MULTICULTURALISM @50: DIVERSITY & INCLUSION ONLY FOR THE HIGHLY SKILLED?[1]

Elke Winter is Professor of Sociology and Director of Research, Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Citizenship and Minorities (CIRCEM), University of Ottawa. Most recently, she served as the William Lyon Mackenzie King Chair for Canadian Studies at Harvard University (2019-21). Her research examines the relationship between social inequality, boundary construction, and pluralist inclusion in ethnically diverse societies. Her publications can be accessed at elkewinter.com.

Selecting immigrants based on their potential economic contribution to the national economy, integration facilitated by multiculturalism, and relatively easy naturalization have been a Canadian trademark for the past fifty years. However, rules to make Canadian citizenship "harder to get and easier to lose" – implemented under the previous Harper Conservatives, but left unchanged under the governing Trudeau Liberals – have turned Canada's naturalization regime into an extension of its market-driven points system in immigration: facilitating quick and easy access to citizenship for the highly skilled "from all corners of the world," while raising the hurdles for individuals who enter Canada through noneconomic immigration streams such as family reunification and asylum.

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While the rules for citizenship acquisition are separate from those that govern multiculturalism – proclaimed as policy in 1971 and made law in 1988 – naturalization remains a society's most important legal, practical and symbolic expression of inclusion. Whom we grant citizenship to and how we welcome them (quickly and easily or, on the contrary, grudgingly with lots of hurdles and delays) can thus serve as a magnifying glass revealing what we want Canadian society to be, and who is likely to be favoured by the rules in place.

In 2019, Canada welcomed more than 400,000 temporary migrants and roughly 340,000 permanent residents (IRCC 2020). Only the latter are eligible for naturalization after a minimum of 3 years of physical and legal residence. They were admitted under the Economic Class (58%), Family Class (27%), and Humanitarian Class/Refugees (15%). Most of them come from the Global South, namely (in 2019) from, India, China, the Philippines, and Nigeria. For the years to come, the government has announced accepting more than 400,000 immigrants/year, most of them in the Economic Class. It also offers a limited number of new paths to citizenship for temporary migrants (63,000 in 2019).

To naturalize, permanent residents must file an application, pay fees of $630/adult, prove their language skills, study the citizenship guide *Discover Canada*, sit and pass the test, attend the citizenship ceremony, and swear an oath of

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citizenship. In 2016, immigrants with the highest levels of education (a Master or a Ph.D. degree) had a citizenship test pass rate of 97.1% (Xu, 2018, p. 4), and those admitted under the Skilled Worker Program had a pass rate of 94.5% (Xu, 2018:6). This contrasts starkly with the difficulties in passing the citizenship test experienced by immigrants with secondary education or less (76.7%), resettled refugees (57.3% for those privately sponsored and 59.5% for those government-assisted), individuals having no knowledge of an official language at landing (77.3%) or individuals born in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia. Individuals admitted under the family class have a pass rate of 81.2%. In all categories, female citizenship candidates score less than men (Xu, 2018; for similar results see Hou & Picot, 2020). Even with these low scores, Canada remains a country of fairly rapid naturalization by international comparison. However, we must ask what causes these stark scoring differences, what they mean for the individuals at stake, and whether this form of inclusion corresponds to what we want Canadian society to be/become.

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My research shows that candidates for Canadian citizenship are indirectly tested for human capital: social and professional skills, superb mastery of English or French, knowledge, self-sufficiency and entrepreneurship (Winter, 2018, 2021). These attributes have traditionally been at the heart of the immigration point system but were not at stake in the citizenship application. Currently, however, Canada's naturalization regime is operating along the very same market-driven logic that is already driving the country's immigration policies, thereby implicitly articulating Canada's vision of meritocratic immigration onto citizenship.

For skilled and highly skilled immigrants – with university degrees and often in high-paying jobs – this redefinition of Canadian citizenship does not pose an undefeatable challenge. They rely on their professional experiences to fill the forms, make sure to furnish all documents, and have Excel calculate their days of physical presence in Canada. Being tech savvy, they find and download helpful online tools and "walk the streets of Ottawa" or "skate the canal" listening to *Discover Canada* podcast (CC04). While the prospect of undergoing a test is stressful to most, they can reflect on their student days and subsequently "practice a few questions, at least to know (how) the questions looked (in the past) " (CC16). Even when respondents encounter difficulties in the form of administrative flaws and mismanagement, that tend to affect candidates regardless of economic "merit," they are ingenious and resourceful in finding solutions, such as contacting their local MP, negotiating time off with their employers, or even tracing their files through access to information requests.

The interviewees my team spoke with were aware of their privileged class position. More than half of them expressed concern over the fact that the application process may be easy for them but not for others, especially "people who are not used to managing a lot of documentation, who have oral cultures, who are instead used to speaking to someone and that someone in customer service fills in the forms with them" (CC29). They characterized the citizenship application fee as "an amount, which corresponds for many people to one or two full days of pay" (CC37). They also found that the citizenship test is "made for people who have an education. If you do not have a high education level or a university (degree) , it can be difficult" (CC06). In short, many had friends or family who struggled with the application process or lived the demoralizing, time-consuming, and costly experience of failing the language or citizenship test. Their anecdotal evidence corroborates the statistics provided above and strongly resonates with the dramatic increase in demand for assistance with citizenship applications at community legal aid clinics (Nakache, Stone, & Winter, 2020).

Almost half of our respondents self-identified as being an individual belonging to a "visible minority" group. It is promising that none of them complained about racism directed at themselves by government agents (in the, admittedly, very limited personal interaction during the naturalization process). However, the interviews also showed that skills such as language and demeanour influence naturalization outcomes, and not only in purely functional ways. Some felt "treated more as a Canadian because (their) English (was) better than (that of) some other (applicants) " (CC21). Having lived and worked in Canada for the past years, interviewees were appalled by the citizenship study guide's uncritical portrayal of "Canadian values," and the denial of social divisions within Canadian society, whether with respect to Indigenous Peoples, French Canadians or women. Cultural biases were also detected at the citizenship ceremony. Interviewees commented on the fact that officers were checking lip movements during the oath. Many brushed it off as "really dumb" (CC12), others found it "disturbing" (CC32).

What does this mean for *Multiculturalism @ 50*? To recall, the

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rules for citizenship acquisition are an important way to symbolize what kind of society we want to be. They also demographically reproduce this society, as Canada's population grows more through newcomers than by babies born. The current naturalization process contributes to a society of "multicultural" individuals and nuclear families. Those who naturalize most easily are middle-class individuals from diverse ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds with strong social and cultural capital, i.e., they often speak multiple languages, hold international degrees, can adapt quickly to diverse cultural contexts, and are embedded in transnational social networks. They contribute to Canadian society through their jobs and their taxes, and they are able to financially support their households and children. However, because of unequal citizenship acquisition they are also increasingly distanced socially, economically, geographically, and legally from extended kin, friends, and acquaintances who are older, disabled, have less education, different migration trajectories, or otherwise less favourable life circumstances. With this hindsight, it becomes clear that the current naturalization rules undermine social cohesion.

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To conclude, an unbalanced and one-sided interpretation of the economic imperatives harms the social contract and undermines the assumption of mutual solidarity upon which Canada, like any modern democratic polity, is founded. Given that holding citizenship status of the country of residence is associated with better jobs, higher salaries, and social recognition, Canada's current naturalization process reinforces already existing inequalities within its society. It thereby penalizes not only those who have suffered persecution and trauma, such as refugees, but also those who enable skilled and highly skilled workers to do their jobs by looking after their families and offering other low-paying services. These latter (im) migrants also contribute to Canadian society, albeit on a different social level. Making them feel less worthy of Canadian citizenship undermines the promise of membership in an egalitarian pluralist society that combines racial equality and ethnocultural inclusion with social justice and social citizenship rights.

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