

Summary

Norway has joined a long list of states that have expanded citizenship deprivation powers in recent years. After decades of hibernation, states have passed new legislation or amended or reinforced existing laws to rid themselves of unwanted citizens. Suspects of terrorism and naturalization fraud are the main targets of this revival of citizenship deprivation. Naturalization fraud pertains to cases in which immigrants have acquired citizenship by application—*naturalized*—on false pretenses. If the state decides to strip the person of citizenship—*denaturalize*—deportation can follow. In 2016, the Norwegian government instructed the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration to prioritize cases of naturalization fraud. Targeting “citizenship cheaters” was one of several measures aimed at regaining border control at the height of the “refugee crisis.” Subsequently, 500 cases were opened by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration.

This dissertation takes the government’s decision to intensify citizenship revocation as its point of departure and follows the debates it engendered and some of the lives affected by it. It examines the state practice of citizenship deprivation from the state and subjects’ point of view. To examine the state’s perspective, I analyze parliamentary discussions over legislative proposals submitted by opposition parties seeking to tame the government’s denaturalization powers. To explore the lived experiences of those affected by citizenship deprivation, I build on qualitative interviews with 28 individuals undergoing processes of denaturalization. Theoretically, the thesis mainly draws on concepts of exceptionalism, emotions, and interpellation. Analyzing parliamentary debates and qualitative interviews through these theoretical perspectives, the thesis poses two overarching research questions: What arguments did the Norwegian government articulate to justify the decision to revitalize citizenship deprivation in Parliament? How does the process of citizenship deprivation shape emotions, social relations, and subjectivities among those targeted?

Concerning the first research question, I find three different arguments. First, the government claimed that sanctioning naturalization fraud was important in protecting the moral integrity of the asylum system and the institution of citizenship itself. According to the government naturalization fraud was not only a breach of law, but also portrayed as a severe moral misconduct. Second, the government depicted targets of citizenship revocation as potential criminals and security threats to justify the decision to initiate—and perpetuate—the tightened denaturalization practice. Such criminalizing discourse functioned to keep the possibility of citizenship deprivation indefinitely open, placing naturalized citizens in a permanently precarious position before the law.

Third, the government depoliticized the decision by grounding it in domestic and international law. According to this hyper-legalist reasoning, the government's only course of action was enforcing the letter of the law. As such, the government attempted to remove accountability for its priority to tackle the issue of naturalization fraud.

Concerning the second research question, I find that undergoing the process of citizenship deprivation is an embodied experience that also shapes social relations. I examine the process of denaturalization as an "affective economy", in which emotions "circulate" and "stick" to subjects experiencing it. Based on the interview material, I reconstruct three constellations of emotions and estrangements. First, some interviewees expressed pain and anger about being alienated from the national body. To them, the prospect of possible expulsion opened a space for critiquing racially coded promises of equal citizenship. Another finding was that fears of deportation and surveillance circulated, which destabilized families and heavily targeted communities. These fears led to social isolation and a sense of containment, making some consider self-deportation. A final finding was that the interviewees experienced exhaustion because of protracted case processing. Their lives became increasingly mechanical and "zombie"-like, followed by a sense of self-estrangement. Overall, the interviewees' expressed experiences of alienation in three concentric circles of life: from the nation, their families and communities and themselves.

Undergoing the citizenship revocation process also shaped subjectivities. All interviewees were facing or had faced an accusation of lying or concealing information to the immigration authorities. The accusation forms part of a broader policy trend through which states use citizenship policies as an instrument to distinguish between deserving and undeserving citizens. I analyze the accusation as an interpellation, understood as a speech act that calls out a subject and designates a place for them in the social and ideological system. Based on the interview material, I distinguish between three positions in response to the accusation of acquiring citizenship by fraudulent means. The "sinners" assumed guilt and appealed for administrative mercy. Interviewees who took this position reflected the notion of deservingness. The "saints" claimed minor wrongdoings in asylum procedures but implied they were the wrong targets of citizenship revocation. This position implied alignment with welfare state virtues (e.g., being financially self-supportive) while implicitly taking distance from undeserving others (e.g., welfare clients). The "racialized scapegoats" claimed that the authorities had no substantiating evidence to support the accusation against them, suggesting instead that the government used citizenship revocation to gain political currency. Some of the interviewees originating from Somalia suspected that they were collectively targeted because of their racialized, inferior position in Norwegian society.

The dissertation consists of three articles prefaced by an introduction. Whereas the articles revolve around the current practice of citizenship deprivation in Norway, the introduction seeks to historicize it. The impression left by prevailing histories of Norwegian citizenship is that citizenship deprivation is a new practice. However, this is not entirely true. During the first half of the 20th century, the Norwegian state turned many Roma, Jews, and war brides into “alien citizens” and expelled them from the national community. The fact that the expulsion of these groups was considered legitimate at the time calls for an open discussion of today’s policies, their justifications, and their consequences. Therefore, I reflect on the breaks and continuities between past and current practices of citizenship deprivation.

The introduction comprises six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the topic and the research questions. Chapter 2 discusses cases of alien citizens in Norway’s past and present. Chapters 3 and 4 reflect on the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the dissertation. Chapter 5 summarizes the three articles. Chapter 6 outlines the main findings of the dissertation, discusses their implications for our understanding of the relationship between state and subject, and reflect on the re-emergence of citizenship deprivation against the backdrop of its prehistories. The articles are listed below.

List of articles:

“Citizenship Cheaters” before the Law: Reading Fraud-Based Denaturalization in Norway through Lenses of Exceptionalism.” *International Political Sociology* 17 (1). doi: 10.1093/ips/olad006

Circles of alienation: examining first-hand experiences of citizenship deprivation through the perspective of emotions and estrangement. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* doi: 10.1080/1369183X.2023.2266148

Sinners, Saints, and Racialized Scapegoats: (Mis)interpellation and Subject Positions in the Face of Citizenship Deprivation. Under review.