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"There's No Connection Plugging Me Into This System": Citizenship as Non-Participation and Voicelessness

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Abstract

The small and remote island community, the Faroe Islands, has experienced a vast increase in immigration recently. In the space of a decade, immigration has risen from 1.5% of the population to 5.5%. The island community, previously ethnically and culturally homogenous, is now facing growing diversity. The Faroese context is characterised by its small size and a micro-administration that is ill-equipped for the complexities of immigration. Previous research has found that underlying the Faroese language and identity is a pervasive ideology of who is considered to "authentically belong." Furthermore, the small population is strongly connected through multiple relations, and navigating formal and informal life depends on social/family networks. In this small island community context, this article examines immigrant citizenship experiences, drawing on qualitative data collated between 2016 and 2023. Citizenship is here understood as everyday relational and spatial experiences at various levels of society. From the analysis, two central values of citizenship emerged as key to entangled citizenship experiences: (non)participation and (mis)recognition. The analysis finds that Faroese society, both formally and informally, is highly inaccessible to immigrants, rendering them voiceless and marginalised. Furthermore, immigrants experience misrecognition for the resources they bring and find themselves on the margins of the labour market and society in general.

Keywords

citizenship; immigration; island community; participation; recognition

1. Introduction

In the small island community of the Faroe Islands, the population of 54,000 people has remained ethnically and culturally homogenous, with limited immigration, until the very recent past. In only a decade,

immigration has dramatically increased. In 2010, there were 1.5% non-Nordic residents in the Faroe Islands. In 2023, the number had grown substantially, bringing it to 5.5% of the population (Statistics Faroe Islands, 2024b). Consequently, the Faroe Islands are waking up to a new reality of being an increasingly diverse community.

Located in the high North Atlantic Ocean, the Faroe Islands are characterised by remoteness, smallness, and boundedness. The social configuration of island life revolves around familiarity, people knowing each other, and close social/family networks (Gaini, 2013; Hayfield, 2022). Much of the Faroe Islands can be described as rural, and even in towns, social relations are tightly knit and anonymity impossible (Hayfield, 2017). Furthermore, geographical proximity and a well-developed infrastructure ensure that mobility within and between villages/towns is uncomplicated.

On a societal level, integration has received scarce political attention. Integration governance in the Faroe Islands, I suggest, is characterised by non-policies. There are no legal frameworks governing integration and no overarching policy for hearing, recognising, or supporting immigrants. Coupled with the sharp increase in immigration and the lack of societal and social readiness for the diverse needs of newcomers, is the issue of second language acquisition of the national language, Faroese. Although the quality and availability of Faroese language courses have improved somewhat in recent years, learning experiences in this insular language community impact power relations between native Faroese speakers and new speakers (Hoffmann & Holm, 2022). This is evident in the labour market specifically, and society generally, as immigrants experience exclusion and deskilling (Holm et al., 2019). Similarly, in her study of marriage migrants to the Faroe Islands, Ísfeld (2019, p. 239) found that the "system and structures are creating a wedge and a class distinction between locals and migrants, resulting in a situation of A and B citizens." Therefore, linguistic and cultural "otherness" may be a very poignant reality for immigrants who do not fit with the ideals of Faroeseness or the ideal citizen (Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2006; Hayfield & Schug, 2019).

From the above, there are indications that immigration in the Faroe Islands is fraught with tension. I argue that close social/family networks, power inequalities associated with language, insufficient societal support, and a lack of societal and social readiness to welcome new citizens, significantly shape citizenship experiences. In a previous article, we applied an inductive approach to explore immigrant experiences which were framed using the concept of place-belongingness (Hayfield & Schug, 2019). However, following later fieldwork, including the work of other scholars (as referenced above), I suggest that place-belongingness, whilst helpful, does not fully capture the entanglement of immigrant experiences of the Faroe Islands.

I revisit previous and recent empirical material to examine how citizenship is experienced and practised in a small island community like the Faroe Islands. In doing so, I understand citizenship as a relational and spatial concept. Relational in the sense that citizenship is "constituted at the intersection with others" (Wood & Black, 2018, p. 168), be it in social/family networks, systems or structures, informal and formal. Spatial, in the sense of the regional boundedness of island community contexts whilst still acknowledging islanders' interaction with global networks (Grydehøj et al., 2020). Citizenship, furthermore, is spatially practised in different locales and different positions. Concretely, I ask: What are immigrants' experiences of citizenship in the Faroe Islands?

To address the entangled nature of immigrant experiences this article is positioned in the intersection of cultural geography and sociology, but also takes inspiration from linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics.

In what follows, I address the Faroese immigration context and subsequently, the theoretical framing of the article. I then present the methods, followed by the analysis, which is structured around two overarching values of citizenship: participation and recognition. The closing section of the article, the discussion and conclusion, is subsequently presented.

2. The Faroe Islands Immigration Context

The Faroe Islands are eighteen islands located between Iceland and Shetland. They represent a self-governing jurisdiction of Denmark with their own parliament and flag. The welfare model of the Faroe Islands bears much resemblance to the Nordic model with underlying values of universalism and egalitarianism (Hayfield, 2020). Over the past seventy years, autonomy has gradually increased in different realms of society, and the islands now enjoy extensive self-government, especially in domestic affairs. However, historical and current relations with Denmark remain sites of tension, and islanders have a strong sense of Faroese identity, intensified by being geographically remote from Denmark. This is manifested in important claims for independence in the Faroe Islands, in contrast to many other non-sovereign island territories (Ferdinand et al., 2020).

Faroese is the first language of the overwhelming majority of inhabitants (Holm, 2023). It is a distinct West-Nordic Germanic language, although most Faroe Islanders understand and speak Danish as well. The islands can thus be characterised as a bilingual community. Danish remains a secondary official language used to a limited extent, e.g., by the judiciary. There are strong efforts to develop and maintain Faroese in all realms of society, e.g., through Faroese print, electronic, and digital media, in Faroese literature, and educational material. However, Danish texts/literature, and now increasingly English, remain relatively common in the secondary and tertiary educational system, making (re)education difficult for many immigrants.

One exception to Faroese self-governance is in matters of immigration/citizenship. Nevertheless, integration is the responsibility of the Faroese Parliament and presently, there is no overarching legislation governing integration (although an integration bill is presently being debated in parliament). The main modes of entry for immigrants are through family reunification and work permits, both of which have grown substantially. However, due to low unemployment coupled with an economic boom, immigration for work purposes has increased vastly of late. Furthermore, since the war in Ukraine began, the Faroe Islands have, for the first time, received refugees and now host around 175 Ukrainian refugees (Statistics Faroe Islands, 2024b). Although immigrants come from all over the world, many are from Eastern Europe (mostly Romania and Poland), and South-East Asia (mostly the Philippines and Thailand; Statistics Faroe Islands, 2024b). Many immigrants work as unskilled labourers, especially in fish processing, construction, hospitality, and cleaning (Statistics Faroe Islands, 2024a).

Broadly speaking, and with certain conditions, immigrants who have entered through family reunification can apply for permanent residency after three years, whilst those on work permits can do so after having worked consecutively for seven years. Gaining legal citizenship is lengthy and processed by Danish immigration authorities. Part of this process involves a police-led interview to assess if applicants can, "without the use of rewriting or other languages, and with the accent, which is natural…easily participate in a conversation in Faroese" (Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2021; translated from Danish by the author).

3. Citizenship: Relations and Language

In this section, I examine citizenship and how it can be applied using a small island community perspective. I commence with defining citizenship and then discuss relational citizenship in the Faroe Islands, and subsequently the intimate connection between citizenship, the Faroese language, and identity.

Understanding citizenship as a relational practice pushes the concept beyond its more traditional approach, which concerns the static, formal, and legal relations between individuals and the state (Delanty, 2007). For this article, therefore, citizenship encompasses "processual, performative and everyday relations between spaces, objects, citizens and non-citizens" (Spinney et al., 2015, p. 325). As such, citizenship is played out in everyday life, through performances and social relations. In this sense, scale and context matter in the construction of citizenship, as structural positions make their way into micro dynamics (Lister, 2007; McAreavey, 2017).

Citizenship provides a lens to explore its inclusionary and exclusionary mechanisms (Lawy & Biesta, 2006), which relegate some societal groups (e.g., gender-based, religious, disabled, or immigrants), to "the status of lesser citizens or of non-citizen" (Kabeer, 2005, p. 1). Implicated in the relational dimension of citizenship is a value, or asset, of citizenship, and the terms of access to that asset. This means that some people/groups have enhanced substantive citizenship, and greater access to it than others. In this sense, the relationship between citizenship and exclusion concerns "exclusion from having full access to citizenship rights and being able to fully live the role of a citizen" (Reiter, 2012, p. 4).

Implicated in the politics of belonging are struggles of determination over which identities are legitimately recognised, and how they may participate, or be included as citizens (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Previous research on exclusionary citizenship has drawn attention to marginalised groups and their struggles to expand and redefine ideas of rights, duties, and citizenship (Kabeer, 2005). Furthermore, to expand and redefine societal boundaries towards more inclusive citizenship requires understanding the meanings of inclusive citizenship from the standpoint of excluded. Central meanings, according to Kabeer (2005), include values of justice, recognition, self-determination, and solidarity. However, citizenship is also highly relational and involves feelings of being important, meaningful, and valued within a community (Furuhaug, 2020) and in a small island context, such feelings emerge in community life.

3.1. Interconnectedness in Island Life

Notwithstanding globalisation and complex non-territorial ties, the boundedness of islands suggests that still today, relations in remote small island communities are intimately connected to island identity, and I argue, also citizenship (Leonard, 2020; Stratford, 2003). Therefore, citizenship as being relational is a pertinent perspective in contexts, where relational interconnectedness is a key characteristic of navigating and accessing social and formal life (Hayfield, 2022). Interconnectedness in this sense, refers to the multiple and interdependent relationships that people have with one another. People who are related may work together, attend the same church, have children at school together, and meet in social/family settings. Furthermore, formal or political decisions that implicate the lives of others may hinge on connections going back to childhood (Veenendaal, 2020a).

Thus, people are connected through dense and overlapping networks in which they hold multiple roles—kinship networks being the most important markers of identity (Gaini, 2013). In such contexts there may emerge a climate of familiarity, intimacy, and care as an ethical readiness (Baldacchino & Veenendaal, 2018; Hamington, 2017), and in the Faroese context social cohesion (Leonard, 2020). However, such social cohesion is not necessarily reserved for everyone. Immigrants, who do not belong to social/family networks are understood as bodies out-of-place, unplaceable, and not part of the Faroese "cognitive map of [family] relations" (Hayfield & Schug, 2019). Smallness in this relational sense entails that those without family are constructed as those without attachment to place (Gaffin, 1996; Gaini, 2013).

The potential impact on everyday citizenship in small island communities is perhaps best conceptualised through the blurring of boundaries between formal and informal life (Anckar, 2006; Veenendaal, 2020b; Warrington & Milne, 2020). This means that people do not necessarily pay explicit attention to the roles they inhabit, leading to the conflation of social and professional acts. Rather authority and politics may be personalised and vice versa (Veenendaal, 2020a). The particularity and size of island communities entail that formal roles are more likely to be characterised by role diffusion and role enlargement (Baldacchino, 2012). This means that, in formal roles, people are likely more autonomous and less supervised, and policies are less formal and stringent, all of which can implicate citizenship.

3.2. Faroese Language, Identity, and Ideology

In the late 19th century, the Faroese language movement emerged to sustain and reclaim language rights. The illegitimacy of the Faroese language was especially manifested in Faroese being excluded from public domains including schools, the church, and public administration. These struggles were inextricably woven into Faroese-Danish (colonial) relations and later emerged in the form of political and national separatism (Sølvará, 2016). Consequently, the Faroese have become "evangelical about their language…and nearly all discussions of independence, nationalism and identity in the Faroe Islands come back to language in some way" (Leonard, 2016, p. 60). In other words, embedded in the Faroese language are ideologies as power mechanisms (Holm, 2023).

Language ideologies concern the multitude of ways in which language is woven into systems of power (Cavanaugh, 2020). This includes how language is significant in rights to being heard and providing cultural proficiencies to exercise citizenship (Valentine & Skelton, 2007). Underlying the Faroese language, Hoffmann and Holm (2022, p. 261) argue, is an ideology of linguistic authenticity and concerns "the idea of a language belonging to a specific group." An ideology of linguistic authenticity is contrasted with linguistic anonymity, such as English, which does not belong to any one group.

Central to linguistic authenticity are the values and relationships of a language to a specific community. This means that "a speech variety must be very much 'from somewhere' in speakers' consciousness, making its meaning profoundly local" (O'Rourke, 2015, p. 64). Therefore, an ideology of linguistic authenticity involves contestations over language ownership, what constitutes a legitimate speaker, and how to correctly speak the language. The sustainability of Faroese as a minoritised language goes to the core of linguistic authenticity, which has profound implications for legitimacy, participation, and recognition in Faroese society (Hayfield & Schug, 2019; Holm et al., 2019; Vijayavarathan, 2023). As a result, language in the Faroe Islands is fraught with tension for immigrants who take up residency (Hayfield & Schug, 2019).

Connecting ideology to language might, on a surface level, concern the sacredness of one language over other (e.g., foreign) languages. However, ideologies of language can also disguise other agendas of (non)participation and (mis)recognition, such as those concerning politics, economics, communities, or identities (Zaidi, 2012). A critical perspective aimed at uncovering such agendas may thus be necessary to alert societal consciousness concerning immigration and inclusive citizenship.

4. Methods

This study draws on critical theory as a guide to understanding societal inequalities and challenging social realities (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2018). In this sense, critical theory is a strategy for exploring and enquiring about immigrant experiences, rather than an approach that determines how the world is seen (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). Importantly though, the emancipatory facet of critical theory entails research that "attempts to explore the forces that prevent individuals and groups from shaping the decisions that crucially affect their lives" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011, p. 288). It thus concerns justice, power, participation, and self-determination.

The empirical material for this article is drawn mainly from semi-structured transcribed interviews, conducted in 2016, 2018, and 2023, in addition to parliamentary debates, official documents, and informal conversations with immigrants and officials. Interviews were conducted in English, except one, which was translated to/from Thai. Interviews with professional actors include municipalities, government workers, welfare professionals, and private sector managers, whose official capacity involves immigrants and integration. For this article, however, I focus only on interviews with immigrants. These comprise 49 interviews with 58 people (three groups, 46 individuals). Individual interviews lasted from 28 minutes to 1 hour and 27 minutes, and group interviews from 1 hour and 18 minutes to 2 hours. Interviews are a useful approach to explore experiences, and questions were designed to elucidate the words, meanings, and actions of immigrants (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Participants came from all over the world, representing thirty countries and all continents, except Australia. They were aged mid-20s to late 50s, and resided all over the Faroe Islands, with a slight overrepresentation of women. The inclusion criterion was limited to participants having lived in the Faroe Islands for at least one year, thus avoiding short-term workers with limited exposure to Faroese society. Recruitment was through networks, organisations, and snowballing (Parker et al., 2019). The sample is diverse and tying the sample together are experiences of being immigrants in a small island community.

In the first set of interviews, from 2016, the reasoning was inductive to connect and generate ideas, whilst the analysis for later interviews was abductive in nature (Reichertz, 2014). Using Nvivo to manage the data, the stages of analysis involved close reading of texts, creating categories, finding overlaps in coding and, subsequently, creating a system of interrelated categories (Thomas, 2006). Following the 2016 and 2018 interviews and many informal conversations, I realised there remained more to be uncovered regarding immigrant experiences. Therefore, further interviews were conducted in 2023, applying an interpretive approach to the data, which is both "suspicious" and "empathic." Suspicious in the sense of using theoretical concepts to unveil that which is not immediately apparent, and empathic as interpretation, which aims to understand from within (Willig, 2014). Using the concept of citizenship, I reanalysed codes in which citizenship issues had originally emerged, including belonging, language as access and learning, cultural capital, Faroese networks, social navigation, labour market access, and identity. This second analysis took as

the point of departure concepts of inclusive citizenship from the literature and involved the same stages as the first analysis.

Being a Faroe Islander, my situatedness includes multiple privileges. I am an educated, fluent Faroese speaker, immersed in social/family networks, which may blind me to the social positioning of immigrants. Therefore, taking an immigrant standpoint and utilising their epistemic privilege can shed light on immigrant citizenship experiences (Sweet, 2020). This aligns with Kabeer (2005, p. 1), who argues that debates of citizenship are abstracted from the citizen voices, and tend to take place in an "empirical void." Ethically all formal requirements were met, including ongoing informed consent, data storage, and confidentiality issues. However, my ethical concerns are more pertaining to the social, psychological, and legal vulnerability of immigrants in society—especially those that are not yet "full" citizens in legal terms. Interviewing took inspiration from (critical) feminist interviewing, which is relational, and empathic, but at the same time aimed at uncovering experiences for social change (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Furthermore, being a vulnerable group, immigrants are easily an object of critique in a small island society (Hayfield, 2022). Immigrants are ill-represented in the Faroe Islands, and the public hearing of immigrant voices is rare. Therefore, a (relational) care ethics approach assisted the researcher in staying "ethically alert" and mindful of the representation of immigrant voices (Hayfield, 2022).

5. Analysis

The key finding from the analysis goes beyond how language, smallness and familiarity function as exclusionary mechanisms and non-belonging. Rather, the very entanglement of these factors in Faroese society profoundly shapes citizenship experiences. Furthermore, such experiences intensify when ideology camouflages the different realities of Faroese natives and immigrants. From the analysis, I found this especially manifested in citizenship values of participation and recognition. Whilst these values overlap and conflate, they are addressed separately for analytic purposes. For many of the immigrants in this study, barriers to participation and misrecognition become manifested in anguish, stress, and loss of identity, as well as experiences of low solidarity in formal and informal society. For some, this impacted mental health; for most, their wellbeing. In the next two sections, immigrant citizenship experiences are represented.

5.1. Seen But Not Heard: Participation and Voice

The growth in immigration constitutes a highly visible social change in the everyday landscape of the Faroe Islands. By the account of different (ethnic and behavioural) appearances, many immigrants become conspicuous in public spaces. My participants emphasised that whilst they are visibly different, they are effectively voiceless citizens in many public spaces. To navigate institutions and communities, my participants express what can only be described as an anguished relationship with Faroese as a second language. On the one hand, they are acutely aware of the fundamentality of Faroese for accessing information in formal and informal spaces of citizenship. On the other, there are complex difficulties in their language experiences. Thus, even accessing basic services and understanding their rights and entitlements can be highly challenging. In other words, the inability to understand/speak Faroese is central to citizenship experiences. Yet, fully comprehending how pivotal language is to Faroese belief systems involves a process that, for most participants, unfolds over time. This process, I found, includes two central citizenship dynamics: *transitioning from visitor to citizen* and *the false promise*. I address these below.

5.1.1. Transitioning From Visitor to Citizen

When immigrants arrive in the Faroe Islands, they have what might be referred to as a "grace" or "honeymoon" period. During this time, it is widely tolerated that newcomers are unable to understand or speak Faroese. However, following an initial period, immigrants experience what they express as unrealistic pressure from Faroe Islanders to speak the language, as two participants explain:

> It is *very* difficult in the Faroe Islands. But again, when you are just settling, they start with caution, that you are a visitor, and they will treat you as a visitor. But as months go by, then they are like: "You need to learn the language!" It becomes irritating. Because there are many things that you are struggling with besides the language. (group interview 2, male, <3 years in the Faroe Islands, 2018)

> When you come in [somewhere] and somebody will just say hi and the next statement is: "You must learn the language!" I mean not everything depends on this language thing. (interview 11, female, <3 years in the Faroe Islands, 2017)

These quotes represent the experiences of almost all participants and, for many, involve intense emotions of pressure or stress. Transitioning from visitor to citizen becomes a self-directed effort with limited, if any, assistance from formal institutions, and limited tolerance from the community. Consistent with the experiences of most participants, the expectation is that immigrants are highly active language-learning citizens, and through their success or failure in doing so, their given value is determined. Authenticity and recognition are, therefore, integrated into speaking Faroese. Not doing so is likely interpreted as a sign of unwillingness, or even undeservedness, to participate. Underlying this is an ideology of the individual hardworking new citizen, who must earn participation rights. Thus, access to society is controlled through power mechanisms, which justify a lower position for immigrants. This becomes further apparent when confronted with the reality that many Faroese will not speak English in social settings, except in one-on-one situations with immigrants—something almost all my participants point out. Consequently, in most (Faroese-led) settings, my participants resort to silence and withdrawal. However, my participants' understanding of the Faroese people is not that they are intentionally intolerant or unkind in their discipline surrounding the Faroese language. Rather, an ideology of authenticity has become so naturalised and commonsensical that its ideological status is rendered invisible to native Faroese (Darvin & Norton, 2016).

5.1.2. The False Promise

The second dynamic is the false promise of language. As immigrants struggle to find employment of relevance for their skills and qualifications, they are persistently faced with demands to improve their Faroese language skills. An often-unavoidable consequence of spending (many) years improving language skills, is that previous qualifications and knowledge devalue over time and become outdated. Yet, as my participants continue on their language-learning journey, continuously improving their language skills, their hope of better employment is replaced by another reality. This is the false promise associated with learning Faroese.

Firstly, the false promise involves the realisation that for most (highly) skilled jobs, immigrants' language skills (oral and written) will likely never be perceived as adequate or authentic enough. Secondly, many come to recognise that mastering Faroese is insufficient. Being a bilingual society, Danish is frequently a condition to

navigate employment or undertake further education. One immigrant explained that she had struggled for years to learn Faroese. When finally securing educationally relevant employment, she found all manuals were in Danish. Her only option was to resign as she was unable to carry out key tasks. However, for some, the most anguishing aspect of the false promise is that language authenticity goes beyond the actual command of language. Rather, everyday citizenship is intimately connected to social/family networks and boundaries, which are constructed through a politics of belonging:

> There are *so* many promises attached to learning the language and it is like: "If you learn the language then doors will open." But it is not true…my main point is that there is so much attached to learning the language, which I think might be false. (group interview 2, male, <3 years in the Faroe Islands, 2018)

> I wanted to be here and become part of Faroese society and I even had political ambitions when I was younger. But to be a politician you must have local family, so I had to drop those ambitions….If none of your parents are from here, it's very difficult [to become Faroese]. Even though you speak the language, you can change your name, and still they call you—like in my particular case—they will always call me "the Romanian." (interview 37, male, 15+ years in the Faroe Islands, 2017)

The former quote draws attention to a perceived false promise, which is bought into by immigrants and native Faroese alike. The falsity is that the "solution" is to learn the language. The promise is complex and affirms that immigrants can learn Faroese. However, full participation and voice are primarily reserved for "authentic Faroese." The latter quote points to this false promise, exemplifying that, beyond legal citizenship, political participation is unachievable without family on the islands. This participant explained that he once had longed to *be* Faroese. Yet he learnt, even as a fluent speaker, that his positioning and relation to society would always be as "The Romanian." For this immigrant, exclusionary citizenship led him to, in his own words, "create a little Romanian land," around him, with fellow Romanians. As with several other participants, he "lost interest" in societal issues, withdrew, and disengaged with Faroese public life, essentially internalising his existence of being an inauthentic citizen. However, in another agentic sense, he is actively resisting exclusion, by navigating transnational citizenship as a Romanian, outside of Romania. In this sense, his resistance and creating new spaces of solidarity can also be construed as an act of citizenship.

5.2. Getting "Plugged Into This System": Recognition and Familiarity

In the Faroe Islands, recognition goes beyond status and subjectivity and is quite literally physical and embodied. In other words, bodies in societal spaces are (mis)recognised as those that are unfamiliar and unplaceable. Participants overwhelmingly referred to intense, closed social/family networks, to smallness, and to everyone knowing each other. As a consequence, immigrants are faced with a society that they experience as inaccessible—on a macro level, on a community level, and on a social level. These levels, however, cannot be separated, but mutually constitute each other, as we shall see.

Many of my participants work in fish factories, in cleaning, or in unskilled jobs that do not require language skills. Highly skilled immigrants find it almost impossible to obtain employment even moderately corresponding to their skills/qualifications. According to one participant, fish factory work is "integration 101," referring to the many immigrants who commence employment in Faroese fish factories. However,

moving beyond cleaning or the fish factory is an exhausting struggle. One highly skilled participant shared with immigrant colleagues her plans to have her qualifications assessed and recognised by the official Career Guidance Centre, only for her colleagues to scorn her, and point out that she would likely never progress and would remain "stuck at the fish factory." Participants' stories of employment paths in the Faroe Islands are fraught with tension and my findings indicate feelings of low self-worth and loss of identity as a result. Some participants even suggested that depression amongst immigrants in the Faroe Islands is comparatively widespread. This failure of Faroese society to recognise, value, and utilise human capital, therefore, impacts autonomy and self-determination.

In their dealings with organisations, immigrants soon realise they are not merely navigating formal systems. Rather, they are navigating individuals and social/family networks within formal systems. Most participants find themselves outside the realm of familiarity in the small island community leading to social closure, even in formal settings. One highly qualified participant explained that she had applied for almost two hundred jobs upon arrival. She received two responses, one for an interview, in which the first question was, to whom she was married. In her own words:

> If someone cannot recommend you, if you cannot get in the circle of cousins and religious community and whatever, then it doesn't matter what qualifications you have, or work experience, it's all about who you know….I had this impression that it's not because I was lame. It was just because there was no connection that would, you know, plug me into this system. (interview 1, female, 4–7 years in Faroe Islands, 2017)

In being confronted with their status as lesser citizens, immigrants become vulnerable to a system, which severely impacts their self-determination. In small island communities like the Faroe Islands, formal and informal citizenship cannot be separated, as the public and private conflate through multiple relations. This means that recognition hinges on networks, and it is oftentimes individual actors, rather than systems, who practice (mis)recognition. Importantly though, recognition is intimately connected to network investment, as one participant explained:

> There's a familiarity with people here in the Faroe Islands that allows them to be forgiving in a work environment, if they know a person or if they know what they're invested in, if they know the social connections with people. If they don't know those social connections, if they're not part of that social network, they're not invested in the individual and they don't have the incentive to support or to encourage. (interview 24, male, 4–7 years in Faroe Islands, 2017)

Yet, the same particularity can also be enabling, as some participants pointed out. Sometimes through luck, they meet the "right" person, who can expand the formal or cultural boundaries. Such persons effectively provide my participants with a chance. The particularity and size of island communities entail that (formal) roles are more likely to be characterised by "role diffusion" and "role enlargement," compared to larger contexts (Baldacchino, 2012). This means that when carrying out formal roles, people are more autonomous and less supervised, and policies are less formal and stringent. Furthermore, people are, according to Baldacchino (2012), more likely to be innovative and make decisions beyond formal boundaries. In other words, individuals in such contexts can, despite systems, enable immigrants.

Faroese people navigate social relations, aware that missteps can have long-term social consequences (Hayfield, 2017). However, for immigrants, struggling for recognition, socially and professionally, the smallest of missteps can result in exclusion. My participants point to gossip as potentially devastating, creating a climate of social pressure. Unlawful dismissals or changes to employment conditions were among the experiences my participants chose not to pursue for fear of ramifications. Even participants who describe themselves as having "made it" in the Faroe Islands are aware that immigrant recognition is fragile and can at any moment be renegotiated.

Throughout the data, it was evident that when immigrants voice societal criticism, the Faroese tend to withdraw or become defensive, directly or indirectly suggesting that they leave if dissatisfied. In other words, rights afforded to Faroese, to resist or challenge societal systems and norms, are not extended to immigrants. Being acutely aware of their lesser citizenship, my participants create spaces of solidarity in which they can discuss concerns, voice distress and build social capital. However, as several participants pointed out, such spaces of solidarity can simultaneously be spaces of social control. Immigrants who publicly voice their criticism of Faroese society are promptly rebuked by other immigrants who fear being punished as a group through association. In other words, immigrants cannot legitimately voice their criticism because the climate surrounding them can turn hostile.

This, however, might be changing. Very recently, an immigrant in the Faroe Islands protested against a cost-cutting measure by Kringvarpið (Faroese public broadcasting association), which involved the cessation of news pieces in English on the Kringvarpið website. On the 5th of February 2024, a headline read: "Protest over scrapping of news in English" (author's translation). The news piece accompanied a short radio bulletin. The bulletin explained how an immigrant was collecting signatures, protesting the decision to cease news in English. In the radio extracts below, the protest initiator (first extract) is interviewed, and then a language teacher (second extract; Jensen, 2024):

> Protest initiator: The news in English is a connection between the place-based community and us immigrants and it is *really* important that it continues…[otherwise] we become dependent on other Faroese to translate, because you cannot use Google translate [to translate into Faroese].
>
> Teacher: Many [immigrants] come from cultures where it is not common to protest, so I think if they are reacting, then it *really* shows that it is of immense importance to them to get this service.

Whilst immigration is sometimes discussed in Faroese politics and media, immigrants are generally those who are spoken *about* by Faroese rather than speaking *for* themselves. However, in the excerpt above, an immigrant is speaking out and engaging in a political act of using voice. He, along with those who have signed the petition, are making claims, trying to redefine and expand citizenship to include their basic right to information.

Some immigrants have opportunities, resources, or skills to acquire Faroese over a relatively short period. This provides some degree of recognition by society. Publicly (e.g., in the media) or socially, they are held up as ideal immigrants. In other words, if *this* immigrant can work hard to learn Faroese, so can others. Consequently, the responsibility, to a large degree, is transferred from society to individual, as the following quote illustrates:

> Often immigrants who have learnt the language are held up in display: "Look, he did it!" That has a divisive effect amongst immigrants. And often the immigrant who is held up as the example says: "I did not want to be used this way." Everyone feels the pressure that one person is being used against me [the immigrant], even though the Faroese may be intending it as encouragement….The discourse is that the Faroe Islands is a good country for everyone, an equal country. We [Faroese] treat our people and immigrants well. But the reality that immigrants experience is completely different. And when one constructs a different reality in discourse, immigrants cannot describe their experiences in terms that Faroese know. What Faroese know from discourse is one [reality] and when I tell them about my reality, well then it cannot be hooked into any reality that they have. There is no bridge as such. All they [immigrants] are asking for is the right to be valued the same as others. (interview 44, female, partner of immigrant, <3 years in Faroe Islands, 2023)

The well-intended promotion of the successful idealised immigrant, as pointed out in the quote, can cause friction and division amongst immigrants. Furthermore, the construction of a discourse of equality and fairness for all in the Faroe Islands renders immigrant experiences illegitimate and uninterpretable. Their realities are camouflaged as they do not fit with the internal image Faroese have of their own society. Thus, immigrants become culturally and structurally misrecognised, leaving no "bridge" to connect and voice their experiences. As a survival mechanism, some participants reported presenting what they refer to as one "culturally accepted" version of themselves, of their identity, to Faroese society and another in the safe space of immigrants. The culturally accepted immigrant does not complain, is not too loud in public spaces, and works hard to learn the language and Faroese culture. This means that when navigating public (Faroese) space, they internalise their misrecognised position, their lesser value, and status as lesser citizens. Yet, creating solidarity in immigrant-friendly spaces is a form of resistance implying that immigrants are not passive victims of the dominant ideology. Instead, they are working at redefining and expanding ideas of inclusive citizenship.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis has highlighted the much-entangled nature of immigrant citizenship experiences in the Faroe Islands. As immigrants struggle for societal recognition and to practice participation rights, the tension between inclusionary and exclusionary dimensions of citizenship becomes visible and articulated (Lister, 2007). For immigrants, misrecognition is especially manifested in their feelings of being undervalued, most notably in the underutilisation of the talent and resources they bring to the Faroe Islands. The sentiment of the vast majority of my participants is that their preconceived expectations, that lacking language skills *would* be a natural limitation, was one they envisaged could be overcome through time. However, their reality is one in which Faroese is experienced by many as insurmountable. Insurmountable in the sense that the ideology of authenticity constructs an image of ideal citizens, which even long-term immigrants likely never can become. The ideal citizen, from this perspective, is a conflation of commanding Faroese perfectly, being immersed in social/family networks, having a history in the Faroe Islands, and navigating the fluidities of formal and informal life. As a result, immigrants have little chance to realise their potential, a position that impacts their self-determination. Donaldson and Kymlicka (2017, p. 841) argue that "the fundamental purpose of citizenship is to ensure that all members of the community have a chance to realise their understanding of their subjective good, to exercise meaningful forms of control in their lives, and to participate in shaping the social norms by which they are governed." Given my analysis above, this argument

exposes Faroese society as failing to provide immigrants with fair and accessible chances for participation and recognition. Said differently, the concept of what constitutes a recognised and ideal citizen must be redefined and expanded.

Importantly, the characteristics of the Faroe Islands, i.e., interconnected relations, the conflation of formal and informal life, and the centrality of language for identity, might not be the principal issues for advancing a more inclusive form of citizenship. Rather, the lack of insight into the different worlds of immigrants, I argue, is a fundamental barrier that emerged from the analysis. The Faroe Islands are characterised by a family-based individualism (Gaini, 2013) in which the family acts as security, a vital social network, and a safe haven—and, in many ways, frames everyday citizenship. It is conceivable that an ontology of the individually autonomous self-responsible agent, as in Western theory (Hamington, 2017), may be camouflaging the struggle of immigrants, who do not have the same access and participatory rights. Therefore, epistemological tools are necessary to provide insight into the struggles of immigrants as a minority group.

Having been highly homogenous as a society until recently, the Faroe Islands are not prepared for the complexities of being increasingly diverse. To advance societal and social readiness towards immigration, Hamington (2017) argues for a relational approach to care. This study has shown that a relational approach is central to understanding the small island community of the Faroe Islands. However, there is a need to expand relational practices in the Faroe Islands by building bridges between ontological realities. This involves societal relations of care in which openness, listening, and responsiveness promote empathy and solidarity. Societal relations of care require that formal institutions have policies and practices that are sensitive to the diverse needs and situations of immigrants. At the same time, societal care encompasses also caring relations at community and social levels to unmask diverse realities and promote understanding between different groups. Shifting the focus to duties of citizenship, rather than focusing (almost) exclusively on citizenship rights, a duty of solidarity requires attending to the well-being of immigrants (Reiter, 2012). This is arguably one of the most important steps towards societal and social readiness.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflicts of interests.

Data Availability

Data can be made available by contacting the author.

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