

# The substantive sense of citizenship: with a focus on the politics of belonging

## *O sentido substantivo da cidadania: com foco nas políticas de pertencimento*

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**Abstract:** Based on an exploratory literature review, this article focuses on the substantive sense of citizenship in the context of second-generation migrants in Scandinavia. Through a theoretical framework that dives into the two terms of *citizenship* and *belonging* and a discussion of the relevant findings from the existing literature, the article aims to investigate the following research question: *How can the politics of belonging interfere with citizenship?* The article concludes that an individual need to feel a sense of belonging to a community in order to be fully a citizen or member of the given state, nation, or area in a substantive sense.

**Keywords:** Citizenship. Politics of belonging. Substantive citizenship. Borders. Scandinavia.

**Resumo:** Baseando-se em uma revisão exploratória da literatura, este artigo se volta ao sentido substantivo de cidadania no contexto dos migrantes da segunda geração na Escandinávia. Isto se faz por meio de um referencial teórico por meio do qual se debruça sobre os termos cidadania e pertencimento, e por meio de uma discussão dos resultados relevantes da literatura já existente, o artigo tem como objetivo responder ao seguinte questionamento: *como a política de pertencimento pode interferir na cidadania?* O artigo conclui que um indivíduo precisa sentir que pertence a uma comunidade para ser plenamente cidadão ou membro de determinado Estado, nação ou área em um sentido substantivo.

**Palavras-chaves:** Cidadania. Políticas de pertencimento. Cidadão substantivo. Fronteiras. Escandinávia.

## 1. Introduction

Many fundamental issues of our times implicitly or explicitly revolve around or even hinge on the conduct and habitus of the subject called the citizen. Whether it is ‘ecology’, ‘security’, ‘immigration’, ‘cohesion’, ‘integration’ or ‘energy’, attention immediately turns towards how governing subjects should produce the intended result, which is the citizen as individual. (ISIN, NIELSEN, 2008, p. 2).

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Throughout history human kind has moved beyond territories, spaces and spheres. In today's modern conception of the *state* these movements are limited and controlled by borders, citizenships and passports. Across the globe individuals are in possession of, in a waiting-state of or in lack of a citizenship. In Isin and Nielsen's quote above, it can be argued that citizenship has a two-folded mission. First, a political aim and secondly, an individual aim. Professor of Sociology Rogers Brubaker states that one can formally be a citizen, but still not be fully a member or citizen in a substantive sense (BRUBAKER, 2015, p. 139).

Brubaker's argument demonstrates how closely linked the two parallels of citizenship and belonging actually are. Citizenship can often be naturalized in the literature, perhaps particularly in the Western literature, and the aspect of belonging might be over-shadowed. However, when overlooking the politics of belonging, the political aspect of citizenship might lose its purpose – how can one be a bounded and exclusive citizen without feeling like one? On behalf of this the research question for this paper stands as following: *How can the politics of belonging interfere with citizenship?*

The aim of this paper is to investigate further on the substantive sense of citizenship through a literature review. To investigate the given research question there will first be a theoretical framework with an exploratory approach focused on the two following terms; *citizenship* and *belonging*. After the theoretical framework there will be a presentation of the methodology. Next there will be a discussion of the results found in the exploratory literature review. At last there will be a concluding part aiming to answer the given research question. To contextualize the paper there will be a particular focus on second-generation migrants in Scandinavia. This is due to the fact that literature in Scandinavia focus more on integration than on the politics of belonging and how it interferes with citizenship.

## 2. Theoretical framework

Based on this papers research question, *how can the politics of belonging interfere with citizenship?* I have chosen two different terms that will help with the process of exploring and investigating the given question. The words are chosen due to the fact that I find them inseparable and that they must be seen in context to each other when exploring the research question. The two terms I have chosen are: (1) Citizenship and (2) Belonging.

### 2.1 Citizenship

Intact with the increasing far-right discourse around the world, one can argue that xenophobia is nowhere near to be defeated. Within the xenophobic discourse it is a common concern that newcomers will capture and occupy welfare benefits, the labor market and/or education reserved for the *exclusive citizens* (ANGEN, 2016, p. 52). Looking back at the so-called and highly criticized *refugee crisis of 2015* there was a distinct tendency to refer to migrants with terms that represents large quantities.

Newspapers, journals and magazines frequently referred to migrants who were fleeing with terms such *migration flood*. Throughout Western media migration is frequently portrayed as a journey from the global South to the global North. However, statistics prove that only 3% of the world's population live outside their country of origin, and that under half of the 3% migrate from the global South to the global North (BRUBAKER, 2015, p. 20). Statistics such as these can conform to the argument of media being the fourth estate with an enormous power and influence on the public and one might question if the media plays a role in the maintenance of xenophobic attitudes. Literature in the field of migration has paid significant attention to the discourse of citizenship, but the relation between citizenship and the

politics of belonging, and how these two factors can interfere with each other, is yet to be interpreted and studied further.

Professor of International Politics, Engin Isin, argues that: “There is no doubt that the new intensity of struggles over citizenship is associated with global movements and flows of capital, labour and people.” (ISIN, 2008, p. 16). Brubaker argues that citizenship was designed by the modern state to create a system of bounded and exclusive citizens within territorial areas (BRUBAKER, 2015, s. 19). Brubaker’s argument directly points out that individuals within the state without a citizenship fall outside of this bounded and exclusive deal. The struggles over citizenship mentioned in Isin’s statement might be seen as a reflection of the citizens and their thoughts and panic over not having exclusive access to the labor market, welfare benefits, education and/or the public sphere.

After 2015 the media in Europe was overwhelmed with images of women, men, families and children fleeing in a state of despair, while waiting for further transport through the Balkan Route, or over the Mediterranean, on the way to a new and prosperous state. However, Western media was not dominated by articles stating facts and seeking understanding and sympathy from their audience. On the contrary media was dominated by titles, images and articles questioning how *this wave* could affect the labor market and the welfare systems.

Brubaker’s statement points out that citizenship is closely related to inequality – who *is* what has implications for *who* gets what (BRUBAKER, 2015, p. 74). Who is lucky enough to reach a new and prosperous state? It is relevant to question if the situation would look the same if it was Northern Europeans seeking a new and prosperous state due to inhumane living conditions.

### 2.1.1 Belonging to a citizenship

Isin & Nielsen argue throughout their interdisciplinary book, *Acts of Citizenship*, that the acts of citizenship are the various events that happens before a subject constitutes him/herself as a citizen (ISIN, NIELSEN, 2008, p. 2). Throughout the first chapter of Isin and Nielsen's book they claim that the acts of citizenship demands both responsibility and accountability. Further they argue that "It is always the citizen whose acts, conduct and habitus are at stake, whether problematized or valorized." (IBID, p. 2). This view of the citizen as a vulnerable subject can be seen as a part of the modern states proclamatory message of the exclusive citizen – one has exclusive access to certain benefits but are always under a certain responsibility and restraint to follow the laws and reforms given by the state.

Gillian Creese argues in his study on *racialization, belonging and identity among second-generation African-Canadians*, that borders function as a material purpose as well as a psychic purpose where social, cultural and psychological boundaries between *us* and *them* are created (CREESE, 2018, p. 4). In other words, borders are not only geopolitical and bounded by territories, they also constitute who belongs and who does not belong within the borders (IBID). The power constituted by the borders can therefore, in a way, affect and determine an individual's identity by designing an image of *who* belongs.

As previously mentioned, Brubaker argues that one can formally be a citizen and still not be fully a member in a substantive sense (BRUBAKER, 2015, p. 139). Creece expands on Brubaker's argument by stating that borders are in a position of controlling the politics of belonging by creating a feeling of being a stranger and not belonging in a substantive sense. Being a member or citizen in a substantive sense can be explained as the interpretation of having a firm basis and at the same time feel important, meaningful and/or considerable. In other words, the distinction between being formally a citizen

and being fully a member or citizen in a substantive sense will be reflected on an individual's sense of belonging to the given state.

## 2. 2 Belonging

The concept of belonging is highly relevant within the two major fields of psychology and sociology. To gain a deeper understanding of the concept and content within the politics of belonging it is beneficial to dedicate a paragraph in this paper to a further discovery of the term *belonging*. Sociologist and professor Nira Yuval-Davis defines belonging in the following way:

People can 'belong' in many different ways and to many different objects of attachments. These can vary from a particular person to the whole of humanity, in a concrete or abstract way; belonging can be an act of self-identification or identification by others, in a stable, contested or transient way. (YUVAL-DAVIS, 2006, p. 199).

In other words, belonging can be understood as a dynamic and complex process that can change over time. Belonging is not only shaped by our physical- and/or psychological sphere, but also by the way these are judged and valued by others (IBID, p. 203). The importance of being accepted and acknowledged stands out as an important fundament for the development of the sense of belonging. Yuval-Davis argues that belonging is closely related to identity – your sense of belonging has implications for your personal identity. However, she also states that it is important to distinguish between belonging and the politics of belonging. Belonging is often naturalized and only given a second thought when being threatened, it also includes an emotional aspect where the feeling of home is central. (IBID, p. 197). In contrast, Yuval-Davis suggest that the politics of belonging is more of a political project with an aim of building and constructing certain collective ways of belonging (IBID).

Brubaker defines the *politics of belonging* in a similar way by stating that “The politics of belonging is a politics of identity, but it is often at the same time a politics of interest: who *is* what has implications for who *gets* what.” (BRUBAKER, 2015, p. 74). Brubaker’s definition underlines the close relation between belonging and citizenship. He also makes a point out of making a distinct between the internal- and external politics of belonging. Brubaker argues that the internal politics concerns individuals living within a state without being accepted as a fully member (IBID, p. 134). The external politics concern individuals situated outside the state that still remain a sense of belonging to that particular state or area (IBID).

### 2.2.1 Internal belonging among second-generation immigrants

In Creece’s qualitative study he interviews second-generation immigrants in Canada. One of the participants name is Shukre who was born in Somalia but grew up in Canada. Creece asks Shukre how she believes that other Canadians view her, and she replies that she is viewed as *black* (CREESE, 2018, p. 8). Creece writes: “Being seen as black erases her Canadianness because as a black woman she is presumed to be from somewhere else.” (IBID, p. 8). Due to the fact that Shukre has another skin color than white, she is being marginalized and generalized. In the concluding part of Creece’s study he writes that “Almost all participants linked thinking about their identities to the way strangers and casual acquaintances frequently ask “where are you from”.” (IBID, p. 14).

As the far-right movement around the globe keep increasing, the argument of preserving *national culture* within the state is often used to justify why anti-immigration programs are established and practiced. Nicholas De Genova writes that within the far-right discourse it is presumptive that a native-born is a part of the national culture and that this is legitimated as a birthright (DE GENOVA, 2013, p. 13). However, De

Genova states that to be a native-born one has to fit into a thought way of being with the *correct* skin color, family heritage and language (IBID). It can therefore be argued that migrants, whether being first-, second- or third-generation, will never fit into or be a part of the thought *national culture*. Migrants might face challenges of being trapped within a social classification system, tied with hierarchies ranking how national one is (LUNDSTRÖM, 2017, p. 82).

Peter Nyers supports Lundström's argument by stating that within societies there can be an implicit ranking system that creates a hierarchy of belonging (NYERS, 2010, p. 138). This ranking system is often based on pre-established conceptions of *who* belongs.

### 3. Methodology

I have now presented a theoretical framework based on relevant literature within the field of migration on the two terms 'citizenship' and 'belonging' and their close relation. As previously mentioned, this paper aims to explore how the politics of belonging can interfere with citizenship. This interest emerged from a personal experience after working as a civics teacher at a public elementary school and at a refugee service for adults in Norway. Throughout this work experience the close connection between citizenship and belonging stood out as particularly interesting.

The methodology used to approach the research question is through an exploratory literature review. By implementing an exploratory literature review, one seeks out to explore what literature actually exists on the chosen topic, which in this case is the politics of belonging in relation to citizenship (ADAMS, KHAN, RAESIDE, 2007, p. 42). To identify relevant literature, I used different academic databases (particularly the two databases *Oria* and *Google Scholar*). To further limit and specify the terms 'citizenship' and 'belonging' I combined them with keywords such as inequality, borders,



strangers, second-generation and identity. I only chose literature published after 2005 to explore the topic in a contemporary discourse.

Throughout the process of exploring the relevant literature it became clear that several scholars are highly interested in this topic. Specialists in the field such as Rogers Brubaker, Engin F. Isin, Greg M. Nielsen and Stephen Castles have touched upon the topic in several publications. However, in the context of Scandinavia there is a lack of research on the politics of belonging in relation to citizenship, both qualitative and quantitative. Most of the research and publications written about the topic within Scandinavia deals with the discourse of integration. This can be problematic due to the fact that integration seems irrelevant in the context on second- and third- generation migrants who has grown up in a Scandinavian country. This was also the main issue when searching for relevant literature; there was not a lot written in the Scandinavian context. Most of the literature is written in a Canadian or U.S. American context.

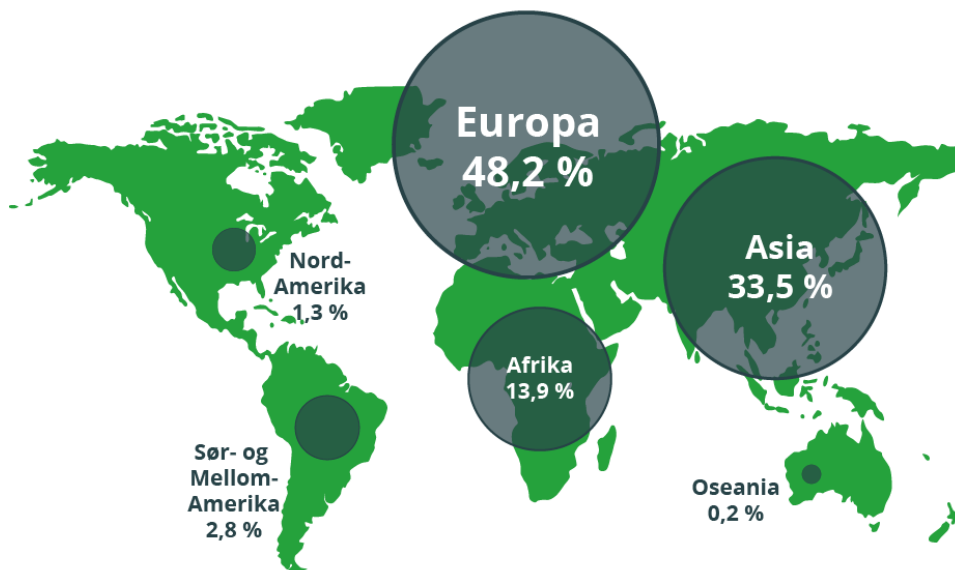
#### 4. Results

In this section I will present the findings that are most relevant to the research question; *how can the politics of belonging interfere with citizenship?* As seen in the theoretical framework there is a tendency around Europe to have an interpretation of how a migrant should look, act, dress, talk and even smell. This is argued by Professor of Sociology Catrin Lundström when she explains the naturalized image of ‘the migrant’ in her study on race, citizenship and belonging in Sweden:

The migrant’ tends to be imagined as a non-privileged, non-white, non-western subject in search of a better future in Europe or the United States and as such is a pre-constituted subject shaped by notions of marginalization and poverty. (LUNDSTRÖM, 2017, p. 79).

Lundström argues that ‘the migrant’ is frequently linked with sharp notions of marginalization and poverty. Xenophobic and uninformed thoughts such as these does not only include migrants, they can also include the understanding of second-generation migrants. In other words, a Norwegian with another skin color than white can easily be placed into this marginalized category and can therefore never fully be a citizen in a substantive sense. As Lundström mentions, it is a common thought that ‘the migrant’ is from a non-western country, often from the African continent or from the Middle East. This imagined thought of ‘the migrant’ will often stand in the way of prosperous and hard-working individuals from an ethnic minority.

Image 1 – Statistics



Source: Made by the author.

Norway show that 48% of all immigrants in Norway descend from other European countries (STATISTICS NORWAY, 2019). In fact, most residence from ethnic minorities living in Norway comes from Poland, not from Somalia or any other African country for that sake. Isin and Nielsen (2008, p. 7) state that: “When acts of citizenship produce strangers, aliens and outcasts, they

emerge not as beings already defined but as active and reactive ways of being with others”.

As previously mentioned in the paper, Isin argues that there is a new intensity of struggles over citizenship due to the global movement and of people, labor and capital (ISIN, 2008, p. 18). Isin’s argument can be understood in two different ways. First as a political discourse where states have built strict and restrained border controls. This results in a pressured situation for individuals wanting to enter a state without a citizenship from the given state. The other way of interpreting Isin’s argument is as a xenophobic discourse.

One might question for how long people have moved beyond borders and territories when reading Isin’s argument. It can be seen as common knowledge that the population in countries such as the United States of America mainly consist of families from European, African, South-America and/or Asian descent. In other words, movements beyond borders is a phenomenon that has happened throughout history – the difference today is the modernization which has resulted in easier access to transportation. The intensity of struggles over citizenship might therefore be a result of the growing xenophobia and scare of losing one’s exclusive options to someone *strange* and *unknown*. One might question who is to blame for this scare of something unknown, and there will probably be several answers to the question. However, the far-right discourse and the media’s way of creating an image of *who belongs* does not decrease the intensity of struggles over citizenship.

#### 4.1 Where are you from?

Within the field of migration, it is a common practice to differentiate between first-, second-, and third- generation migrants. Nations around the globe have various and diverse laws about how to receive a citizenship after

arriving as an asylum seeker. Since the laws differ from nation to nation, the asylum seeker has to acquaint him/her-self with the laws of seeking a citizenship in the specific country.

To receive a citizenship in Norway after arriving as an asylum seeker you must have had a coherent stay in Norway for a total of seven years during the last ten years, with at least one year of a residence permit. To be classified as a second-generation immigrant in Norway one has to have two parents and two grandparents born abroad (TONNESSEN, 2018).

You are also classified as a second-generation immigrant if you move to Norway before having lived in another nation for more than seven years. In Gillian Creese's study mentioned in the theoretical framework, he interviews Shukre about how she interprets that other Canadians see and understand her. After the interview it is clear that Shukre as a second-generation immigrant does not really belong to Canada in a substantive sense, even if Canada is the country that she grew up in. Shukre is frequently asked where she is from, but how can she answer this?

On the one hand she has a Canadian citizenship and all her former schooling is in the Canadian education system. On the other hand, she is never interpreted as a true Canadian by other Canadians. Shukre's lack of internal belonging creates a distinction between *us* and *them* where she, as a second-generation migrant, stands on the outside as *them*.

#### 4.1.1 The interference with citizenship

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, Yuval-Davis argues that belonging is often naturalized until it is being threatened. Further she states that it is important to distinguish between belonging and the politics of belonging. Belonging has an individual aim and is controlled and constituted by how an individual interprets him/herself by oneself and by others. Belonging can be threatened when the politics of belonging has been

constructed in ways that one does not identify with – for example by skin color, hair, family heritage and so on.

When there is created a distinction between citizens within a country, there is a risk of building a division between *us* and *them*. In this way the politics of belonging might interfere with citizenship. As previously mentioned, xenophobic approaches are often legitimized by arguing for a “national culture”. However, a solid and uncomplex definition of national culture is yet to be interpreted and understood. The understanding of what lays within the term *national culture* might differ from one individual to another within a state. The argument of preserving national culture can be defined as weak due to the various and complex definitions of the term. One can argue that the politics of belonging is not generated by migration itself, but that it is generated by marginalization, generalization and the image of who is *a migrant*.

#### 4.2 In the Scandinavian context

A second-generation migrant who grew up in Norway and holds a Norwegian passport might not feel a belonging to the Norwegian culture and society in a substantive sense, just like Shukre. This might be due to the media’s power of portraying migration as a massive group of unemployed, psychological unstable and illiterate individuals. The construction of *who* is a migrant and *how* a migrant should act is a marginalizing and generalizing way of seeing another individual.

Shukre might be a prosperous and hard-working woman that has pursued higher education, but the constructed image of *the migrant* might stand in her way for personal and professional growth. There is no question that the media’s way of portraying who belongs within a state can generate the public’s opinion. Scholars in Scandinavia are highly interested in the

discourse of integration and Scandinavia is often referred to as generous in terms of integration policies (VALENTA, BUNAR, 2010, p. 464).

However, it can be questioned how successful integration really is if individuals from an ethnic minority do not feel like a citizen in a substantive sense. As mentioned, Lundström and Nyers states that there is a ranking of hierarchies of belonging within societies that is often based on pre-established conceptions of *who* belongs. As seen in the theoretical framework, Yuval-Davis argues that to feel a sense of belonging it is an important factor how one is valued and judged by others. When scholars such as Nyers and Lundström argue that migrants usually end up at the bottom of the hierarchy of belonging it can be question if and how one can eventually feel like a citizen in a substantive sense.

It can be argued that Scandinavia could benefit on a further study of how citizenship interfere with the politics of belonging. With all the focus on introduction programs and integration in Scandinavia it might be overshadowed that second-generation immigrants do not necessarily feel like a citizen in a substantive sense.

## 5. Conclusion

Throughout this paper I have explored how the politics of belonging can interfere with citizenship. After reading relevant literature in the field it is evident that the politics of belonging can interfere with citizenship in several ways and that there is an inseparable bond between the two discourses. For an individual to acknowledge him/herself as a citizen in a substantive sense, the feeling of having a firm basis and at the same time feel important, meaningful and considerable needs to be consistent.

To achieve the feeling of being a fully member or citizen, the construction of the collective ways of belonging should not be built on national culture, skin color, family heritage or language. The collective ways of

belonging should be built on one thing; having a citizenship in the given state. Once an individual is formally a citizen there should not be a distinguish between who belongs the most. After all, all citizen within a state are required to contribute to the same fundamental systems of welfare and labor markets.

For further research it can be beneficial to do a field study with second-generation migrants in Scandinavia through semi-structured interviews. By doing this the research could gain personal experience and thoughts around the substantive sense of citizenship. To take the study another one step further it could be fruitful to see how the lack of belonging might affect an individual's life quality. It can be misleading to argue that Scandinavia has generous integration policies when the politics of belonging are overshadowed by the discourse of integration. Where should the line be drawn between integration and belonging?

As a closing remark I would like to argue that citizenship does not equal belonging. The two discourses interfere with each other on several levels, but they will perhaps never be coherent without a nuanced way of constructing the collective ways of belonging.

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