

Neoliberal Citizenship: Sacred Markets, Sacrificial Lives by Luca Mavelli, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2022, 190 pp., £75 (hardback), index, ISBN 978-0-19-285758-3

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2023.2291413>

Europe is no longer the religiously and culturally homogenized territory that many of the region's rulers and citizens believed it once was. Things have changed in recent years. Impacted by the end of the Cold War, globalisation, increasing immigration and refugees, Europe has seen via the ballot box the widespread rise of right-wing populism. Today, European countries face the future with both fear and trepidation; the optimism of yesterday has gone. This situation was reflected in the 2015 "refugee crisis", with the sustained rise in racism and bigotry, manifested in the UK's 2016 "Brexit" vote to leave the European Union.

Luca Mavelli explores what he identifies as the "sacred" foundations of Europe's "neoliberal citizenship". Neoliberal citizenship encompasses the issues of economization – that is, the act or practice of using resources to the best effect, and of marketization. Marketization is motivated by the conviction that the public sector is prone to inefficiency, workers are largely shirkers, and its managers are more concerned with empire-building than efficiency. Marketization, it is believed, provides a salutary shock, keeping these tendencies in check and, if successful, reversing them. Drawing on these developments, Mavelli provides a detailed and nuanced examination of how Europe has been affected in multiple ways, including politically, with the electoral successes of right-wing populism in most countries of the region. Mavelli argues that neoliberal citizenship obfuscates boundaries between economy, morals, and politics. The result is to produce societies where social, economic, political and cultural hierarchies are to the fore, creating a few winners – no prizes for guessing who this tiny elite of ultra-rich are – as well as myriad losers: undocumented migrants, dispossessed citizens, and elderly in care homes during the Covid-19 pandemic, where such groups died in huge numbers across Europe.

The book is divided into nine chapters. The introductory chapter introduces and examines the concept of neoliberal citizenship, and draws on this to identify and discuss the book's approach and structure. Chapter two explains how the current situation came about, occasioned by the "creative destruction of citizenship". Mavelli identifies four main components: banks, austerity, refugees, and Brexit, coalescing to create a new hierarchy of worth in Europe which required extensive scapegoating and much use of the blame game in relation to undocumented migrants, dispossessed citizens, and elderly in care homes. Chapter three examines how citizenship became a commodity for sale; some could afford and acquire it, others could not and did not.

Chapters four and five examine perhaps the most discussed topic in modern European political and social history: refugees, their worth, provenance, and what to do about them. The 2015 international migration and refugee crisis made it crystal clear that Europe was not a hermetically sealed rich person's club, able to keep the world's woes away through a policy of benign neglect. A combination of the continuing refugee/migration crisis coupled with unprecedented fears across the region linked to growing extremism and terrorism brought it home to many European politicians and voters that the region could no longer shield itself from the political travails of the Global South. This was especially the case in relation to geographically contiguous regions, including the Middle East, western Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, all of which contain extensive areas undergoing pronounced state weakness, economic travails, societal fragmentation, and terrorist outrages. Europe responded, on the one hand, with a much-critiqued deal with Turkey to try to curtail the flow of refugees and migrants across the Aegean Sea. In addition, the European Union dangled the carrot of increased development aid to sub-Saharan countries to encourage African

states to take back migrants not entitled to asylum in Europe. Ultimately, however, such deals, even when successful in reducing numbers of migrants, were no more than temporary dressings for a serious wound: numerous migrants and refugees' determined efforts to reach the promised land of Europe from the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa. This would not significantly diminish until the latter regions are safer (in a security sense) and more generally prosperous, so that most people – rather than an elite few – feel they are benefiting from economic growth, societal peace and existential security.

Chapters six and seven focus on the rise of the “sacred market” and its corollary “sacrificial lives”. For the former to emerge and dominate, the latter must take the hit. For right-wing populists to achieve power they must both deify the “market, identifying and vilifying those they claim are chiefly responsible for denying the market the “magic” of improving things. The scapegoats are not bankers, governing elites and wealthy “socialites”; instead, it is the weak and vulnerable whose are said to be causes of the failure of the “market” to do its work.

In conclusion, Mavelli's book is a carefully argued, rigorously researched book which presents an original thesis about how we (in Europe) got to where we are now: under the aegis of neoliberal citizenship, developed and structured by governance practices across Europe. Mavelli emphasizes how the European Union, as well as European states and non-governmental organisations, all agree that “there is no alternative” to the neoliberal fascination in the “market's” secular holiness, where biopolitical practices and policies determine the degree of citizens' sacrificial worth. Overall, Mavelli's book amounts to a convincing explanation for and account of the re/de-construction of citizenship in today's Europe. It deserves to be read widely, and its conclusions employed to help understand why Europe is undergoing democratic backsliding and the ballot box rewarding the right-wing populists.

Jeffrey Haynes
London Metropolitan University
Tsjhayn1@londonmet.ac.uk