Neoliberal Nationalism

The Brexit and Trump shocks of 2016 mark a deep caesura in the history of liberal societies. It is no longer sufficient, if it ever was, to look at Western states' immigration and citizenship policies through the single lens of advancing liberalism. Instead, two additional forces need to be reckoned with: a new nationalism, but also the neoliberal restructuring of state and society in which it is generated. Joppke demonstrates that many of the new policies have their roots in neoliberalism rather than the new nationalism. Moreover, some of them, such as "earned citizenship", are the product of neoliberalism and nationalism working in tandem, in terms of a neoliberal nationalism. The neoliberalism-nationalism nexus is complex, its elements sometimes opposing but sometimes complementing or even constituting one another. This topical book will appeal to students and scholars of populism, nationalism, and immigration and citizenship, across comparative politics, sociology and political theory.

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Neoliberal Nationalism

Immigration and the Rise of the Populist Right

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Contents

Preface *page* vii

1 The Neoliberalism–Nationalism Nexus 1

2 Courting the Top, Fending-off the Bottom: Immigration in the Populist Storm 68

3 More Difficult to Get, Easier to Lose, Less in Value: The Rise of Earned Citizenship 158

4 End of Liberalism? 250

Bibliography 284
Index 317

Preface

The successful Brexit referendum of June 2016, followed by the US presidential election victory of Donald Trump in November of the same year, mark a deep caesura in the history of liberal societies. Precisely the two champions of globalization and of building open and inclusive societies, Britain and the United States, succumbed to a new nationalism, a most unlikely outcome by any means. The new nationalism is not limited to the Anglo-Saxon arc but pushed across Europe and the West by increasingly successful populist radical right parties. What does it portend for the policies that define and regulate membership in a society, that is, immigration and citizenship policy, the domain the new nationalists care most about?

One might think that membership policy, whose stock-in-trade is to establish who "we" are, in distinction from "them" or "others," is chronically nationalist, even *before* the arrival of the new nationalism. While this is true, to a degree, one could still observe that, before this caesura, immigration policies were becoming increasingly universalistic and nondiscriminatory, decoupled from considerations of national origin, ethnicity, and race; that citizenship was becoming more liberal and inclusive; and that the recognition, even celebration, of diversity was now a signature feature of liberal and ever more liberalizing societies, in defiance of repeated declarations that "multiculturalism is dead" (for these three trends, see Joppke 2005, 2010a, and 2017c, respectively).

Certainly, the liberalizing trends were never linear and uncontested. Already before the new nationalists were on the map, one could observe a rivalry between "de-ethnicizing" and "re-ethnicizing" processes in the liberal state, for instance, in certain citizenship reforms in Europe that were torn between the imperatives of accommodating immigrants at home *or* maintaining ties with co-ethnics abroad (see Joppke 2003). But the expectation was that, somehow, the liberal trends would prevail over the illiberal ones. Not only do Brexit and Trump call in question any certainty or automatism that liberalism will always win. My previous

work also does not pay enough attention to the complexity of what "liberalism" is. In addition to a rights-based liberalism, protecting the individual from the vagaries of state power, there is also a harsher, utilitarian variant of "neoliberalism," which incidentally first took hold in the later breakthrough sites of the new nationalism: the UK (under Thatcher, in 1979) and the United States (under Reagan, in 1980). The spatial coincidence between neoliberalism and the new nationalism suggests that these two phenomena are closely connected, though not always in obvious ways, as we shall see.

A sustained analysis of how the new nationalism and neoliberalism are reshaping liberal states' membership policies, does not yet exist. This is what I try to do in this book. But before we start, a few remarks about central concepts and assumptions are in order.

When I loosely entertained the idea of a new book that would become *this* book, in the *annus miserabilis*, 2016, my immediate lead concept, under the impression of its tumultuous entry into public discourse, was "populism." "Populism and …": citizenship, democracy, civil society, immigration, liberalism, almost anything really, were the typical conference titles on the academic circuit in 2017, 2018, 2019, and counting. We – that is, macro-sociologists, political theorists, comparativists – are all into populism now, and the book that you hold in your hands, in a way, is "my" populism book. But it is so with a difference. Most works about populism that have been put out at frantic pace since 2016 have been about its causes and expressions, less about the impacts of populism in policy fields that are central to its concerns – immigration, in particular. For mapping these impacts, it became quickly apparent that populism, alone, just wasn't the right, because under-specified, concept. If I retained it, if only in adjectival form and in the subtitle, it is for the sake of catchiness. But strictly speaking, populism is a political style, lacking content. Most analyses of populism thus circle around the phenomenon itself, almost self-referentially. And this is not by accident, because the core of populism, in all of its manifestations, is to be a response to as well as an expression of a malfunctioning of democracy, alas, not fixing but reinforcing the problem (see Pappas 2019). For populists, it is always the homogenous "people" who are to "rule," again, after having been mischievously subdued by cunning elites, and populists seek to recover and exercise the people's lead position in by definition illiberal ways that are a threat to democracy itself. There is no obvious way from here, the alleged fixing of the democracy deficit, to specific policy, because populism itself has no program or content. This content is variable: left or right, socialist or nationalist. In the double shock of 2016, and in most of the Western world today, the content of populism is nationalism.

So I retooled, from populism to nationalism. But mostly a specific kind of nationalism is driving populism today, a reactive, even regressive nationalism that arises in a context of accomplished nation-building. This new nationalism is a world away from the modernizing and emancipatory nineteenth-century nationalism that Ernest Gellner (1983) and other "modernists" in the nations and nationalism literature had written about. The new nationalism wishes to restore the closure, the protection, the security that have been inevitably lost in the most massive opening that human societies have ever experienced, in the process commonly referred to as "globalization." Indeed, the story of this nationalism cannot be told without factoring in globalization, and in particular the "neoliberalism" that is undergirding and framing it. However, while the first and most obvious relation of the new nationalism to neoliberalism is to be reactive and oppositional to the latter, this is not the only possible relationship. At second sight, which is even a historical first, there is also the possibility of nationalism to complement and support neoliberalism, and even to be constituted by neoliberalism itself. An example of the "constitutive," perhaps most interesting variant is "earned citizenship," discussed in Chapter 3. It is the expression of a genuine "neoliberal nationalism" that is a new entry in the nations and nationalism lexicon – and interesting enough for serving as the title of the book.

As the story unfolded, it became clear that many of the restrictive trends in immigration and citizenship policy, commonly attributed to the new nationalism, are in fact neoliberally motivated, or at least they may be neoliberally phrased. Indeed, new nationalists are at their most effective when themselves adopting neoliberal language. With respect to immigration policy, for instance, it first seemed that the courting of high-skilled immigrants, which has become ubiquitous throughout rich societies, is "neoliberal," while the aversion to (presumably low-skilled) family migrants and asylum seekers is "nationalist," or worse. In reality, the policy's aversive part also can be, and has been, motivated and justified from a neoliberal angle, as in the interest of reducing nonproductive and economically costly migration. Because openly racist language is risky and illegitimate today, and foreseeably will remain so, it is convenient to use a neoliberal idiom that has the same effect. In citizenship policy, the recent trend toward "earned citizenship," as will be shown in some detail, may even be seen as the expression of a neoliberal nationalism, in which any sense of tension and opposition between the two elements has disappeared.

This book also revisits and updates my first engagement in the field of immigration and citizenship, published as *Immigration and the Nation-State* in the last year of the old millennium. Certain assumptions that

were constitutive then, no longer hold today. In the Western state world, there are no longer the distinct migration regimes and sharply distinguishable migration experiences that I had earlier referred to as "settler," "postcolonial," and "guest worker." Instead, the same dualism of "courting the top" and "fending- off the bottom" is observable everywhere today. This means that America, or rather Canada, are no longer models for Europe (even though Canada retains a strong attraction). The classic immigration countries are even showing a preference for temporary and at best "two-step" migration, including with respect to the high-skilled. They thus adopt the European logic of an only gradual consolidation of residence status over time, in which migrants have to earn and prove their worthiness rather than being considered as citizens-in-waiting from day one. Catherine Dauvergne (2016) aptly called the new New-World reality the "end of settlement." But on the European side, things have also changed, though in an opposite direction. The old assumption that the great postwar migrations were a historically singular episode, not to be repeated, has receded in favor of the notion that migration is a recurrent process, and even desirable in certain respects.

Partially as a result of these front-gate changes, the reality of integration and citizenship also is profoundly different from what it was twenty years ago. "Multicultural citizenship" was my term in 1999 for a generous and rights-minded integration approach prevalent at the time, even in a Europe that still subscribed to the quixotic goal of zero-immigration. Now that migration has been accepted as a recurrent, unstoppable process, a more restrictive approach to integration has made its appearance, commonly referred to as "civic integration," which mixes migration control with immigrant integration functions. And "earned citizenship" has become the chief idiom, from the UK to Australia, to mark a more demanding, conditionality-spiked access to post-birth citizenship, which is handed out no longer as a "right" but as a "privilege." However, while Western states praise their citizenship as the "first prize," it has become a skeletal version of its former self, which in its prime was described and celebrated by T. H. Marshall as "social citizenship." While neoliberalism plays a big part in citizenship's loss of value, this may be also the price to pay for the constitutive openness of Western societies that all the restrictions of the past two decades could not and would not undo.

Chapter 1, *The Neoliberalism–Nationalism Nexus*, maps the context and contours of the new nationalism that dramatically burst onto the scene in 2016. It includes a detailed account of neoliberalism, which needs to be distinguished and set apart from liberalism. While some, like Michael Mann (2013:ch.6), subscribe to a narrow view of neoliberalism as economic policy that is specific to the "Anglos" and may have long passed its

peak, I take it to be a pan-Western governing and society-making rationale of deeply transformative reach. Neoliberalism thus understood provides the context of the new nationalism, which arises both in opposition to it but, in a statist variant, may also be complementary to neoliberalism or even constituted by it. The constitutive nexus with its "neoliberal nationalism" proper points to a novel phenomenon on the nations and nationalism map that has so far not received the attention that it deserves.

Chapter 2, *Courting the Top, Fending-off the Bottom: Immigration in the Populist Storm*, lays out the dual thrust of immigration policy in the neoliberal age, which is to "court" high-skilled immigrants and to "fend off" all sorts of presumably (but not legally) low-skilled migrants, including family migrants. But the heart of the chapter examines the role of immigration in the populist storm. While immigration has been central to both Brexit and Trump, it has been central in different ways. Brexit, though driven by hostility to large-scale intra-EU migration, does not challenge the structure of (neo)liberal immigration policy – it will even make British policy more universalistic because cleansed of favoritism for other Europeans. By contrast, Trump`s immigration policy breaks with the "antipopulist norm" that Gary Freeman, in a classic paper (Freeman 1995), held constitutive of a liberal immigration policy. Germany during and after the 2015 Syrian Refugee Crisis is an interesting negative case of stubbornly holding liberal course, though inadvertently fueling populism at home and abroad.

Chapter 3, *More Difficult to Get, Easier to Lose, Less in Value: The Rise of Earned Citizenship*, gathers a variety of recently restrictive trends in the acquisition and loss of citizenship under the umbrella of "earned citizenship," which is not a "right," as in the liberal past, but "privilege." "More difficult to get" and "easier to lose" are complementary sides of the same neoliberal-cum-nationalist logic of making citizenship more exclusive and conditional on the immigrant`s individual behavior and desert. Being neoliberal and nationalist in tandem, earned citizenship is the clearest expression of a neoliberal nationalism. Earned citizenship's third element, to be "less in value," seems to contradict the fact that a rich society`s "citizenship premium" has never been bigger than in today`s globalizing world (Milanovic 2016:ch.3). However, the same citizenship that renationalizing states have claimed to strengthen by making it more selective has become internally devalued through its infiltration by immigration law and a neoliberal welfare-to-workfare devolution.

Chapter 4, *End of Liberalism?*, situates changing immigration and citizenship policies within a larger crisis of liberalism. I defend Francis

Fukuyama`s (1989) much-ridiculed claim that the "liberal idea" (yet not practice) is without competitor today. However, internal deficiencies of "liberal meritocratic capitalism" (Milanovic 2019), most importantly the elite-generating and -insulating principle of meritocracy itself, will continue to feed a populist challenge that, paradoxically, is fought more on the cultural than the economic terrain – and that liberals are well-advised not to enter too quickly. I close with the question what a "liberal" immigration and citizenship policy, unimpeded by the "nexus," might look like, and the answer is: not much different from the policies that are in place today.

The immigration and citizenship restrictions under the neoliberalism–nationalism nexus do not cut deep enough to undo the openness that Western societies are constitutively committed to. If persistent openness goes along with a devaluation of citizenship, this may be the inevitable price to pay. As David Goodhart (2004) pointed out some time ago, there is an inherent "conflict between solidarity and diversity." Having opted for "diversity," Western societies' internal solidarities cannot but suffer and are even set to diminish further.