



Book Reviews

Global Matrix: Nationalism, Globalism and State Terrorism

Tom Nairn and Paul James

Pluto Press, London, 2005, 304pp.

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To borrow Michel Foucault's phrase, one can say that *Global Matrix* writes a history of the present. The authors tackle the ambiguities of nationalism, democracy, freedom, equality, and community under the conditions of our present (defined as globalism). The complexity of the present conjuncture is grappled with dialogically, with Nairn and James contributing successive chapters (interspersed by Joan Cocks' contribution to the debate on the politics of nationalism). The dialogical approach of the book — much like the *Open Democracy* debates to which Nairn has been a constant contributor — is one of critical disagreement, of contradiction and competing alternatives. The three theoretical challenges that structure the book, globalism, nationalism, and the war on terror open up this fertile space for theoretical disagreement. Each chapter brings out contradictions and tensions between social practices, between concepts and even between ethical alternatives. After all, this was the nutshell manifesto to which the authors subscribed in the introduction: 'Globalization...should encourage greater diffidence and uncertainty. This is why *Global Matrix* is also a founding member of the 'crooked timbers' club. Giants are not admitted, naturally; all '-isms' must be consigned to the cloakroom upon entry' (pp. 3–4).

Although the book traces disagreements about our present conjuncture, the arguments are formulated around several key concepts: nationalism, nation-state, democracy, and community, to name the most important ones. These are both a part of and a challenge to globalism, the 'dominant matrix of ideologies and subjectivities associated with different historical formations of global extension' (p. 22). In a conjuncture defined by neo-liberal ideology, globalizing pretensions of undemocratic states, and the return of identity-politics, Tom Nairn sees the potential challenge in a democratic nation-state with a carefully defined civic nationalism. Nationalism has the capacity to mobilize against the threat of neo-liberalism. At the same time, nationalism is in need of systemic *and contemporary* democratic rigidity to ensure that it does not default into populism by a combination of external threat and autocracy (p. 33). James however short-circuits the links between democracy, the state and the nation in



their capacity to provide progressive political alternatives. Certain kinds of postnationalism or civic nationalism are presented as compatible with the globalization of the market. Moreover, James argues in the debate on the politics of nationalism, there is no distinction to be made between good and bad nationalism, as even the most positive nationalism is *potentially* problematic (p. 106).

Nairn and James also disagree about the meaning and practice of democracy. The Rwandan genocide leads James to argue that democratic proceduralism was part of the problem, when it gave the power to a majority that has a long heritage of colonial oppression by a minority. His alternative is a 'reflexive, critically negotiated and embodied community' (p. 59). Nairn in his turn defends a concept of democracy that is not limited to electoral proceduralism and cannot be confused with a sociological majority. 'Democracy is a constitutional *system*... It has to be a juridical order that permits both minorities and head-counted majorities to persist, to change their positions, and to confront one another in more than a life-or-death endgame' (p. 207). James would again disagree in one of his most powerful contributions to the book *Dark Nationalism or Transparent Postnationalism?* Here he sketches out an alternative that is based 'ethically and pragmatically on positive principles of interrelationship' (p. 118). Democracy, equality, freedom, solidarity feature here in a matrix that negotiates the tensions and contradictions between these principles. The last chapters of the book dedicated to the social and political matrix that has been set in place after September 11 offer a bleaker counterpoint to the alternatives sketched earlier: totalizing control, totalizing war, and a 'third coming' of nationalism with an authoritarian ethos.

Contradiction remains however the structuring principle of the book and a method of analysis. It allows the authors to think alternatives from 'the field of *our own ideological determinations*' (Balibar, 2004, 25), to work with the concepts and from within the social practices that they explore. Besides the contradictions that foment debate and create alternatives, there are however other contradictions that remain unaddressed in the book. Citizenship is one of the missing words in the formulation of alternatives. How would civic nationalism deal with the contradiction between citizenship and nationality and the effects for migrants today? If nationalism rests upon a 'rule of exclusion' (Balibar, 2004, 22), what does this constitutive exclusion mean for democratic politics? How is the thin line between negotiation and conflict, between negotiated principles and identities and more conflictual ones to be drawn? Does James' concept of war at a distance contradict the intimate forms of violence that Nairn discusses? Independent of these questions, look out for future Nairn–James disagreements.



Reference

Balibar, E. (2004) 'We, the People of Europe?' *Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, Princeton: University of Princeton Press.

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Power, A Radical View

Steven Lukes

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Lukes's classic, brief and bold analysis of power, originally published in 1974, is here reprinted with two further chapters. Sympathetic readers of the original work will not be disappointed with these additional chapters, which cover critical reflections on his initial discussion, plus an analysis of some of the developments in power analysis over the last 30 years. There is the same taut, lucid style and the same incisive level of discussion. Moreover, although Lukes makes a number of concessions to his critics, he sees little reason to make any major shift of viewpoint, which defends a 'radical', non-Marxist view of power.

For those unfamiliar with Lukes' original argument, his main point was that the concept of power required a non-behavioural third dimension, pointing out the way in which power can prevent people 'to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things' (p. 11). The key question then became: 'how do the powerful secure the compliance of those they dominate — and more specifically how do they secure their *willing* compliance' (p. 12, author's emphasis). Put simply, narrowly empirical political scientists underestimated the power of ideas. Although Lukes claimed that power was an 'essentially contested' concept, he held that his 'radical' view, which owed something to C. Wright Mills' power elite model, was superior to the liberal orthodoxies of American political science in the 1950s and 1960s. It offered a more rounded account of power in the sense that the concept was intrinsically value-laden, and identified more accurately the mechanisms of power. Lukes's 'radicalism' stemmed from his deployment of Marxist concepts, namely, 'real interests' and 'false consciousness', in a non-Marxist way. Thus, he dissociated himself from the structural determinism