pass the test, may have caused them to appear more patriotic than the American respondents, who knew they had successfully passed the interview. At the same time, the citizenship interview is a culmination of the 'long gray welcome' (North 1985) that characterizes the American immigration system. Prior to my interviews, the American respondents had just spent hours in the rather intimidating environment of the local immigration office. Rather than expressing patriotism expected of 'good' immigrants, however, their interactions with this system gave them many opportunities to gain a pragmatic attitude and a skeptical take on what they are told naturalization is supposed to mean. Many appeared to view naturalization as something an immigrant goes through, an important protection that is not determinative of identity or a sense of belonging, which are grounded elsewhere. Aside from the experience of the naturalization process itself, it appears that other contextual factors, such as the war on terror and vicissitudes of immigration reform—as much as ideas about belonging and national identity—play a role in immigrants' understandings and decisions around naturalization and thus influence their political incorporation.

Conclusion

Immigrant naturalization is a way of socially reproducing the nation by turning outsiders of the nation into members. Naturalization is also about social control: immigrants in both Canada and the USA are screened for eligibility and fitness. As Li (2003) notes, the bar for immigrants is higher than for the native-born because they must show that they enrich their new nation and are loyal new citizens. States use naturalization as an instrument of social control, to create new citizens that conform to established ideas of what Canadians or Americans are like. Because naturalization works this way, it is also a mechanism of stratification, as many immigrants are necessarily left outside the circle of citizenship when those deemed most deserving naturalize. This is especially apparent in the USA, where so many immigrants do not have access to the rights and protections of citizenship.

Interviews with immigrants who are going through the process of naturalization and experiencing these modes of social control and ways of reproducing the nation in their own lives show that, for the most part, immigrants' own understandings align with these functions. Even those immigrants in the USA who may not have been motivated to seek citizenship by a desire to embrace the positive qualities of the USA did strongly associate citizenship status with settling down. The simplified parsing of immigrant motivations into right and wrong reasons, which is often evident in the public sphere, is belied by the more complex reality, and by the resistance of many immigrants to the dominant discourses that place utmost importance on the act of acquiring legal citizenship.

The differences in how Canadian and American immigrant respondents explained their experience of naturalization reflect the differences in the institutional contexts in which their naturalization takes place. Although, in recent years, there has been an increased effort by the US government to encourage naturalization through funding of non-profit organizations, it remains marginal compared to the outreach by the Canadian government. Active encouragement of citizenship acquisition contradicts the framing of American citizenship as a highly desired prize that must be earned, particularly in a climate where immigrants are already suspect for naturalizing for the 'wrong', instrumental reasons. It is not that in Canada, there is no suspicion of immigrants who may be taking advantage of the system or not sufficiently valuing citizenship. Rather, the institutional framework is set up in a way that supports citizenship acquisition as a facet of social and political integration of ethnic groups (Bloemraad 2006). In the USA, on the other hand, naturalization is framed as the culmination of an individualized immigrant path, a trial for proving one's integration and deservingness. What this research shows is that some American immigrants resist this framing by disconnecting their belonging from formal citizenship status. Meanwhile, others are becoming what Jones-Correa (1998, p. 200) has termed 'citizens by intimidation.' Fear and anxiety become an integral part of reproducing the nation.

I began by asking how immigrants in Canada and the USA explain their decisions to seek formal citizenship status. The interview data allowed me to fill a gap in the immigration literature by providing some answers to these questions, even as the unrepresentative nature of the sample limited the generalizability of the findings to the populations of new Canadian and American citizens. The brief length of interviews and the context in which they were conducted raise some internal validity concerns, particularly around priming and social desirability bias. Bolstering my conclusions is

the fact that many respondents, particularly in the USA, explained their naturalization in ways that deviate from expected scripts of eager immigrants thrilled to be joining their new nation. However, the results of this analysis, while illuminating why those who naturalize do so, leave us in the dark about understandings of citizenship among those who are eligible for citizenship but do *not* naturalize, and this should be taken up by future research.

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