CANADIAN CITIZENSHIP FROM TRUDEAU TO TRUDEAU: A TALE OF (NEO-)LIBERALIZATION

ELKE WINTER AND FRIEDERIKE ALM

Elke Winter is Professor at the School of Sociological and Anthropological Studies and Director of Research at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Citizenship and Minorities, University of Ottawa. Her current work, which includes special issues of *The Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (2024, forthcoming) and *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* (2023, vol 29, no 4), examines how neoliberalism refashions societal (dis)integration along and across ethnic and racial fault lines.

Friederike Alm is a PhD researcher at the Institute of Political Science at Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. In her concluded dissertation project, she undertook a comparative-historical analysis of the immigration, citizenship, and integration politics in Canada, France, and Germany since 1945.

INTRODUCTION

Canadian citizenship, as both an institution and set of normative values, underwent multiple changes since its formal implementation in 1947 (Winter and Madularea 2018). In this paper, we argue that the past sixty years of changes are best understood as a tale of increasing (neo-)liberalization with the liberalization of citizenship starting in the mid-1960s under Liberal Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau (*père*), and the neoliberalization of Canadian citizenship beginning in the 1990s and continuing under Canada's current Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (*fils*) until the present day.

LIBERALIZING CITIZENSHIP

During the two decades following Canada's *Citizenship Act* of 1947, the framing of "good citizenship" emphasized Anglo-conformity and Whiteness. The underlying ethnocentrism remained dominant until the late 1950s. From the 1960s onward, however, Canadian immigration and citizenship policies became gradually liberalized. A major turning point was the replacement of immigration based on "national preference" by the purportedly "colour-blind" point system. The *Official Languages Act* of 1969 recognized the equality of French and English as Canada's official languages and the *Can-*

adian multicultural policy adopted in 1971 by Pierre Elliott Trudeau's Liberal government officially declared cultural diversity as the very essence of Canadian identity. This pluralist approach is also noticeable in some stipulations of the 1977 *Citizenship Act*, which defines citizenship as a right rather than a privilege and redesigns it "to allow for multiple allegiances and forms of belonging" (Nyers 2010, p. 52).

In the 1980s, an individualist and liberal interpretation of immigrants' ethnic background and "civic" membership in the polity started to replace the previous, more communitarian conception of ethno-cultural membership that emphasized Anglo-Saxon conformity. As such, Canadian citizenship sustained both social (redistributive) rights and individual (human) rights. This trend was reinforced in other legislative measures:

1. the repatriation of the Canadian Constitution in 1982 alongside the adoption of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, in which multiculturalism and the principles of equality and social justice are especially evident;

2. the *Employment Equity Act* of 1986, which encouraged affirmative action in the employment of underrepresented groups (women, "visible minorities", members of First Nations, and persons with disabilities); and

3. the adoption of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act in 1988.

NEOLIBERALIZING CITIZENSHIP

While fears for national unity due to the revival of Québécois nationalism prevented changes to citizenship legislation for more than 20 years (until the early 2000s, Winter 2013), in 1995, an important administrative change took place: a standard 20-question multiple-choice citizenship test replaced the individual citizenship interview with the aims of reducing costs and increasing consistency. The test was based on a new study guidebook *A Look at Canada*. With a pass rate of over 90 per cent, the Canadian citizenship test was essentially symbolic. It has also been identified as a major step towards the "cheapening" of Canadian citizenship by reducing any meaningful conversation between citizenship candidates and (costly) citizenship judges (Joshee and Derwing 2005). In short, the pen and paper multiple choice citizenship test symbolizes the onset of a neoliberal iteration of Canadian citizenship that continues under Canada's current Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Canadian citizenship legislation witnessed numerous alterations under the government of Stephen Harper's Conservative Party (2006–2015). They culminated in the adoption of the *Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act* in 2014, which aimed at making Canadian citizenship more difficult to obtain and easier to lose. Elsewhere we interpret Harper's citizenship interventions as a "re-nationalization" (Winter and Sauvageau 2015) and "re-communitarization" of citizenship (Carlaw and Winter 2023). The Conservatives emphasized Canada's monocultural British cultural and political heritage and nourished a climate of anxiety over foreign infiltration. At the same time, their policies reinforced the neoliberal undercurrent of what it means to be a Canadian. They also continued to undermine multiculturalism's foundation in social justice considerations. Citizenship was no longer

considered a "tool" facilitating societal integration but rather a "reward" for good behaviour and successful economic performance (Adams, Macklin, and Omidvar 2014).

Campaigning on the slogan "a Canadian is a Canadian is a Canadian", Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party won the 2015 federal election by opposing several controversial Conservative policies: the Liberals allowed women to swear the oath of citizenship with their lips/face covered and banned citizenship revocations for dual nationals (other than in the case of fraud or misrepresentation). They facilitated access to citizenship, and, in 2021, changed the nation's citizenship oath to include that "the laws of Canada, including the Constitution […] recognizes and affirms the Aboriginal and treaty rights of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples" (Johnson 2021). Nevertheless, the Trudeau Liberals also kept many of the tightened provisions in place. More than eight years after coming to power, the notorious citizenship study guide *Discover Canada*, implemented by the Conservatives, has still not been revised and continues to advise immigrants not to bring their alleged "barbaric practices" to Canada. The Liberals have also failed to reduce citizenship fees, which still stand at CAD$630 per adult applicant. Economic means, creativeness and self-sufficiency have become critical for successful naturalization, where citizenship is granted to those who demonstrate mastery of the skills and mindset of highly educated individuals (Winter 2021). On the one hand, there is a stark decline of the citizenship pass rate among vulnerable populations (Nakache, Stone, and Winter 2020). On the other, more and more immigrants decide not to take up Canadian citizenship (Institute for Canadian Citizenship 2023b) and to leave Canada altogether (Institute for Canadian Citizenship 2023a). Return or onward migration suggests fraying social ties and – closely related – a lack of government investment in critical social services such as housing, healthcare, and education. Immigrants and native-born Canadians want to lead productive, healthy and rewarding lives. Instead, and arguably to ease access to naturalization, the Liberals propose that citizenship candidates take their citizenship oath online by a mouse click rather than in the company of co-applicants, friends, family, and a citizenship judge (Osman 2023). Astute observers warn that this would further "cheapen" the meaning of Canadian citizenship and undermine its collective foundations (Keung 2023, cf. Andrew Griffith's contribution in this volume).

CONCLUSION

Over the past sixty years, Canadian citizenship has undergone a profound and much needed liberalization, shedding many – albeit not all – of its discriminatory monoethnic tendencies in both legislation and meaning. Since the 1990s, however, liberalization has become increasingly paired with neoliberalization, i.e. the belief in a self-regulating free market as a superior force that requires policies of deregulation, privatization, and citizenship as a "first prize" for successful, self-driven individuals. In neoliberalism, rational, economic considerations become empirically indistinguishable from the cultural, emotional and moral dimensions of national identity. While neoliberalism encourages a meritocratic ethic of "diversity" beyond ethnic and cultural group differences, it also undermines everyone's willingness to invest in shared citizenship defined in terms of mutual trust and care.

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