Neoliberal Migration Policy

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Tokyo, 12 June 2025

Overview

- Economics and culture no longer separate criteria for selecting and integrating migrants (= neoliberal migration policy)
- Focus here: migrant selection
- 1. “Liberal Paradox”?
- 2. Blurring of the economics v. culture divide
- 3. Neoliberal nationalism
- 4. Case A: High-skilled migration
- 5. Case B: Family migration
- 6. Case C: Asylum migration
- 7. Future of migration policy; lessons for Japan?

1. “Liberal Paradox”?

- A.Zolberg (1999, 2006): “identity axis” v. “material conditions” (economics) as separate axes of migrant selection
  - *Each* axis restrictive *or* inclusive (e.g.: US legal migration *always* via identity axis, pre- and post-1965; Cold War refugees “ranked high” on identity axis)
  - → “strange bedfellow” coalitions (e.g., 1990s` US Wall Street – ethnic alliance)

- J.Hollifield (1992, 2004): “liberal paradox”
  - Identity/culture v economics (= restrictive v. inclusive; each axis monochrome, *not* bipolar)
  - 2 versions: market v rights (*both* “liberal”!); economic v political logics (only the *first* is “liberal”!)
  - → not two, but three forces at play (two liberal, one democratic/nationalist)
  - Better: “liberal *state* paradox” or “liberal-*democratic* paradox”; but then: NO PARADOX

2. Blurring of the Economics v Culture Divide

- “utility” and “identity” no longer “logically distinct concerns” in migration policy (Elrick and Winter 2017)
- Example: German labor migration policy as “national middle-class” building (ibid.)
  - OECD spouses exempted from “civic integration” tests (their national origins endow them with middle-class credentials)
  - ↔ fusion of class (utility) and nationalist (identity) considerations
- “(I)n the current nationalist neoliberal context, the policy distinction between cultural and economic criteria is increasingly blurred” (Bonjour and Chauvin 2018)
  - “good citizen” as “worker citizen” (ibid.)

3. Neoliberal Nationalism (NN)

- Nationalism: necessary for migration qua “membership” policy (to sustain “communities of character”, M.Walzer 1983)
- NN: neither “civic” nor “ethnic”
- What is “neoliberal”?
  - Economize everything, people included (“responsibilize”; human capital)
  - From “social” to “individual justice” (F.Hayek 1960)
  - But: “neoliberal” before the word: the ethics of immigration (e.g., US “deeming”)
  - And: NN qua ideology: “strange compositum” (P.Manow 2021)
    - (Geneva School) neoliberals are “globalists” (Q.Slobodian 2018)
    - Hayek (1982): nationalism as “threat to a free civilization”

3. Neoliberal Nationalism (NN)--continued

- Real-world NN:
  - Community of the thrifty (excluding “lazy” citizens and including “productive” immigrants)
  - Policy examples:
    - Social policy (from welfare to workfare)
    - Citizenship policy (from right to privilege: “earned citizenship”, Joppke 2021)
    - **Immigration policy** (**v.** Brubaker 1992; **v.** Joppke 2005: both discarded nationalism); to be elaborated by Cases A-C.

4. Case A: High-Skilled Migration (HSM)

- Conditioned by globalization ("race for talent", A.Shachar 2006) *and* by NN
- EU Lisbon Strategy (2000): for "knowledge-based economy" *and* for "social cohesion"
- HSM as "middle-class nation-building" (E.Winter 2024)
- The case of Canada:
  - 1950s/60s: bypassing racial exclusion by "exceptional merit" (J.Elrick 2021)
  - Post-70s: removing "personal suitability" from points system; from "skilled industrial" to "highly skilled knowledge workers" (A.Ellermann 2019)

5. Case B: Family Migration (FM)

- FM: individual rights v. state interest
- Western Europe: restricting FM after guestworker stop (1973ff)
- Neoliberal FM: family from *support* factor to *cost* factor
- Restrictive trends:
  - Raising income and housing thresholds
  - “levelling-down” citizen to immigrant rights (GER, FRA)
  - High-skilled immigrants have more family rights than citizens (UK, NOR)
- Case of Canada:
  - FM moving from “social” to “human capital citizenship” (Ellermann 2019)
  - From extended to nuclear family (2012: even restricting the latter)

6. Asylum Migration (AM)

- Economizing AM is double-edged: *restrictive* for recognized refugees; *inclusive* for rejected asylum-seekers
- Neoliberal AM:
  - From right to charity (humanitarian) *and* economistic ("most refugees are young, well educated, and highly motivated", Daimler-Benz CEO in 2015)
  - 2016 Integration Law (Germany)
    - Written by McKinsey Consultancy
    - Demoting recognized refugees to "ordinary" legal migrants (no automatic permanency; civic integration)
    - Yet: "good prospect to remain" gives immediate access to integration support; "track change" for rejected asylum seekers (*Geduldete*)
- Neoliberal AM as double-edged:
  - *Economization* blurs the labor-asylum distinction (false incentives)
  - *Humanitarianism* undercuts rights (e.g., 1998 "illness clause" in France; preference for "truly vulnerable" in Britain, post-2015, runs parallel to externalizing asylum to Rwanda)
  - The connection: "neoliberal political economy of belonging" (L.Mavelli 2018)

Summing Up 1-6

- Neoliberal immigration policy as “middle-class nation-building” (MCNB) (E.Winter 2024)?
- → **YES**:
  - economic (class) consideration held entry across selection criteria
  - “middle-class” vision is classless, thus reducing the class v. nation tension
  - ergo: neoliberal nationalism (centered on the “worker citizen”); “elites have broken the very first rule of social solidarity: members come first” (Y.Tamir 2018)
- → **NO**:
  - Explicit nation-building not in migrant selection but integration (“civic integration”, for Global South low-skilled migrants)
  - Middle-class as loser of globalization → MCNB would be cynical (à la *grand remplacement*)
  - Model Canada: toward temporary (“two-step”) migration, even for the high-skilled (“loss of settlement”, C.Dauvergne 2016)
- **Migration policies are patchwork, no grand design!**

7. Future of Migration Policy; Lessons for Japan?

- The European Challenge: **separating asylum and labor migration policies** (no issue in Japan, because of geographic insulation)
- The Japanese Challenge: **institutionalizing labor migration policies** (that are long in place in Europe)
- The European **Progressive`s Error**: asylum and labor migration as "communicating vessels" (= opening the tap for labour to reduce the demand for asylum)
- → **liberal labor migration always to be complemented by restrictive asylum policies**
- ↔ **inevitable goal conflict: control v integration**

7. Future of Migration Policy (continued)

- **Europe`s defunct asylum system: the case of Germany**
  - Organized hypocrisy (1): hard outside, soft inside (visa restrictions → all asylum-seekers are "irregular"—and **almost all stay**!)
  - "900.000 rejected asylum seekers live in Germany" (Thym 2025)
    - Only 16% with "protection" status are Geneva refugees; the rest: "subsidiary protection" or "prohibited deportation"
    - Without protection status but "tolerated" (*geduldet*): ca. 300.000 (fully entitled to social aid!)
    - Inflated legal protection: "Bed, Bread, Soap" high court jurisdiction (in part, incl. ECJ and ECtHR)
    - 7 years post-arrival: 60% work, but 40% of them in need of social aid; **50% of social aid recipients are foreigners**
  - Organized hypocrisy (2): most asylum seekers are **young males**; "survival of the fittest" (Thym 2025)
- **→ Inevitable future: Externalizing asylum to third-countries**
  - Model Rwanda (UK): no right to move on to UK
  - Model Albania (Italy): protection status entitles to enter Italy
  - EU Migration Pact (2026): "border procedure" (with no-entry fiction) as intermediary step