

Elke Winter:  
[elke.winter@uottawa.ca](mailto:elke.winter@uottawa.ca)

“Quo vadis Canada? (Un)Equal Citizenship in an Age of Transnationalism”

**Abstract:**

For many years, Canadian multicultural citizenship was portrayed as a role model for other countries. In the past five years, however, Canada has considerably redressed the boundaries of its citizenship regime, and this with respect to both legal status and identity. This paper examines a recent amendment to the Canadian Citizenship Act and interprets it against the backdrop of a large number of subsequent changes to Canadian naturalization and citizenship policy. Specifically, the new amendment retroactively restores or gives Canadian citizenship to “hundreds of thousands of unsuspecting foreigners, most of them Americans” (Wall Street Journal, 2009) while also restricting the inheritance of Canadian citizenship to the first generation born abroad.

How do we evaluate this political change? Aiming to redress past discriminations based on gender, marital status and dual citizenship while simultaneously curtailing modern citizenship’s dubious *ius sanguinis* provision, the new law might be interpreted as perpetuating Canada’s reputation as a world leader in interethnic relations and human rights. A contextual analysis of the new law, by contrast, raises doubts about the underlying motives. In fact, the boundaries that are being drawn lead to the re-ethnicization and securitization of Canada’s new citizenship regime. On the one hand, government discourse and policy conflate kinship and Whiteness, and are thereby inviting the construction of “possible citizens”, i.e. intrinsic Canadians whose authenticity and loyalty to the nation is unquestioned. On the other hand, non-White, non-Christian individuals who are leading increasingly transnational lives – for private and professional reasons – are constructed as “impossible citizens”, whose absences from the country, as well as allegedly fraudulent behaviour and utilitarian attitude are portrayed as eroding “the value of citizenship”. This raises the question where Canada’s citizenship policy is heading politically and ideologically. Furthermore, as a country with one of the world’s highest immigration, naturalization and dual citizenship rates, it remains to be seen whether Canada will become an outlier or a trailblazer in dealing with citizenship under the conditions of transnationalization.