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The impact of naturalization on civic integration: An empirical study on TCNs in Italy

Synthesis

The main objective of this dissertation has been that of exploring the relationship between *naturalization* and *civic integration* from an empirical standpoint. There already exists a number of empirical studies concerning such relationship, most of which focus on the impact of naturalization on the specifically *economic* dimension of integration. These studies feature pretty homogenous results, showing that naturalization generally *does* have a positive effect on economic integration. The studies that investigate the *non-economic* dimensions of integration (social, cultural, civic) instead are fewer and have generally produced much more heterogeneous results. This is especially true for what concerns studies on the case of Italy, where the lack of any systematic contribution on this area denotes the scarce attention that is generally paid to the role of naturalization policies in the process of integration of immigrants.

In this research the question of the impact of naturalization on civic integration is developed in particular with regards to *first-generation, third-country nationals* (TCNs) residing *in Italy*. Civic integration is given a working definition characterized by three dimensions (“vertical”, “horizontal” and “subjective”), each of which corresponds to a set of variables which ultimately make up an index of civic integration. The research is based on interviews with fifty individuals carried out between 2012 and 2014. Interviews featured both a structured questionnaire and an open-ended talk in which individuals were free to elaborate on the topics suggested by the interviewer. The respondents, all of whom belong to one of the five main non-EU foreign communities in Italy, have been divided into two main groups, whose main difference consisted the fact of holding (or not) Italian citizenship. The two groups were characterized by internal heterogeneity (in terms of levels of education, religion, background, origin, place of residence), but they were specular to the other group. The methodology of analysis of the data was both quantitative and qualitative. The objective of mixing such two methods was to enable me, on the one hand, to define the relationship between the “citizenship variable” and the other main ones, and on the other, to gather a deeper understanding the mechanism at work behind the process of integration in relation to citizenship acquisition. Due to the small interview sample size, and to the use of a single observation site (the Lazio region), the present study does not intend to make universal claims. Rather, the research

should be read as a single puzzle piece that can be used to enhance knowledge building on a much neglected topic.

Overall, this research finds that notwithstanding the pervasive effects on the economic, social and political life that globalization, deterritorialization and increased cross-country mobility have had on nation-states and on individuals living within their borders, citizenship is still a powerful drive in shaping first-generation immigrants' chances for civic integration into the host country. Individuals who have acquired citizenship have been here observed as having better records in terms of *two out of three* of the main indicators that have been used to operationalize the concept of civic integration. In this light, I argue that the formal recognition of membership that comes with citizenship acquisition eases those material and immaterial barriers that make it difficult for the individual to experience a sense of belonging to the society. The empirical findings give rise to a number of considerations which oppose me to post-nationalists (of various kind) who argue that citizenship has lost its centrality in shaping individuals' attachments, identifications and life paths.

My argument about the persistent centrality of citizenship is *not* meant as a normative stance. I do not mean this dissertation as a conservative defense of the old national categorizations on who is a member and who is not. Neither was this research aimed at defending the current status quo in terms of citizenship policies and legislation in Italy or elsewhere in Europe. Rather, its main objective was that of understanding what is the impact of the current status quo in terms of citizenship policies on immigrants' ability to integrate in their host society. The focus was therefore not so much that of indicating the moral, ethical and practical concerns which should be taken into consideration while designing new public policies for citizenship acquisition, but rather, that of detecting how the relationship between citizenship and integration works within the current state of affairs.

The dissertation has been structured into six main chapters, plus an introduction and a conclusion. The six chapters correspond to three different levels of analysis: a theoretical level, an empirical level and an analytical one. The aim of the two chapters in the *theoretical* part was to provide a definition and a contextualization of the two main concepts that make up the research question and around which the dissertation is build, that is, namely, "civic integration" (Chapter 1) and "citizenship" (Chapter 2). The *empirical* level also consisted in two chapters accounting for the methodology (Chapter 3) and the empirical study itself (Chapter 4). The third and last part deals with what I called the *analytical* level, a part of the dissertation in which the results of the empirical study and a number of issues connected to them are discussed with a broader level of abstraction. In particular, Chapter 5 discusses the results of the empirical study in light of post-national membership theories, whereas Chapter 6 discusses the impact of the EU on member-states'

integration regimes, arguing that significant homogenization has not taken place yet. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 represent the core of the study.

KEY WORDS: Naturalization; Civic integration; Citizenship; Immigration; Third-Country Nationals (TCNs).