

Our 2018 Theme: A New Anti-Globalization?



Populism, neo-nationalism, nativism – regardless which name is attached to it, we are experiencing an astonishing backlash of what seemed to be an obsolete ideology which operates by drawing a firm line between ‘us’ and ‘them’. In doing so, it claims to defend the interests of ‘the people’ against what is being portrayed as the oppressive rule by a misguided, arrogant and self-serving power ‘elite’ in business, media and politics. The rise of this new nationalism, most prominently exhibited by the election of Donald Trump in the U.S. and the Brexit vote in the UK, is challenging the prevailing coordinates of political orientation: Left, center and right seem to be losing their old meaning and instead for a growing segment of the electorate, politics become a matter of “my country, right or wrong”!

Populism is itself a global phenomenon. As a general characteristic, it thrives on stirring up feelings of resentment and antagonism against perceived outsiders, suspects or enemies who are framed as ‘the other’ who does not belong here and needs to leave or be expelled, if need be by force. In its ethno-centrist version, these others – be they Rohingya in Myanmar, Somalis in South Africa, Poles in England or Haitians in the U.S. – become the scapegoat for the discontent, often justified with one’s own circumstances of economic and social life.

Not surprisingly, the proponents of this new nationalism have little patience for high-minded appeals to global citizenship. British Prime Minister Theresa May stated plainly that **“if you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere. You don’t understand what citizenship means”**. And Donald Trump dismisses any talk about becoming part of a globalized world by pointing out that “there is no global anthem. No global currency. No certificate of global citizenship. We pledge allegiance to one flag and that flag is the American flag”.

Underlying this new nationalism, there is a defensive posture against unfettered economic globalization that produces more losers than winners and causes distress and misery among large parts of middle class and marginalized populations. However, the anti-globalization stance of the ethno-nationalist camp alternates between deception and a denial of reality. It does not address any of the issues that are transnational by nature – like climate change, new mass migration, the depletion of natural resources, to name but a few – and require cross-border cooperation and a community of global citizens for their solution. Instead, it channels the frustration and anger about the global disorder to target outsiders and minorities, and it promotes the illusion of a society which can be walled in and protected against the ‘contamination’ by alien forces.