Book Review/Compte rendu

Craig Calhoun, *The Roots of Radicalism: Tradition, The Public Sphere and Early Nineteenth-Century Social Movements*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012, 416 pp. $US 25.00 paper (9780226090863)

Once in a while one finds a book that infiltrates your conversations. *The Roots of Radicalism* is such a book — one that wrestles with big questions in an accessible way. Calhoun has written the seven essays in this book over a long period, but brought them together with a contemporary desire to understand the relevance of today's populist movements — from the Tea Party and Occupy, to religious and prodemocracy movements in North Africa. With a strong central question of the role of tradition in social movements, the chapters hang together well around the theme of "resituating radicalism," and hearken back to the topic of Calhoun's first book, *The Question of Class Struggle: Social Foundations of Popular Radicalism during the Industrial Revolution* (1982).

As the recently appointed Director of the London School of Economics and past President of the Social Science Research Council, Calhoun is a powerful actor in the world of sociology and one who is clearly comfortable engaging with big questions. Concerned that left-leaning social movement scholars and sociologists more generally have inherited biases that make us unable to adequately understand populist or conservative movements, the author argues that it is useful to understand such movements as sites of "reactionary radicalism" (p. 84). Drawing on Bourdieu's method for understanding the intersection of academic, economic, and political fields, Calhoun argues that because of the way liberal and Marxist intellectual trajectories emphasize and value progress and change, movements that defend traditional practices remain unnecessarily mysterious. This inherited bias limits analysis of such movements, as it may dismiss them as irrational relics, rather than as more comprehensible formations engaged in political action.

Using the well known cases of struggles in early 19th century Britain and France, Calhoun argues that both Marxist and liberal conceptions of social change are constrained by their emphasis on rationality and progress. Within these frameworks, movements or struggles to defend traditional communities, whether religious or secular, appear irrational, incomprehensible or doomed. Calhoun challenges such approaches by

highlighting how some of the fiercest social movements have been both radical and traditional — as participants struggle to defend tradition and local communities against incursions by capitalism and the state. This position challenges Marx's model of proletarian revolution arguing that, "Neither in France or in Britain or anywhere else has the growth of a factory based proletariat provided a sufficient social basis for revolutionary mobilization" (p. 206). Instead, Calhoun sees class-based movements as trapped in capitalist modalities and fragmented social networks that limit their potential for mobilization. In contrast, traditional communities characterized by clusters of face-to-face social networks and local culture would be able to pose deeper, sustained challenges to capitalism and the state. For example, Calhoun argues that French peasants were more able to defend their social networks and way of life than their British counterparts, suggesting that the less industrialized country was more radical. In this argument, he reminds us of the centrality of utopian socialist and anarchist traditions of the early 19th century, traditions since sidelined by academics, although not by grassroots community organizers. Indeed, such organizers may find the book useful, emphasizing as it does the necessity both for organization and mobilization.

Part of Calhoun's explanation for the marginalization of traditional peasant and utopian movements is the way that the emerging 19th century hegemonic public sphere in England and France excluded nonelites and those who would have challenged its progressive teleology. Drawing on Marx's emphasis on the changing social relations in industrialization, Calhoun argues that Habermas' portrayal of the bourgeois public sphere neglects the way that it was based on the exclusion of nonelites and those ideologically threatening to elites.

By calling into question the division between the patterns of relations in community life and political life, and emphasizing the way that the defense of local traditions and social movement activity are tied, the author is able to illustrate continuities between the "New Social Movements" of the 1960s and similar types of mobilizations in the early 19th century. Both sets of movements included sectors that celebrated precapitalist social relations and practices — albeit in very different contexts and with very different ends. He raises, but does not answer the intriguing question as to why such movements emerged at the particular times and places that they did.

Some might argue that Calhoun romanticizes peasant communities as sites of resistance. However his last chapter emphasizes that while face-to-face relationships may strengthen a community's capacity for mobilization, they may also reinforce patriarchal and exclusive relations. Such communities may also be unable to seize power beyond their own

community. He explores how "tradition" is not simply a reflection of the past, but is a construction of the present about relationships to the past. This is clearly visible in populist movements in recent years. Instead of eliding the traditional aspects of struggles, Calhoun shows how understanding the connection between defending tradition and radicalism can allow us to see past our current blinders.

Overall, *The Roots of Radicalism* is a provocative and lively book that calls into question current constraints in social movement theory and offers insight into trends within some of the most dynamic movements operating today. It would be a great addition to graduate courses on social theory, political sociology, or social movements.

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