Immigrant to Citizen:
Reciting the Canadian Oath of Citizenship in a Multicultural Society

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Abstract

The Canadian Oath of Citizenship has been a contentious topic in Canada over the past years, particularly in how the recitation of the Oath was perceived to be unconstitutional as it contains a portion where naturalized citizens pledge allegiance to the Queen. Although the courts have dismissed the objections to the Oath, how naturalized citizens interpret the Oath remains largely unexamined. This article explores the experience of 10 naturalized citizens in Canada, examining their experiences and how they make meaning of the Oath. The interviews were analyzed according to the principles of interpretative phenomenological analysis. The results of the research highlight four overarching themes which include 1) oath as a promise, 2) the dichotomy between Canada and the Queen, 3) perceptions of Canadian identity, and 4) agency. The findings add to our knowledge of how the Oath, as a long held tradition, is perceived by new Canadians in the 21st century.

*Keywords*: Canada, oath, citizenship, multiculturalism, interpretive phenomenological analysis
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I would like to acknowledge and thank the participants who gave their time and honesty in sharing their opinions and experiences. It would be an understatement to say that the conversations were interesting. As they shared stories about their lives in Canada, not only did they capture my attention, but their generosity in sharing their thoughts and opinions were poignant and, at times, humorous as I found myself relating to many of their stories as an immigrant turned Canadian citizen. Thank you.

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This thesis is dedicated to my partner, Iain. I owe my deepest gratitude to him for his continued support, love and encouragement.
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Chapter One: Introduction

The material above has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The material removed is the Canadian Oath of Citizenship.


At the time of undertaking this research, a number of events were taking place in Canada that made the topic of citizenship contentious. This included the challenge of the monarchy in the Canadian Oath of Citizenship (“Oath”) in court by three permanent residents who stated that the requirement to pledge allegiance to the Queen to obtain citizenship was unconstitutional (Gray, 2015). Secondly, the *niqab* (burqa or face veil) was banned from the citizenship ceremony in 2011 by Stephen Harper’s Conservative government, so people wearing a *niqab* who needed to recite the Oath had to uncover their faces during the citizenship ceremony (Winter, 2014).

Additionally, under the same Conservative government, there were alterations to the citizenship acquisition process, namely Bill C-24 – Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act, which included a controversial amendment that allowed the revocation of Canadian citizenship from dual citizens who are either a member of an armed force engaged in conflict in Canada and/or convicted of terrorism, treason or spying (Government of Canada, 2015), which the British
Columbia Civil Liberties Association described as discriminatory to dual citizens since it reduced them to “second-class citizens” (BCCLA, 2015). All these events raise questions about Canada’s nation-state identity, which has been largely defined by the Canadian ethos of multiculturalism since it was introduced as a policy in 1971 (Karim, 2009).

However, contrary to current narratives of multiculturalism, the history of Canadian citizenship has not always been a story of welcome and acceptance. Examples from Canada’s past include Aboriginals’ exclusion from the national polity prior to 1960 (Lightfoot, 2013), the Chinese head tax implemented in 1885 to discourage Chinese immigration, the stripping of citizenship from many Japanese Canadians between 1945 and 1947, and the Komagata Maru boat incident where government officials denied entry for most of the 376 passengers, except for 24 people from British India (Chapman, 2015). However, in recent decades, Canada has been engaged in the process of constructing its national identity (Sobel, 2015). A huge part of that national identity is the ethos of multiculturalism, which has been ingrained since then Prime Minister, Pierre Elliott Trudeau announced the policy in 1971, where the historically dominant status of English- and French-Canadians were re-affirmed through the recognition of French and English as the official languages, while simultaneously recognizing non-British and non-French Canadians as part of that multicultural identity (Karim, 2009). Additionally, multiculturalism is not just a government policy, but just as much a demographic reality where Canada “receives 67 percent of its overall annual population growth through immigration” (Winter, 2014, p. 5). By using multiculturalism to integrate new immigrants, Canada has been able to use cultural pluralism as part of its Canadian identity (Winter, 2015). However, despite the shift in constructing a multicultural country that is built on immigration (Sobel, 2015; Winter, 2014), the
upholding of certain traditions, such as the Oath, perpetuates Canada’s colonial legacy which presents Canada’s national narrative as linked to the British identity (Barney & Heine, 2015; West, 2002).

The question of the Oath is therefore examined as it exhibits Canada’s colonial past in how it accepts new citizens, which in a contemporary, multicultural society appears to be out of place. Part of the process of attaining citizenship is reciting the Oath, where people pledge allegiance to the Queen and Her Heirs and Successors, and promise to obey the laws of Canada. The first portion of the Oath has received media attention in the recent years as permanent residents went to court in 2014 stating that it was unconstitutional to pledge allegiance to the Queen, whom they consider a symbol of oppression, inequality and colonialism (Sirota, 2015). Having to recite the Oath therefore goes against their freedom of speech, freedom of expression and freedom of conscience. However, their challenge was rejected by the courts (Gray, 2015). Although it was not the first time the Oath was challenged in court (Edwards, 2002; Sirota, 2015), since then some oath-takers have disavowed the first portion or royalty part of the Oath (Mehta, 2015), claiming that the Oath does not have a place in Canada’s post-colonial, modern-day, free, democratic and multicultural society.

Literature on Canadian citizenship has a common theme of belonging (Austin, 2010; Harder & Zhyznomirska, 2012; Wong, 2008;). Researchers have explained how certain narratives exclude groups of people (Austin, 2010; Harder & Zhyznomirska, 2012; Thomas, 2015) where they continue to be presented as the “other” or the “foreigner” (Harder & Zhyznomirska, 2012, p. 297). Through exclusion, these groups of people question their belonging in Canada. Inextricably linked to the feeling of belonging is the question of identity—
whether citizens feel “truly Canadian” (Austin, 2010; Barney & Heine, 2015; West, 2002). Furthermore, the absence of Aboriginal voices in the citizenship process is an issue that has received further attention (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015), calling on the Canadian government to ensure that it creates a more inclusive view of Aboriginal history in welcoming new citizens. Instead of Canada’s current realities, the nationhood continually presented is the common narrative of Canada’s identity and its relation to the British identity (Barney & Heine, 2015; West, 2002). With Canada’s current complex and multifaceted society (Sobel, 2015), how does the Oath fit in and what is its relevance in today’s society?

The purpose of the research is to understand what the Oath means to new Canadians and how it represents Canada’s multicultural society. It poses the research question: What does the Oath mean to Canadian citizens? The sub-questions that are further examined are: (1) How does the Oath represent Canada’s multicultural society? (2) How does the Oath affect the participants’ identity as a new Canadian? I will draw from the framework of cultural studies theory on nationalism and nation-state identity as well as post-colonial theory to discuss the findings of this study.

The goal of this research is to advance knowledge on a prevalent issue about how new citizens perceive the Oath. By understanding how naturalized citizens make meaning of the Oath, there is a better awareness of how it affects new citizens based on their personal histories and perceptions, of understanding whether it affects their freedom of speech and conscience, and of raising awareness of how the Oath contributes to fostering belonging or exclusion in Canada’s multicultural society. By pursuing a phenomenological study using semi-structured interviews to examine the experiences and perspectives of 10 Canadian citizens who have recited the Oath
within the last 5 years, this research found that, due to the personal nature of the Oath, varying interpretations of the Oath’s meaning will be made, at that any interpretation needs to be in line with the oath-takers’ ethical and moral stance in order to internalize it.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In the following literature review, I explore four areas of research relevant to the research design, on: 1) interpretation of an oath, 2) changing the Oath, 3) Canadian nation-state narrative and identity, and 4) belonging. These topics are fundamental in developing a comprehensive framework, in exploring how the Oath is perceived by new citizens, as well as the underlying theme of Canadian nation-state identity.

Interpretation of an Oath

Despite the challenge in court, few researches have been conducted to study the Canadian Oath of Citizenship and its effects in Canada’s contemporary society. To understand why the Oath has been challenged, it is important to explain what an oath is. Daniel Sulmasy (1999), in an article exploring the nature of an oath, elucidates how oaths have a greater moral weight than promises and involve the oath-taker more deeply, especially after the words are uttered, the words become intertwined with the oath-taker, thus changing him. Additionally, Sulmasy adds how oaths are inherently interpersonal as oath taking involves a commitment to persons or a community. This is an interesting point, particularly in how it relates to the citizenship Oath, where the Oath becomes a commitment to Canada and its people, thus changing the oath-takers and transforming them into citizens of Canada. Similarly, Sherman Clark (2003), in a law review article exploring how an oath may be experienced by the oath-taker and how it affects their identity, argues that the oath can be interpreted as “part of … the process of weaving oneself into
the fabric of a life” (2003, p. 16). Clark’s explanation is a possible interpretation. However, it is only one interpretation, therefore there is a need to interview diverse citizens to explore the meanings they associate with reciting the oath.

In Canada, the dissenting voice against the Oath is fought by invoking the Constitution. By analyzing the history of the Oath and its effect on the freedoms of the oath-taker, Bryce Edwards (2002) explains how the Oath violates the freedom of conscience and religion of the oath-takers, as it forces them to choose between Canadian citizenship and being true to their conscience. Despite the fact that the Queen is the Canadian Head of State, which is a part of the court’s reason to continue loyalty to the Queen, Edwards maintains that there is still an argument to be made based on Charter grounds. Comparable to the findings of Sulmasy (1999) and Edwards (2002), by reciting and internalizing the Oath, Leonid Sirota (2015) argues that it personally binds the conscience of the oath-takers, which is entwined with their ethical and moral stance. Sirota concludes that the Oath could be revised to take out the reference to the Queen and states that the expression of commitment to the country can be done without the Oath. This brings to question whether would-be citizens want to change the Oath to take out the reference to the Queen or completely eradicate it.

The presented articles are comprehensive in their review of the nature of the oath and how it can be perceived and challenged by would-be Canadian citizens in light of the Charter. However, there is still a need to investigate how new citizens interpret the Oath to examine their perceptions and opinions, and understand whether it is an infringement on their rights and freedoms.

Changing the Oath
Similar to the interpretation of an oath, few research studies have been conducted to explore whether there is a need to change the Oath in Canada. A report written by CBCA Reference (1995) explains how the Liberal government made plans to change the existing Oath in 1994 to ensure it reflected the new realities in Canada. However, plans fell through as opponents were strongly opposed of the suggested revision of the Oath, which did not include the Queen, who is Canada’s Head of State. This illustrates how, despite knowing how Canadian society has changed, it is not easy for the government to edit the Oath due to the Queen’s role and her representation of the Crown. Additionally, in David Smith’s (1995) book studying the history and role of the Crown in Canada, Smith elucidates how the Crown, considered as the oldest institution dating back to the beginnings of Canada, remains to be the least understood. Because people identify the symbol of the Crown with the Queen herself, it is often confused and not recognized as an institution, even though it is the source of authority of state power and rule of law in Canada, and it is the heart of the political system, which explains why the state is often referred to as the Crown. This raises the question as to whether this confusion leads people to challenge the Oath, because of the literal interpretation of the Queen as a person rather than the Head of State.

In addition to the Oath’s reference to the Queen, other changes have also been proposed. As recently presented by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, the Commission’s Final Report (2015) asks the Canadian government to answer two calls to action, which include revising the information kit for newcomers to Canada and its citizenship test to present a more inclusive history of Aboriginal peoples, and revising the Oath to include a portion about Treaties with Indigenous People as part of the second portion. By presenting these two
calls to action, it becomes evident that the Aboriginal peoples of Canada need to have a say in their inclusion in the Oath, as well as to be part of the process of welcoming new citizens, especially in their own land.

Based on the above literature, it is apparent that there is a desire to change the Oath; however, to date, no change has been made. The Queen’s role in Canada is one of the reasons that the Oath has not been changed; however, the omission of Aboriginal peoples in the Oath remains unanswered. Additionally, it remains to be examined whether new citizens understand why it is important to have the Queen in the Oath.

**Nation-State Narrative and Identity**

To address why Aboriginal peoples are still not included in the Oath despite being recognized as the original peoples of Canada prior to the arrival of the French and the British, Engin Isin (2002), in his book exploring the history and political nature of citizenship, explains how throughout history, it has been the victorious citizens who have been able to define the narrative of citizenship while the oppositional “others” are often written out. This is consistent with Sheryl Lightfoot’s (2013) article on Canadian Aboriginal history, where Lightfoot explains how prior to 1960, Aboriginal peoples were not considered part of the national polity and were considered the other, therefore, their inclusion in nation-state narratives have been recent. This explains why Aboriginal peoples remain omitted in the Oath.

Additionally, because of its beginnings, Robert Barney & Michael Heine (2015), in their article exploring the birth of a new Canadian symbol during the 1908 London Games, demonstrate how the Canadian identity has been largely influenced by its membership in the British Empire. The article explains how the promotion of the maple leaf during the London
Games has been seen as a move towards a national self-identity, one that moves away from the British identity. If it is a move away from the British identity, this raises the question as to whether a move to change the Oath is possible. However, despite these efforts, Elke Winter (2014) demonstrates how the British identity continues to be more dominant and perpetuated to this day. In a study on the recent changes between 2006 and 2013 to the Canadian citizenship rules, Winter found that the changes made are moving toward renationalization, particularly Canada’s increased emphasis on military history, British traditions and the monarchy, which she believes run opposite to the ethos of multiculturalism. The move towards renationalization could explain why the Oath remains unchanged. A similar finding on the dominant narrative can be found in Jasmine Thomas’s (2015) discourse analysis, where following the government’s December 2011 announcement of banning the niqab during the citizenship ceremony, Thomas found that the media continued to portray the niqab as an opposition to Canadian culture and values, in other words, against the “expected Euro-White-Canadian norm” (p. 194). The findings in these articles present the strength of the British or generally, “Euro-White-Canadian” identity narrative. However, it raises the question of how the Oath fits in this narrative and whether its relation to the British tradition perpetuates it as a process that supports this narrative.

The studies and reports presented above contribute to explaining what identity narratives exist in Canada. As Winter’s (2014) study argues, Canadian multiculturalism permeates nation-state narratives, but the link to the British or “Euro-White-Canadian” identity continues to be more dominant. For those who do not fit in that narrative, this raises the question of how the Oath shapes their perceptions in nation-state identity, as well as how the Oath affects their own identities.
Belonging

The development of nation-state identities and how it cultivates a sense of belonging has been heavily studied. According to Benedict Anderson (1983), nations are a constructed political community where people imagine sharing general beliefs, values and attitudes with each other, and can identify themselves to be a part of that country—thus the notion of “imagined communities.” If Anderson’s framework is used, it broaches the question of how the Oath is used and perceived to maintain Canada’s imagined community. Additionally, multiculturalism is often used as the common value that makes people feel that they are a part of a Canadian community (Winter, 2014). Despite this narrative, in his examination of how race is excluded in historical and contemporary notions of Canadian nationhood, David Austin (2010) challenges the common narrative of Canadians as being the “peaceful, multiculturalism-loving Canadian citizen, descendant of the two founding nations, France and Britain,” and how that narrative excludes the “Indigenous ‘Indian,’ the Black, the immigrant newcomer and the refugee” (p. 19). Austin concludes that master narratives of nationhood directly affects its citizens, particularly how narratives identify who belongs. It therefore becomes important to examine whether the Oath, originally a British tradition, also excludes those who do not fit in that idea of nationhood.

Studies exploring how nations build their own narrative to nurture belonging have also been conducted. After studying six Canadian citizenship guides developed between 1947 and 2012 to explore what narrative dominates in the descriptions of naturalized citizens, Nora Sobel (2015) found that the guides present a continuity in the way it defines what the Canadian Government expects from its citizens, which is linked to being of good character, responsible, wholesome, politically active, test-ready and loyal citizens. The findings somewhat mirror the
words of the Oath, particularly the loyal citizen, which can be linked to “allegiance,” and the responsible and politically active, which can be linked to “observing the laws” and “fulfilling their duties” as a citizen. This raises the question of whether new citizens who have recited the Oath live up to that expectation. To address this point, Lloyd Wong (2008) surveyed 42,476 respondents to explore the commitment of transnationals or dual citizens in fulfilling their duties as a citizen, and found that transnationals are just as committed and active in participating in Canadian society. Perhaps this can be linked to their faithfulness to the Oath.

The literatures examined above all have an underlying theme of belonging within Canada’s nation-state narratives. However, additional study needs to be conducted to address what constitutes an environment that nurtures belonging and attachment to a nation and whether the recitation of the Oath plays a part in nurturing belonging or exclusion in Canada.

Summary

It is evident from the above literature that the common narrative present in the Canadian citizenship and identity has been inextricably linked to the British Empire and the Crown, which is the authority that created Canada as a legal entity. The Queen is the embodiment of the symbol of the Crown, the highest authority in Canada and from which its laws are derived, and so the perpetuation of the pledge of allegiance to the Queen as part of the Oath is therefore continually defended as she is perceived to be an integral part of Canada. Despite her importance, requests to change the Oath have been proposed to include Aboriginal peoples, as well as reflect the present realities of Canada. Few research studies have been done to examine how the Oath presents the contemporary Canadian citizen and identity as shown in Austin’s (2010) and Thomas’s (2015) research. To date no other research has been conducted with a focus on how new citizens
perceive the Oath. Considering Canada needs to examine how it welcomes new citizens with its citizenship process, especially if it has been challenged twice in Canadian courts, this is an important aspect that is missing from the research literature. This study therefore has the opportunity to inform an understudied area of citizenship process by exploring how citizens perceive the Oath. By interviewing a diverse group of new citizens on their perceptions of the Oath, we can better understand whether the Oath affects their freedom of speech and conscience.

Chapter Three: Research Method

Design

Qualitative research with a focus on phenomenological design is the most suitable framework for this research. To understand how the Oath affects new citizens, they need to be able to tell their unique stories of how they internalized the Oath and the meanings they created when they spoke the words during their citizenship ceremony. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) allows this type of engagement where researchers examine how participants experience and “ascribe meaning to a specific phenomenon” (Clarke, 2009, p. 37), which in this case is the recitation of the Oath. According to the phenomenological approach, there is not one official reality to be observed, but infinite equally ‘real’ realities that develop from our subjective experiences (Langbridge, 2007). Furthermore, by using IPA, it allowed the researcher to delve into the contexts of how participants made sense of themselves, their experiences and the world around them (Griffin & May, 2012), especially taking into consideration their background, countries of origin, cultures and individual experiences. Considering experiences shape a person’s “subjective experience of life” (Frazer, Oyebode & Cleary, 2011, p. 678), IPA allowed the researcher to examine participants’ individual perceptions of how they make meaning and
perceive the Oath. The inductive approach captured the complexity of the participants’ lived experience (Griffin & May, 2012) and how their feelings toward the Oath are context-dependent embodied in their history and subjective views. Most importantly, through IPA, participants were empowered (Vanner, 2015) to share their opinions and beliefs, thus allowing their stories to challenge the narratives about the Oath.

Additionally, IPA’s emphasis on research as a “dynamic process” where the researcher’s own values and conceptions “are required in order to make sense” (Smith & Eatough, 2007, p. 36) of the participants’ experience, provided the researcher an opportunity to use her own experience to make sense of the participants’ world. She was empathic in seeing the participants’ point of view (Smith & Eatough, 2007) and, at the same time, critical in her analysis of certain aspects of participant accounts that they themselves may not be aware of. It is through the double interpretation, or what Smith and Osborn (2008) refer to as a double hermeneutic, where in addition to participants trying to make sense of their world, the researcher also tried to make sense of the participants’ efforts in making sense of their world. Through this process, the researcher not only described the phenomenon, but also understood the phenomenon within the context that is inclusive of both the participant and researcher’s interpretation (Clarke, 2009).

Using *epoché*, a technique when all judgments and presumptions are put aside, the researcher took on a fresh outlook in describing and interpreting the participants’ experiences.

**Method of Data Collection**

**Recruitment.** The researcher initially planned to recruit participants through advertisements and networking with organizations located in the Lower Mainland, British Columbia; however, this was not the most successful approach. Despite best efforts, the only
ones interested in participating were those who were not eligible for the research. Finding
research participants was not easy, which may be due to the fact that the topic of citizenship has
been such a contentious issue, particularly with the talk of the burqa or niqab, Bill C-24 and
refugees, that prospective participants may be wary of giving their opinions to a complete
stranger. Another reason could be that the incentive only included taking part to this research and
learning from the data available. However, these are all speculations on the part of the
researcher.

To ensure the researcher found participants, she had to change her recruiting strategy by
using purposive sampling, which is a technique used to include particular areas or groups found
in population (Short, Ketchen & Palmer, 2002). She conducted this sampling method by
approaching new citizens directly through her network of friends, colleagues, acquaintances and
strangers. Due to her experience as an undergraduate student, she was able to interview research
participants who belonged to international organizations and used to be students from her
previous university. Snowball sampling was also used to recruit research participants, through
recommendations of a friend or an acquaintance.

The research participant selection process was therefore not randomised, and also
dependent on whether they meet the criteria of (1) being a new Canadian citizen by (2) having
recited the Oath within the last 5 years, and (3) being between the ages of 19 and 60 years old.
Anyone who fit the criteria and agreed to participate was interviewed. Clarke (2009) states that
the “‘essence’ of a phenomenon can be understood by revisiting a person’s immediate conscious
experience of it” (p. 38). It was, therefore, important that participants remember the moment
when they recited the Oath. Participants who have recited the Oath within the past five years
were interviewed, as five years provided enough time for them to ensure that they have a recollection of this momentous event in their lives.

Participants. The research sample included ten naturalized Canadian citizens who have recited the Oath within the past five years. Participants came from varied backgrounds with different gender, religion, ethnicity, occupation, age and educational achievements. Participants’ ages ranged from their twenties to their fifties and they have been living in Canada between six and fourteen years. There were two participants from Brazil, two from Iran, two from China, one from Afghanistan, one from India, one from Israel and one from the United States. Five of the participants are dual citizens, while the other five are not due to restrictions or non-recognition of dual citizenship in their countries of origin. The participants currently reside in British Columbia and Ontario, and the length of their citizenship varies between a year and four years. Their reasons for moving to Canada included coming in as a student and moving for a job, spouse or family. This diverse set of participants allowed the researcher to explore the difference in perceptions, beliefs and reflections regarding the Oath.

Procedure. Data was collected from participants through in-person, one-on-one interviews in Vancouver and Victoria, British Columbia, as well as over an internet application called Skype for participants who resided outside the province of British Columbia, especially when face-to-face interview was not possible. The sample size used in this research was limited to allow for a longer in-depth interview for each participant. The length of an interview ranged from forty-five minutes to ninety minutes, which required answering semi-structured and open-ended questions as well as engaging in a full conversation (Smith & Eatough, 2007).
The interview was conducted with a mixture of formality and conversation to gain a detailed picture of the participants’ account of their experience. The list of questions (see Appendix) served more as a guideline and were facilitative in nature, so it allowed the participants to diverge and pursue issues relevant to the research topic that were not considered when the questions were compiled. Participants were asked about their transition moving to Canada; secondly, about their thoughts on Canadian identity and their own identities; and finally, their thoughts on the Oath of Citizenship and ceremony.

During the interview, some of the questions were redundant for participants who provided lengthy and in-depth answers, so being flexible allowed the researcher to skip certain questions and ask follow-up questions that required further clarification. Considering participants are the experiential expert (Griffin & May, 2012), ample opportunities were provided for the participants to tell their stories. Through this process, the researcher collected rich verbal participant accounts. All interviews were recorded, except one who wished to be unrecorded. Notes were taken throughout the interview for the excepted participant to ensure answers were captured, as well as for participants whose interviews were recorded to document observations.

**Reflexivity**

In the interest of self-disclosure, this researcher recited the Oath of Citizenship in 2015 while attending the ceremony to obtain her Canadian citizenship. She therefore has her own experience as a naturalized citizen and is aware of the citizenship process from the inside. She is conscious of the fact that she has pre-formed ideas and has her own set of beliefs and perceptions about the recitation of the Oath. These were noted during the analysis of each participant’s
Data Analysis

After transcribing the interviews and reading the interview transcripts, data analysis was conducted. To get a “feel” for the interview, the researcher conducted data analysis by following the repeated process of reading and re-reading a transcript, allowing the researcher to get the “insider perspective” (Storey, 2007, p. 54). Notes were written on the margins on the transcripts to code participants’ interviews (Smith & Osborn, 2008) and common experiences and patterns were identified. Transcripts were reanalyzed to ensure there were no inconsistencies and self-reflective notes were taken during the analysis process to annotate reflexivity and document the analysis process (Burbeck & Willig, 2014). Writing notes about the process allowed the researcher to record her role in the interpretation of the transcripts. From the generated notes, sub-themes were examined and identified (Smith & Eatough, 2007). After discovering the connections between sub-themes, the overarching themes were generated and brought together to establish the connections among them (Burbeck & Willig, 2014).

The final step was to present the analysis in narrative form (Storey, 2007) where portions of the interview were reconstructed to form a comprehensible narrative and where excerpts from the transcripts are presented to illustrate the themes and sub-themes of the research (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The researcher ensured that data excerpts were not misrepresented or distorted, and stories were presented within the context in which they were told (Smith & Osborn, 2008). A few of the participants’ ability to speak English was not perfect; however, no grammatical edits were made on the transcription of their interviews. The quotes presented under the results are

transcripts. Further, by using the actual words from each participant when coding and generating themes, the researcher ensured that participants’ interviews were not taken out of context.
directly from their own voices and from their own choice of words so as not to take away the essence of what and how they wanted to convey their thoughts and perceptions. Additionally, for the purpose of this research and protecting the privacy of each participant, their personal and contextual characteristics were taken out and participant numbers were used throughout to distinguish each one.

**Chapter Four: Results**

The analysis focused on how participants’ make sense of their experience in Canada, focusing largely on their experience with the Oath and the common ground shared by the participants. Based on the analysis of the interviews, four overarching themes emerged: 1) the Oath is a promise, 2) Canada is real whereas the Queen is a distant figure, 3) Canadian identity, and 4) Agency. There are eleven (11) sub-themes identified, which are described under the main features of the overarching themes. Where possible, theme titles and labels contain participants’ own words to ensure that the analyses remain close to the participants’ own experiences.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Table 1</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Themes and Subordinate Themes of New Citizens’ Perceptions of the Oath</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Themes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Oath is a promise</td>
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<td>2. Canada is real whereas the Queen is a distant figure</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Canadian identity</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Agency</td>
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**Theme 1 – Oath is a Promise**
Through the recitation of the Oath, all ten participants expressed how they interpreted the Oath as a promise. Although the interpretation of the promise, as well as the solemnity and internalization of the Oath varies for each participant, the idea is that the Oath is a solemn pledge which they have undertaken that marks their citizenship process. The “Oath is a promise” becomes the main theme shared by all participants in diverse forms, which branches off into three sub-themes: 1) promise to home; 2) promise to self; and 3) pride in the promise.

**Promise to home.** All the participants have expressed how they have chosen Canada as their home for a variety of reasons. By reciting the Oath, six participants promised to take care of Canada as their home. Participant #1 expressed how he perceived the Oath:

*I didn’t internalize and I didn’t mean them, not in the literal sense of the words. But I meant them in the sense that I’m taking Canada as a home and will do my best to make this country a better place.*

By internalizing the Oath as a promise to his home, Participant #1 and five other participants explain how they have built their lives living in Canada, integrating in the country, creating communities and establishing a network of people whom they call friends, families, colleagues and acquaintances in Canada. The Oath becomes a promise to their home—a special place, where Canada becomes more than just a space to live in, but a place where participants have made their lives building connections, creating friendships and other relationships.

With these strong ties, the participants end up having an emotional and social connection to Canada. This is evident in Participant #4’s interview where after living in Canada since 2002 as a student, working in Victoria and making her life in Canada, she found that:
I have more connections socially here than China. All my friends mostly live in Canada.

The people in China, I've lost connection or I can't find anything in common.

Further to their emotional connection, two participants explained how by meeting their partners in Canada, they were able to get to know Canadian life and culture better. They shared how through activities with their partners, they experienced parts of Canadian life they otherwise would not have been exposed to as a student or as an intern. With their partners, they became more rooted in the country, which is evident in Participant #1’s recollection of what he had done when his visa was about to expire and his internship was about to end:

Because when I met [my husband], it was right before my visa expired. So maybe in an alternative world that I didn’t meet him and my visa expired, I would have just gone home. Or because at the time, when my visa was about to expire and I decided to apply for an extension and all that, maybe I persisted because of the relationship…. We’ve been together for eight years and I’ve been in Canada for nine, almost ten years.

By making connections in Canada, participants found it easy to recite the Oath and interpret it as a promise to take care of the country, a place where they have made their home.

Promise to self. Further to the interpretation of promising to make their home a better place, participants interpreted the Oath as a “promise to self.” This sub-theme differs from “promise to home” in a way that it is an active promise to themselves to accept Canada’s laws and rules. The promise becomes an act of compliance. This is evident in Participant #8’s excerpt:

The oath, you promise yourself. You have to accept the country's rules. You have to just obey the rules. ... You're not living in the jungle, right? We're living in communities that you have to obey the rules.
Further to complying with the rules and the law, Participant #3 saw the Oath as a promise to be loyal to Canada.

*It's like you swear to be loyal to that country I would say. You know, which is what's important. You decided to be a part of the country—you have to be loyal. So if you don't want to be loyal, then why did you come here?*

Being loyal becomes an active duty for the new citizen to be a part of Canada, which Participant #3 sees as an important duty and questions why anyone would not want to be loyal to a country they currently live in. Further to this idea is the interpretation of promising to be a good citizen.

Participant #10 explains:

*For me, what it means is and as I took the oath and I stand firm by the second portion of the oath, I promise to be a good citizen, law-abiding citizen. I try to follow the law and I try to be really—I know it might sound like a cliché, but it’s not. I try to be a responsible person to the community. I try to do things right as right as possible.*

By pointing out the second portion of the Oath, Participant #10 interprets it as a promise to be a good citizen, which reflects being responsible and of good character. By emphasizing being a good, law-abiding citizen, she is determined to follow through with that interpretation of her promise.

**Pride in the promise.** By making a promise to their home and themselves, participants exhibited a sense of pride during the ceremony. This is evident in how eight of the participants explained how after receiving the invitation to the Citizenship ceremony, which is the last process before becoming a new Canadian citizen, they felt a sense of arrival, a sense of completion. Eight participants described the ceremony as a moment of conclusiveness, often
sighing with the word "finally." Participant #8 expresses his delight after finally going through the citizenship process:

\[ Oh \text{ wo}w, \text{ it was a really good time. Me and my wife we go to the ceremony. I remember that day, I remember the guy who shook my hand and gave citizenship .... So that was a really good feeling. } \]

The ceremony itself was a memorable day for Participant #8. It provided new citizens an opportunity to reflect on their journey, making it more significant for them, and providing a time and place for a completion or a sense of arrival to becoming a citizen. Eight participants expressed their positive experience in the citizenship ceremony. The whole process was an experience they described as a "cornerstone" or an achievement in their Canadian life, which they felt proud of. Participant #7 explained:

\[ I \text{ felt proud. I felt like if there was no ceremony, I wouldn't feel as proud. Like if you got your certificate in the mail, it wouldn't be as proud. } \]

The participants explained that the whole ceremony itself, which included the judge’s speech, picking up the certificate, reciting the Oath and shaking the judge’s hands all play a part in creating a ritual of belonging for eight of the participants.

**Theme 2 – Canada is real whereas the Queen is a distant figure**

The dichotomy between Canada and the Queen is the second super-ordinate theme that addresses the participants’ interpretation of the Oath, allowing them to focus more on their connection with the country rather than focusing on the Queen. The dichotomy reflects eight of the participants' perception of Canada and the Queen.
Canada is real. All ten of the participants feel a strong connection to the state, particularly after recounting their experiences moving and settling in Canada. Participants have lived in Canada between 6 and 14 years. During this time, they have made their connections to the country, particularly economically, looking for jobs, studying as a student, working as a professional, as well as socially—meeting new friends, living in communities or with families, and/or meeting their partners. By separating Canada and the Queen, participants focus on Canada and recognize the ways in which the country provides various opportunities, community, home and privileges of Canadian citizenship.

By explaining how "Canada is real" and the Queen is symbolic, eight of the participants justify reciting the Oath with what they can connect with. By stating that Canada is real, participants talk about things that they can quantify and witness the effects in their daily lives. To elucidate the “realness” of Canada, Participant #6 explains why he likes living in Canada:

*The living standards are better here. There are more opportunities here I think.*

Participant #3 talks about how despite the Queen being part of Canada's historical and cultural "baggage," she has very little influence in his life and in the country. This is reflected in the following portion of Participant #3’s interview:

*She doesn't actually make any decision in Canada. The people in Canada are actually the ones making the decision, well the government and the people that elect the government that make the decision. We are or the politicians make the Canada that we are. I don't think she, the last 20 or 30 years, created any law that Canada is today. So it's the people, the way we're living in Canada, decided to change, to adapt it the way we think it's better for us.*
By explaining how the people in Canada are the ones making a difference in the country, rather than the Queen, Participant #3 elucidates that the Queen has no effect in his daily life.

**Queen is a distant figure.** All the participants explain how they have very little connection with the Queen. Three participants try and explain how the Queen is involved in Canada, particularly pointing out Canada's colonial history, constitutional monarchy, how parts of the British culture have been adopted and the Queen's connection to the country, such as the appointed Governor General, to explain that she is part of Canada. However, despite these accounts and rationale for having her as part of the Oath, they cannot deny that, as a person, she has very little influence and connection in their daily lives, which is explained by Participant #3 above. Participant #5 states her curiosity about the Queen, admitting how little she knows about her and explains her interest, stating:

*I would love to know more stories about her. But I sort of regard her as a celebrity, instead of “your highness.”*

By regarding her as a celebrity, there is a certain adulation and curiosity for the Queen more as a famous and well-known person rather than as Canada’s Head of State. Furthermore, by describing her as a celebrity, it takes away the seriousness and status of the Queen’s role in Canada.

Additionally, six of the participants explain that if they were to take the Oath literally, then they would have a problem pledging allegiance to the Queen. This is echoed by Participant #2:

*Yes, I would have a problem if I had to interpret the Oath literally. We’re in the 21st century; we have grown out of a monarch.*
Having recited the Oath, Participant #2 had no problem reciting it as she perceived it symbolically. Only by taking on the literal meaning would the Oath be problematic, particularly by pointing out that it is the 21st century, which implies that the Oath’s literal meaning is outdated if she actually had to pledge allegiance to the Queen.

Two participants explained how, despite other people viewing the Queen as being symbolic in the Oath, they relate it to how other people may not be aware of Canada’s history. As Participant #10 explained:

*I think the people who see this is a symbolic thing, are either really not aware of the history, are not aware of the power that the current order in the world. So they’re not hurt by it and they want to be a part of it. And they don’t know about the history of genocide that happened, you know, under the names of Queens and Kings of Europe. So if they see it as something symbolic, I kind of want to relate it to the fact that they either have not been hurt by this, by this history, so they don’t feel – why bother? Or they don’t know the context, right?*

By interpreting the Queen as symbolic, Participant #10 believes that others may not be aware of Canada’s colonial history or they may not see the evidence of it in their everyday lives, so the literal meaning is something that is far from their realities. It therefore becomes easy for the participants to recite the Oath and perceive the Queen as symbolic, or a distant figure that appears to do no harm to them, because they believe that they have not been affected by this history.

**Theme 3 – Canadian Identity**
The third overarching theme presents the participants’ perspectives on Canada’s nation-state identity and how it links to their own identities after living in Canada and becoming citizens. By reciting the Oath, there is the belief that they are now “authentic” Canadians, a sense of arrival from becoming to being Canadian. This point is further elaborated in the three sub-themes.

**Canada’s national identity.** Out of ten participants, nine of the participants believe that Canada’s national identity is linked to its multiculturalism policy. All of the participants have expressed how they like the multicultural aspect of being Canadian as it allows them to see themselves in this national narrative. Although being multicultural is part of Canada’s identity, seven of the participants explained how, to them, this idea is not represented in the Oath, due to its focus on the Queen as the head of state. Participant #9 explains:

*I mean, I like very much the fact that, basically the multicultural aspect of Canada—the fact that, again with some exceptions, where you come from doesn’t matter. You know, what matters is what you are, how you are and what you do, and not your ancestry. In some sense, the monarchy is the antithesis of that. All that matters is your ancestry.*

Because the Oath includes reference to the Queen, Participant #9 believes that the Oath does not represent Canada’s multicultural society, which is an aspect that he values in Canada. The monarchy’s representation of a privileged ancestry is an aspect that Participant #9 does not agree with, especially since in his perception it takes away the egalitarian aspect of multiculturalism.

**Hyphenated identity.** When asked whether they considered themselves Canadians after reciting the Oath, eight participants expressed a resonating "yes," while one identified with the Canadian values and another identified Canada as home. Six participants pointed out that despite
feeling Canadian, they also still consider themselves as people from their countries of origin.

Participant #1 described his identity as a "scrambled egg," further explaining:

\[
\text{It's hard to separate the two parts…. in a way, I feel like a citizen of the world, because} \\
\text{I've been to other countries, but I also feel lonely, because I feel like no one gets me.}
\]

Participant #1 explains how the two identities have mixed to the point that it becomes difficult to extricate and separate the two parts. Participant #10 echoes the sentiment about the difficulty of dealing with two identities:

\[
\text{For me it marks a, perhaps a grim turning point in life, because I’m no longer just an} \\
\text{Iranian—I’ll be Canadian and I didn’t know how to deal with that. You know, I didn’t} \\
\text{know how to sort of like split myself between the two identities. I still don’t know. I think} \\
\text{it’s hard.}
\]

Evident from both participants’ interviews are their struggle to make sense of their own personal identities, particularly how it mixes with their previous identities. The talking of mixing and splitting of two identities implies that they have aspects of their identities that have been changed as part of undertaking the Oath, which may be clashing to their previous identities as they emphasize the difficulty of dealing with a mixed or split identity.

**Where are you originally from?** Although the national narrative of Canada being a multicultural country allows the participants to see themselves as Canadians, six admit that they are sometimes not identified as such. Despite not being identified as Canadian, Participant #1 assumes that it could be other parts of who he is, like his personality, that identify him as being “un-Canadian.” Participant #1 explains his and his husband’s experience:
I think the visual element definitely plays a role. If you're a visible minority, you'll always be flagged as not Canadian. Because I even know, and I learned this recently, I had no idea. Because whenever I want to know whether a person's born abroad, and if I know that someone's from abroad, I ask “where are you originally from?” But then I realized—I learned from [my husband]—that often times people ask him where he's originally from, even though he was born in Canada. And he answers Malaysia or he answers China, which is quite a bizarre thing for me, because he's not originally from those places. He's originally from Canada. So I think when you’re a visible minority, you always carry this stigma. But I don't know if the opposite is true, if I was Caucasian, I was born abroad, if people still ask me if I'm Canadian or where I'm from. The optimist side of me wants to believe that people ask me, because I have an accent and it’s because I grew up in a different country, so culturally speaking, I've been exposed to those things because I hug more than Canadians do and I'm louder than Canadians usually are. You know I always assume that it’s because I have characteristics that are very different from other Canadians, but I think the fact that I'm a visible minority definitely plays a role.

Although Participant #1 assumes that certain characteristics, such as his personality and accent, play a role in identifying him, he believes that being a visible minority does play a role in not being identified as Canadian, which is substantiated by the experience of his Canadian-born spouse. Further, as he points out whether the same could be said about a person who looks Caucasian, Participant #9 explains his experience from the perspective of someone who is “white”:
I'm pretty white, which means people who see me don't assume anything…. On the other hand, the moment I start speaking, it's completely obvious that I was not born in Canada. Mostly, occasionally people ask me where am I from and I occasionally answer. Often my answer is very clear that I was born somewhere else, but I live here. People ask me where am I from, often my answer is Toronto. And only when they insist, where am I born? The answer, ‘where were you born?’ sorry, the answer becomes somewhere else.

Participant #9 assumes that because he is white, it allows him not to be visible from scrutiny of being questioned whether he is originally from Canada. It is only when he speaks that it becomes evident he was not born in Canada. Both experiences, Participants #1 and #9 corroborate their beliefs that certain narratives of being white do exist.

**Theme 4 – Agency**

Further to becoming a Canadian, participants explain how they feel a sense of freedom, a change in lifestyle and the feel of security and control in Canada. All these principles are things that participants value, especially when it is a principle not present or valued in their countries of origin. This ability, which I have summarized as “agency,” is the fourth overarching theme that comprises three sub-themes, exemplifying the participants’ perceived citizenship privileges, which culminate in reciting the Oath.

**Vote.** Seven participants expressed the importance of voting, which they see as akin to making a difference. They deem this to be important, as explained by Participant #3:

*When you're a permanent resident, you're already Canadian, but not a Canadian, you know what I mean? You cannot vote, you can’t decide, and I think for me it's really important to vote. You can calculate the decision of the country.*
The importance of voting connects Participant #3 with the ability to practice his democratic right and perceived ability to make a difference in Canada.

**Freedom.** Participants express how there is a certain kind of freedom that comes with being a citizen living in Canada. Some of the participants were from war-torn countries, such as Afghanistan, so the very idea of freedom is invaluable. Participant #8 describes this freedom akin to flying:

> Because whatever you expect from life, you can have here. It depends on you, hardworking to reach your goal and no one can stop you. This is the only freedom that people are looking for. Just that. Free bird, like flying and you're flying and flying. How high you want to fly is up to you. That's the only thing I say about Canada. Life is hard in our country. You don't know how hard life. You never realize this freedom you have here. Nobody took this freedom from you.

As explained by Participant #8, his freedom was taken away, so to have that freedom back is something to celebrate, to cherish and to take advantage of. Participant #8 expresses this freedom as the ability to attain and achieve anything; you only have to fly like a bird and work hard to reach what you expect from life.

Another participant is from Iran where freedom of speech is not a value that is advocated. Below, Participant #2’s answer is simple on what being Canadian is about:

> To be a Canadian is to not be afraid to speak up. [Researcher: Do you think you'd be afraid to speak up in another country?] Try Iran.

This is echoed by Participant #10 who is also from Iran:
No one can deny the fact that in this situation, you can say stuff, you can say stuff people might get upset, people might get offended, especially in Canada. At least from what I know, you can’t go to jail for that. You don’t have to worry about being raped or being tortured if you say “this is a colonial country” or “this country has a colonial past.” And I think that makes it a very interesting, very interesting locale in the world. It’s Canada and it’s the US and like I said countries that have this legacy.

Participant #10 explains how despite pointing out Canada’s colonial past or challenging Canada, which can offend people, she knows she will not have to face extreme consequences, because she is protected under the Canadian law. By identifying the elements of freedom that they have in Canada, Participant #s 2, 8, 9 and 10 explain what they value in their Canadian citizenship.

**Security and control.** In addition to obtaining certain freedoms, as part of Canadian life, there is a sense of security that each participant enjoys and points out as an advantage. One participant describes how he and his family chose Canada for political reasons, because what was going on in his country of origin, in the Middle East, has been discouraging. He found that moving to Canada was better, for political reasons. This was echoed by Participant #1 who explained how the invitation to take the Oath was an invitation to safety:

*When I received the invitation for the oath, I was in Thailand with the military coup. So my impression was that, it was a sign that I should go back. So I was excited. Because I think not being a citizen, although the PR [permanent resident] status gives you a lot of benefits, there’s always a feeling that something might change, the rules might change. Like something they did, right? Like right now, applying for citizenship requires so much more than they did before or that you might lose your citizenship if there’s a term you*
need to sign. So rules change, the fact that I received a letter inviting me to the Oath ceremony, it made me feel safer. So now, I can finally be Canadian then.

There is a sense of safety in being a Canadian citizen that makes participants feel that they will be taken care of. Further, another participant described this kind of security linked to feeling like they have control and they know what to expect. There is a certain kind of familiarity about being in Canada that the participants link to comfort, control and stability, all of which they value. Participant #4 explains in her interview:

I think it's the sense of security. I feel like I'm more in control, at ease when I'm in Canada. Everything that I do I'm familiar with. I know the rules; I know what it's like. I think that's how I distinguish and consider myself as Canadian. When I do live in Canada and when I travel and then come back, it's like “ahhh.” You know it's like a contrast when I go back to China, I feel less in control. I don't understand a lot of things and a lot of the time you feel torn as well.

With these benefits of Canadian citizenship, eight participants talk about Canada with a hint of gratitude and reverence for being provided these benefits that otherwise some of them may not enjoy in their countries of origin or other places they have been to. As Participant #8 explained:

So I was thinking that if I'm going the ceremony and the Oath, and the promise that I'm not going to do any wrong in this country—that's good. That's something you're promising to yourself and that's something that you have to do. Because this country that has allowed you and given so many good things. Of course, you don't realize this, but when someone coming from my background, like me, it's just really hard.
When a contrast is made between countries of origin and Canada, participants look back on certain aspects and privileges that they enjoy in Canada that they would not be able to enjoy in other places or their countries of origin. With the comparison, it becomes evident that Canada has a lot to offer its citizens, therefore reciting the Oath becomes a worthwhile process that the participants actively engage in and interpret in a way that does not go against their ethical or moral stance, so they can obtain the Canadian citizenship.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how the Oath is perceived by new citizens, how it represents Canada’s multicultural society and how it affects the participants’ identity as a new Canadian. As presented in the previous section, 4 overarching themes, each with subordinate themes, emerged from the data analysis.

**Oath is a Promise**

As evident in the findings, reciting the Oath was an active process of interpreting and internalizing the Oath. Given the personal nature of reciting an oath, the findings demonstrate that participants used their own interpretations and beliefs to create what the Oath meant to them, which provided evidence that there are multiple interpretations of the Oath. By creating their own subjective meanings, such as interpreting it as a promise to home, participants were able to recite it with either pride or hesitation, depending on their interpretation, and weave it into their own lives. This is consistent with Clark’s (2003) claim that oath-takers can interpret the Oath to merge and incorporate it into their own lives in Canada. By weaving the Oath into their lives, the Oath takes on a very subjective meaning where participants look at their own personal connection and personal interpretation of the Oath rather than what is interpreted by others, such
as the court or the government. By focusing on their promise to make their home a better place, the Oath becomes an easy promise to recite, because making a promise to home does not go against their conscience or their moral and ethical stance.

The link between the Oath and how it binds the oath-taker’s conscience is consistent with the findings of Sulmasy (1999), Edwards (2002) and Sirota (2015), particularly how the Oath is heavy-laden with meaning and how it binds the oath-taker’s conscience. In addition, when the oath-takers interpret and internalize the Oath, the promise becomes an active stance rather than a passive act of expressing a statement. This concurs with Sulmasy (1999) and Sirota’s (2015) findings about how the Oath imposes a sense of obligation in which participants feel compelled to do as they have promised, which then changes who they are in the process. By interpreting the Oath in the literal sense, and focusing on the loyalty to the Queen, the Oath becomes a promise that would go against their ethical and moral stance. Participants were not comfortable with taking on the literal meaning of the Oath and interpreting it as a pledge of allegiance to the Queen.

Further to the oath-takers’ active stance, the idea of how participants interpreted the Oath as their promise to abide by the rules, is similar to how Winter (2014) explains that the naturalization process is an active stance of agreeing to a social contract and a deliberative choice to be a part of Canadian society. The Oath becomes the symbol of that deliberative choice to be a part of Canada and to be a Canadian, and uttering the Oath becomes a process of becoming a Canadian citizen. Additionally, the interpretation of the Oath as a promise to self, such as being a good, loyal, law-abiding citizen supports Sobel’s (2015) findings on how citizenship literature guides present a certain type of naturalized citizen in order to support a
certain collective Canadian national identity. The Oath plays a part in nurturing that type of Canadian identity as new citizens promise to be loyal and law-abiding.

**Canada is Real Whereas the Queen is a Distant Figure**

The results illustrate that the Oath is perceived as an important process during the citizenship ceremony; however, the participants’ interpretation of the Oath separates Canada and the Queen, leaving them to believe that the Queen has no impact in their everyday lives. This interpretation would be deemed flawed by Smith (1995) and the courts, particularly how it does not include an understanding of the symbolic but crucial role of the Crown, which is an institution embodied by the Queen, and is the highest rule of authority in Canada. Smith (1995) and the courts would argue that the monarch is needed as the symbol in Canada’s constitutional monarchy that allows power to be invested in the government. Additionally, by identifying the Queen as the sovereign, the participants do not see the Crown’s role in their everyday lives, which is the institution that gave authority to the Constitution (Smith, 1995). The results illustrate how there is a lack of understanding or knowledge of the Crown’s role in the Constitution, and its lack makes it difficult for people to understand why the Oath, particularly the inclusion of the Queen continues to this day.

However, the participants’ ambivalence in pledging allegiance to the Queen presents a postcolonial view of the Oath, where participants choose to interpret the Oath as an allegiance to Canada rather than the Queen. This interpretation challenges the court’s narrative, which was the explanation presented to the three permanent residents who challenged the requirement to pledge allegiance to the Queen. Additionally, by interpreting the Oath as an allegiance to Canada, the results become consistent with Edwards’ (2002) assertion that there is a significant shift in the
relationship between the state and the citizen, and how the emphasis is on the loyalty to Canada and the benefits they receive from the state, rather than their relationship to the Queen. Additionally, by presenting the Queen as symbolic, it undermines the intent of building a relationship with the sovereign, which was the original intent of the Oath during Henry VIII’s time (Edwards, 2002).

**Canadian Identity**

Even though the Oath is linked to British traditions and the words do not represent Canada’s current multicultural society, participants found it easy to see themselves as Canadians or hyphenated Canadians when they recited the Oath as they interpreted it in a way that focuses on the state and its multicultural society. This is consistent with Anderson’s (1982) imagined community, where being multicultural is what people relate to when it comes to Canada’s most prominent theme of nation state identity (Karim, 2009; Winter, 2014). These participants are members of an imagined community in which multiculturalism is a basic defining quality and the allegiance to the Queen is a relatively minor symbolic gesture.

However, despite finding themselves within Canada’s multicultural nation-state narrative, the participants admitted to sometimes not being considered as authentic Canadians in the eyes of others due to more dominant narratives of what it means to be a Canadian (Barney & Heine, 2015; Sobel, 2015; Thomas, 2015; West, 2002; Winter, 2015). This is consistent with literatures about how the dominant narrative of Canadian identity is linked to the British, which essentially excludes those who do not fit in that narrative (Austin, 2010; Isin, 2002; Thomas, 2015).

**Agency**
After reciting the Oath, participants looked forward to voting, which they believe allows them to be an active member and make a difference in Canadian society. This is in line with Wong’s (2008) article on how transnationals (or dual citizens) are committed and active in Canadian society. This could be attributed to their continued commitment in upholding the Oath as a loyal, responsible and politically active citizen.

It is ironic, and important to note, that the freedoms, security and control that the participants feel they have in Canada are all qualities that are underwritten by the laws that were given authority and meaning from the Crown (Smith, 1995). As previously mentioned, the participants’ emphasis on their relationship to Canada instead of the Crown, emphasizes the lack of awareness of the Crown’s role in Canada.

Summary

Due to the personal nature of oath taking, opinions and interpretations of the Oath are varied depending on the perceptions and understanding of the oath-taker. Although the Oath does not explicitly represent Canada’s multicultural society, but by interpreting the Oath as a promise to home and to self, oath-takers recite the Oath easily and with pride as they internalize their own interpretation. Additionally, by undertaking and internalizing the Oath, and taking part in the citizenship ritual, it changes the oath-takers, thus transforming themselves into Canadian citizens.

Furthermore, the interpretation of Canada as separate from the Queen leads the oath-takers to believe that they have more loyalty to the state that has provided them with numerous opportunities, freedoms, security and control. However, the court would argue that serving the Crown becomes the same as promising to uphold its laws and law-making system. Nonetheless,
the lack of understanding and knowledge of the Crown does not prevent oath-takers from internalizing the Oath and upholding their duties as a citizen. In actuality, it is the participants’ own interpretation that allows them to truly internalize and commit to their interpretation of the Oath that empowers them to be committed Canadian citizens, so long as their interpretation does not go against their ethical and moral stance.

Lastly, the Oath does play a role in maintaining Canada’s imagined community, however the emphasis on multiculturalism still resonates with the participants more than any other nation-state narrative. It is this continued polarization between the perception of the Queen as a sign of British identity and a narrative of multiculturalism that people present as conflicting values, therefore the difficulty also stems from that interpretation in addition to the lack of understanding of the Crown’s role.

**Conclusion**

The findings from this study inform the discourse of Canada’s multicultural and nation-state identity, as well as citizenship studies in Canada. This study allows better understanding about how new citizens perceive the citizenship process, especially the traditional ritual of reciting the Oath. The findings from this research could also inform colonial studies in Canada, particularly how colonial traditions are interpreted in a contemporary society. Furthermore, the research findings can inform Canadian courts and the government about how the Oath is personally binding and affects the oath-takers’ conscience, and how there is a need for further information and clarifications on the role of the Crown in Canada, which can assist in explaining why changing the Oath cannot be done overnight. Lastly, the findings of this study also had
personal implications as they allowed the researcher to reflect on her own experiences and better understand her own conflicted perceptions and beliefs about the Oath and citizenship ceremony.

This thesis does have its limitations and exclusions. The sample population in this research study is small with participants living in British Columbia and Ontario. Therefore, it does not claim to be representative of the total population of naturalized Canadian citizens. The nature of qualitative design is that it examines a smaller sample in-depth rather than surveying a larger population and sampled in a method that enables a deep understanding of the meaning of an experience. The new citizens who participated in this study were recruited directly; thus it is only representative of what they think, those people who were actively sought out and encouraged to share their stories. Although the research is not meant to be representative of the population, it provides a great insight into how naturalized citizens perceive and interpret the Oath. By examining their views, other Canadians can better understand how the personal, individual views of would-be citizens shape their perceptions of the Oath, which for many can be interpreted as a constraint against their personal choice and conscience specifically in their allegiance to the Queen.

In light of these limitations, future research should include participants from different geographic locations of Canada to examine whether perceptions of nation-state identity relating to the Oath differ greatly from location to location, and particularly how participants in Quebec whose connection to the French may divulge a differing view. Additionally, exploring whether participants would still interpret the Oath the same way if they understand the history and the role of the Crown in Canada may be a worthwhile study considering, as Edwards (2002) and Sirota (2015) believe there is still a case to be made based on Charter grounds. Lastly, additional
studies can be made for natural-born citizens, despite not being required to take the Oath. It would still be worthwhile to explore their beliefs and perceptions, particularly Aboriginal peoples, considering discussions on nation-state identity and the Oath do affect everyone within that imagined community, particularly how narratives have the power to exclude.
References


Appendix: Interview Guide

1. When did you move to Canada?
2. What was your reason for moving to Canada? (Prompt: Better job opportunities? To study?)
3. Tell me about your transition moving from your country of origin to settling in Canada?
4. Did you face any social or economic challenges when you first moved to Canada? If yes, what were those challenges?
5. What has been the most difficult aspect of the transition?
6. Before moving, what were your preconceived notions about Canada? (Prompt: What were your expectations? ie. Better healthcare, nice people, lots of wildlife)
7. When you moved here, did you find that those ideas or expectations were met? Please explain.
8. How long did it take before you decided to apply for Canadian citizenship?
9. Did you have any hesitation or doubts about applying for Canadian citizenship? If yes, what were they?
10. Why did you apply for citizenship?
11. Was it easy for you to apply for citizenship? If no, why not? (Prompt: Financial hardships to pay for the fees? Application difficult to understand? Unable to keep another citizenship?)
12. What does being “Canadian” mean to you? (Prompt: Characteristics, such as religion, values)
13. Do you consider yourself Canadian? How so?
14. Do you feel that you have a sense of community in Canada? (Prompt: You feel safe, a sense of belonging)

15. When you finally received your invitation to the Citizenship ceremony, what were your thoughts?

16. Tell me what was running through your mind when you recited the Canadian Oath of Citizenship.

17. Did you internalize those words? (Prompt: Did you mean it?) Why or why not?

18. What do you think the Oath means?

19. Do you have a problem pledging allegiance to the Queen? Why or why not?

20. Do you feel that the Oath unites you to Canada? The Queen? Or both?

21. Is the Oath a good way to welcome you to the country as a new citizen? Please explain.

22. Do you think the Oath reflects Canada’s current society? Please explain.

23. If you had the option to swear allegiance to the Queen or to Canada, which would you choose? Why?

24. Do you have any other thoughts about the Oath? Please explain.