

BOOK REVIEW

Calhoun, Craig. *Nations Matter: Culture, History, and the Cosmopolitan Dream*. New York: Routledge, 2007.

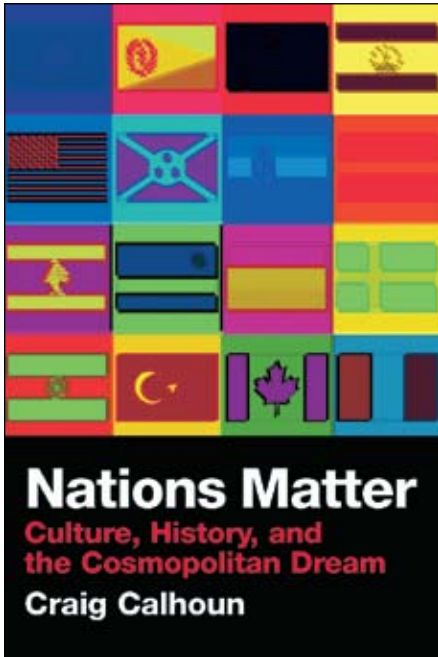
Nations Matter is not Craig Calhoun's most rigorous and comprehensive statement on nationalism (his 1997 book *Nationalism* is a better source on this topic); nor is *Nations Matter* Calhoun's most complete treatise on cosmopolitanism (for that we will have to wait for his forthcoming *Cosmopolitanism and Belonging*). But *Nations Matter* holds many treasures for thinking about citizenship in the age of globalization.

Nations Matter is a collection of previously published essays, each one pitched to a slightly different audience. The common thread is that all are intended to sway liberal-leaning audiences to realize the danger of a cosmopolitan fantasy that denies the historical, and current, importance of nations and nationalism. Calhoun is primarily concerned here with the often-overlooked link between nationalism and liberalism. According to Calhoun, history proves that nationalism has often served to promote the establishment of democratic institutions, as well as the equitable distribution of resources. He further argues that the notion of international cooperation makes little sense in the absence of strong nations. The cosmopolitan dream of transcending nationalism is, for Calhoun, a fantasy. He believes that nations matter more than ever in the age of globalization.

Some critics will assume that this book is not worth reading due to the

repetitive nature of its genre—a collection of previously published essays on a hot topic. However, it is the importance of the topic and the trajectory of Calhoun's research agenda that warrant giving this book special attention. In short, Calhoun is onto something, even if his conclusions feel incomplete. His historically informed view of nationalism combined with his impressive knowledge of current trends in globalization have led him to some keen observations about why the liberal, cosmopolitan dream is inadequate as an empirical description *and* as a political ideal. But Calhoun is not entirely pessimistic. Although he warns that transcending nationalism is impossible, he believes that “nationalism helps locate an experience of belonging in a world of global flows and fears” (1). For Calhoun, nationalism is a source of solidarity that is crucial for democracy and for resisting neo-liberal versions of globalization. He wants well-intentioned liberals to stop focusing on what is wrong with nationalism—which he admits is responsible for some horrific historical events—and instead notice the transformative potential of nationalism.

Calhoun is at his best when he explores the relationship between cultural identity and forms of belonging. Nationalisms are better thought of as having family resemblances, rather than conforming to an essentialist definition. Nationalism, as a discourse, is a product of modernity, meaning the last three hundred years. Ideas about the individuation of the person and the nation are historically emergent and linked phenomena that form the social foundations for nationalism. Calhoun never loses track of the fact that cultural identity is a moving object of analysis and that nationalism is a rhe-



torical tool of identity production. At the same time, he refers to national identity as a Durkheimian social fact that shapes individuals; thus, identity is not a matter of completely free choice.

In chapter 5, “Nationalism, Political Community, and the Representation of Society: Or, Why Feeling at Home Is Not a Substitute for Public Space,” Calhoun draws our attention to the relationship between modes of belonging and political participation. He shrewdly observes that nationalist claims to ethnic or cultural similarity, on one hand, and common citizenship, on the other, ignore a crucial element that constitutes political community. These dichotomous perspectives focus on the continuity of nations and do not explain cultural reproduction or change. Whether claims to nationhood are based in ancient ethnicity (the paradigmatic example being Germany) or an historical moment that constitutionally guarantees rights and

obligations (the paradigmatic example being France), they underestimate the importance of institutions, networks, and movements that bring people together across diversity within nations. Affective attachments between concrete persons differ qualitatively from individual attachments to large-scale cultural categories, such as nations. Furthermore, affective attachments based on similarity do not necessarily create the foundations for navigating difference.

Calhoun warns that social scientists are guilty of conflating nation and society conceptually, a mistake he sees as having political consequences. He argues that conflating nation with society leads to a failure to understand citizenship. According to Calhoun:

Debates on nationality and citizenship need to problematize not only the contrast among territorial, civic, and ethnic models, and the questions of how to understand immigrants, minorities, and aboriginal populations, but also the very way in which a rhetoric of nations and nationalism shapes the representation of political community.

Membership in a society is an issue of social solidarity and cultural identity as well as legally constructed state citizenship. (104–5)

Calhoun goes on to argue that broadening our understanding of citizenship requires attention to distinctions among different modes of social belonging. This is his most intriguing idea—that citizenship can serve as a safeguard against the darker sides of ethnicity and national-

ism. Citizenship, then, becomes a meso-level theoretical tool (or, if you prefer, a metaphorical tool) for imagining the space between the demands of a dense web of local networks (for example, kin groups) and the cultural conformity associated with nationalism. Calhoun's conception of public space—a space of discourse but also a space in which legal entitlements can be enforced—mediates between a diversity of interpersonal relations and large-scale cultural categories. Thus, Calhoun makes the case in chapter 5 for the creation of public space, a space for engaging in discourse, perhaps even critical-rational discourse as Jürgen Habermas suggests, but also something beyond critical-rational discourse—a space to make culture and even to remake identities.

Chapter 6, “Inventing the Opposition of Ethnic and Civic Nationalism: Hans Kohn and *The Idea of Nationalism*,” is the most impressive accomplishment of this volume. Calhoun critically examines the accepted notions of ethnic and civic nationalism by revisiting Hans Kohn's 1944 work, *The Idea of Nationalism*. He makes a compelling case for reinterpreting Kohn for contemporary audiences. Calhoun admires Kohn's optimism about nationalism and his insistence about its importance for liberalism. For Kohn, liberal nationalism could serve as a valuable step on the path to cosmopolitan integration. Calhoun finds this conviction remarkable in the context of 1940s' politics—the rise of the Nazis, World War II, the threat of National Socialism, events that tended to highlight the evil side of nationalism. Calhoun sees Kohn's sustained, and largely positive, attention to nationalism as holding valuable lessons for contemporary liberals:

Many have rejected nationalism as a fundamentally illiberal imposition of the collectivity over the individual, of ethnic loyalty over human rights, and of tradition over reason. And even more commonly, liberalism has swept its own tacit reliance on nationalist thinking under the carpet, failing to analyze why the population of any one country belonged there and why the state was entitled to keep others out. Liberalism generally took up questions about how to advance justice and liberty within “societies,” didn't much examine what made a society a society, and (except when prodded by war) was vague on the relationship between a world of such distinct societies and sovereign states and the rights of individuals in the world as a whole. These issues have come to the fore recently in response to globalization, with many liberals struggling with national identities and state boundaries and proclaiming adherence to a more cosmopolitan ideal. (126–7)

Calhoun admits that *The Idea of Nationalism* has influenced its readers most by contrasting ethnic nationalism (read: irrational and particularistic) with civic nationalism (read: rational and universalistic). However, he instead chooses to reinterpret it with an eye towards the insights that it offers about the link between nationalism and liberalism. In Calhoun's eyes, Kohn was ahead of the wave of postwar modernization projects.

Calhoun traces this insight to Kohn's unlikely synthesis of values from cultural Zionism with Enlightenment liberalism. Kohn's belief in the spiritual foundations of democracy indeed transcends the traditional dualism inherent in contrasting ethnic with civic nationalism. This insight is undoubtedly a product of Kohn's remarkable biography, which Calhoun weaves nicely throughout chapter 6.

Nations Matter can be read as a defense of nationalism, a critique of liberal cosmopolitanism, or, in my view, an insightful look at citizenship today. He insists that a failure to appreciate the power of nations to motivate collective responsibility through solidarity will lead to unintended pernicious politics. He then begins to point towards citizenship and the creation of public space as the hopeful antidote for liberal pipe dreams. We can anticipate that Calhoun will continue to explore the relationship between modes of belonging and political participation and that he will continue to supply us with nuanced observations about the emergence of globalization. For students of citizenship, Calhoun is a man to watch.

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