

Reviews

Marc Helbling, **Practising Citizenship and Heterogeneous Nationhood**

Amsterdam: IMISCOE/Amsterdam University Press, 2008, 211pp., €32.50 pb. (ISBN 978-90-8964-034-5)

In his book on naturalisation politics in Swiss municipalities, Helbling meticulously examines citizenship in various analytical settings through a mixed methods approach. Switzerland has a decentralised naturalisation policy; each municipality has the power to make decisions regarding processes of, and criteria for, naturalisation. It is impossible, therefore, to understand and explain differences at local level through a national citizenship model. While the Swiss case with regard to nationalisation is a curious one, the author suggests that conceptualising citizenship as a local political negotiation process still allows for comparisons with other European countries. Hence the Swiss case might not be so peculiar after all, as local interpretations and various citizenship paradigms can be found elsewhere, even where a ‘national’ citizenship model is said to exist.

The book refutes an essentialist perception of naturalisation and citizenship, hence supporting a constructivist understanding of what it means to be a nation or an ethnic group. Helbling argues that it is problematic to talk about ‘the’ Swiss citizenship policy or nationality since these are not homogenous concepts on which there is agreement across the Swiss political structure. By exhibiting the diversity of understandings of citizenship and of naturalisation outcomes both within and among municipalities, Helbling is able to demonstrate how local politicians’ views are shaped by social and cultural factors formed during the naturalisation decision-making process while these politicians simultaneously shape debate through their contacts with other local political actors. The views of these actors along with local power structures—social networks of actors as well as the relative intensity of their contact and the clout of each actor—form a more

complete picture of localised naturalisation politics. The author specifically focuses on rejection rates (particularly for Muslim applicants from former Yugoslavia and Turkey) and addresses questions of why some municipalities are more restrictive in their understandings of naturalisation than others. This variation, in turn, points to specific national self-understandings.

The study has three main components: a nation-wide, quantitative analysis; a quantitative case study of fourteen municipalities; and a qualitative analysis of four municipalities carried out through interviews with the local actors (excluding the applicants) involved in the process. The large-N quantitative analysis finds that socio-economic or socio-cultural factors do not have a bearing on local naturalisation policies pursued. In other words, unemployment rates or the proportion of Muslim residents in a given locality are not decisive. The language region of the municipality, its population and level of urbanisation are also found to be unimportant in explaining the variance among municipality rejection rates. Helbling concludes that cultural and political factors, such as the relative restrictiveness of conceptualisations of citizenship and the strength of the SVP (a right-wing party) in the municipality in question, matter more.

The quantitative case studies provide an indicator for individual understandings of citizenship through which local citizenship models in these fourteen municipalities are compared and contrasted. This allows for an interpretation of how the local actors involved in the naturalisation process perceive applicants and the extent to which they ‘merit’ Swiss nationality. Finally, Helbling takes a closer look at four municipalities which are similar in demographic attributes but different in terms of rejection rates and citizenship understandings. He finds that municipalities which pursue closed-ballot popular votes are more restrictive. He also finds that, when a municipality pursues a restrictive naturalisation policy, candidates are subjected to more-thorough

scrutiny; detailed criteria are applied such as their knowledge of local languages and political structures, their willingness to renounce their homeland citizenship despite the Swiss recognition of dual citizenship, and their lack of a record of unemployment and dependence on welfare benefits. While this appears to contradict his initial rejection of economic factors as explanatory variables, Helbling concludes that authorities' emphasis on applicants' records in this regard cannot be explained by local politicians' unwillingness to support these residents financially. Rather, it is due to the symbolic importance assigned to being a 'good' Swiss citizen who is not dependent on the state. This level of analytical depth was made possible by the study's qualitative component, focusing on individual actors whose recommendations affect the outcome of naturalisation processes.

Though the qualitative component of the study appears to be modelled closely on the quantitative sections of the work, overall the methodological rigour undertaken and the theoretical and analytical sophistication achieved are impressive. The quantitative analyses pursued are very thorough, with multiple models controlling for variables presented as important in the citizenship and integration literature. Although there is room for debate on the way in which indicators have been calculated, ultimately the study represents a valuable effort to quantify contextual and vague processes, allowing, then, for comparisons across otherwise incomparable locales. The study also goes beyond the more usual approach of focusing either on the applicant (the immigrant) or on national policy. In so doing, it presents a missing link: the people who receive and process applications, conduct interviews, and present cases to the final decision-makers. The book is a 'must read' for any student of citizenship.

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Leo R. Chavez, **The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens and the Nation**

Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008, 256 pp., \$55.00 hb. (ISBN 978-0-8047-5933-5), \$21.95 pb. (ISBN 978-0-8047-5934-2)

The Latino Threat represents cultural studies at its best. Interdisciplinary will sip an intoxicating cocktail that is equal parts Foucauldian

discourse analysis and the demographer's age-sex pyramid. Anthropologist Leo Chavez builds on his earlier published content analyses of coverage of Latino immigrants in major US news magazines to describe and debunk what he calls the 'Latino Threat Narrative'. In this narrative, Latinos are portrayed as a reproductive threat to native Whites, an irredentist minority bent on reconquering the South-West, and a balkanising ethnic group that refuses to integrate into American society. Extensive quotations and images from publications such as *Time* and *US News and World Report* put to rest questions of whether the 'Latino Threat Narrative' is confined to the lunatic fringe. The central contribution of the book is the description of just how misleading and fear-mongering is the US mainstream media's coverage of Latinos.

Chavez then challenges the threat narrative with evidence drawn from the secondary literature and his own surveys in Orange County, California (the state's third most populous county, with more than three million residents, and ground zero for political measures such as 1994's Proposition 187 that are unfriendly to Latino immigrants). The survey data from Orange County show the same general trends of Latino assimilation found in national-level data, including greater intergenerational educational attainment, English dominance, outmarriage, home ownership and income. Chavez argues that unauthorised legal status is the biggest challenge to socio-economic mobility faced by many Latino immigrants, and that stakeholders seriously interested in encouraging Latino integration should support a large-scale legalisation programme.

Unlike many accounts of citizenship (in the broadest anthropological sense of membership) that focus only on social actors making claims to inclusion, Chavez analyses the interactions between claims of inclusion and counter-claims of exclusion that are made by immigration restrictionists. The book is structured around extended vignettes of the Minutemen activists publicising unauthorised entries along the Mexican border, the 2006 immigration reform marches, the ethnic politics of fertility and disputes about the legitimacy of organ transplants for non-citizens.

Chavez concludes that Latinos have internalised the demands of neoliberalism, that is, to work hard and make claims to membership based on contributions to the economy and low rates of usage of public services. The book does not offer strong evidence of how common this framing is, however, relative to other frames for