Ruud Koopmans, Paul Statham, Marco Giugni, and Florence Passy.  
Contested Citizenship: Immigration and Cultural Diversity in Europe. 
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By the 1990s immigration had become the single most contentious political issue in Europe, generating a range of social and political movements, particularly in Germany and France. Koopmans and his colleagues shed some much-needed light on this unprecedented development with an analysis of the claims made by the various actors involved in these debates, particularly by immigrants themselves, but also by anti-immigrants parties and antiracist movements, in Europe’s most important host countries (France, Germany, Holland, Great Britain, and Switzerland).

One of the central contributions of the book is the presentation of multidimensional empirical indicators of national citizenship regimes. These are usually simply described in relation to how long and how easy it is for immigrants to obtain citizenship. Koopmans and his colleagues add a number of important dimensions, including second-generation citizenship acquisition, protection from discrimination, and the granting of cultural rights, among others. This allows them to enrich the usual, fairly rigid dichotomous approaches to citizenship — pluralist versus monist, ethnic versus civic, etc. — by providing a nuanced, and potentially shifting scale. This helps underscore one of their arguments: that citizenship regimes change, often rapidly, and largely under pressure from various forms of contention.

A second noteworthy contribution of the book is its description and analysis of the immigration-related collective contention in the countries they investigate. As expected, the more “ethnic” citizenship regimes (Germany and Switzerland) tend to discourage the collective claims-making of ethno-immigrant groups, while more civic-pluralist Britain registers a much higher rate of open contention. And the difference is not only quantitative: the types of claims made by newcomers are strongly influenced by the institutional, discursive, and political context within which they are expressed.

The authors refer to their methodological approach as “political claims analysis”, based on newspaper coverage of interventions by both governmental and civil society actors. It yields interesting results, but also has clear limitations. On the plus side, it eschews a frequent weakness of social movement research: the tendency to consider that a movement only exists when some recognizable protest event has occurred. Studying claims-making allows the authors to account for the myriad other forms of contentious politics that occur upstream and downstream of protests: public statements, judicial proceedings etc. But the claims the authors count and analyze are only those major newspapers choose to cover. Much of policy-making in the field of immigration, citizenship and cultural pluralism occurs well away from media outlets: in consultations at all levels of government, in correspondence, in studies and in other forms of contribution to the political process. Some of the observed patterns may therefore say more about how the press covers these issues than about the questions themselves. The authors also rely almost exclusively on their own data, which they could have easily supplemented with other sources of information, to avoid some of the repetitions.

Based on this rich data, the book makes a number of strong claims. It confirms the ongoing significance of national states in shaping ethnic and immigrant politics, and conversely challenges the postnational argument that views states as increasingly unimportant in a globalizing world. One
of their striking findings is the importance of the administrative categories and modes of recognition adopted by particular states. Whereas France for instance essentially recognizes immigrants, Britain recognizes racial groups and Holland nationality communities. These modes of recognition lead to particular types of mobilization and claims-making. But nothing is simple in the world of citizenship and cultural pluralism. Some of the reported results seem to indicate that immigrant claims-making is also somewhat autonomous from national institutional frameworks (p. 152). Part of the reason for this is the fact that many immigrant claims are actually religious claims, coming especially from Muslim groups and organizations. These seem to transcend the otherwise powerfully influential national frameworks.

Perhaps the most controversial conclusion of the book, based almost solely the analysis of the Dutch case, is that excessive recognition of collective cultural rights pushes immigrant groups inward and out of public politics (p. 80, 245). Excessive recognition may also discourage mainstream society from taking an interest in immigrant issues. This assertion is all the more surprising given the authors’ suggestion, in one of the best chapters in the book, that group-claims by cultural minorities are actually quite rare in most countries (including Holland), and do not seem to cause a direct threat to the social cohesion of these states. They also rightly compare the current difficulties with Islam to past situations, including the experience of Jewish and Irish communities in many immigrant-receiving countries, in the not so distant past (p. 178). It is not clear, in other words, that, historically or today, immigrant-receiving societies are suffering from an excess of minority recognition. This is nevertheless a crucial debate, and this book makes an excellent, well-informed contribution to it. It will probably set the tone of future research on the topic for some time to come.

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