

REVIEW: NATIONS WITHOUT STATES

Jonathan Hearn

Montserrat Guibernau (1999), **Nations Without States: Political Communities in a Global Age**, Cambridge: Polity, pb. £14.99, ISBN 0-7456-1801-4, 216pp.

With this book Catalan scholar Montserrat Guibernau offers an extended essay on stateless nations in a globalising world. Her book joins an expanding literature that focuses on nationalism within the liberal democracies of Western Europe and North America, usually highlighting the cases of Catalonia, Scotland, and Quebec (e.g., Keating 1996). More generally, she addresses discussions of regionalism in Europe, and the 'crisis' of the nation state in the face of globalisation, concerned throughout to show that 'nations without states' are potentially progressive rather than reactionary phenomena. Indeed, the book hovers somewhere between moderate, academically informed advocacy, and distanced assessment, providing a rounded introduction to the topic, but tending more to digest than analyse.

Guibernau defines 'nations without states' as cultural communities sharing a common past, attached to a clearly demarcated territory, and wishing to decide upon their political future which lack a state of their own' (p.1). She argues that if such nations 'instil a strong sense of identity among their members and prove economically viable, then they are likely to come onto the scene as political actors in the twenty-first century' (p.149). Paralleling this new potential is the formation of what she calls the 'post-traditional nation-state', which responds to the pressures of a globalising economy and supra-state organs of administration by uncoupling citizenship rights and diverse national identities (p.164). Following John Rex, she locates nations without states within a broader multiculturalist paradigm, predicting and

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advocating a functional division between a public sphere of civic rights, and a private sphere of cultural values (pp. 182-83).

Much of the text seeks to flesh out the idea of nations without states by means of typological frameworks. Chapter 2 outlines some typical 'political scenarios' that nations without states encounter, sketching out the histories of illustrative cases, and mostly restricting itself to 'Western' cases in Europe and North America. In the first scenario, 'cultural recognition', there is de facto acknowledgement of national distinctiveness, but this is not politically codified. Scotland between 1707 and 1999 is offered as an example of this situation. Since devolution Scotland has entered Guibernau's second scenario, joining Catalonia in what she calls 'political autonomy', where circumscribed powers and competencies are apportioned to the internal nation. The third scenario is 'federation', which is distinguished from political autonomy by a 'much higher degree of decentralization which is constitutionally established and guaranteed whenever a federal structure is set up' (p.50). After brief considerations of Switzerland, Belgium and Germany, Quebec is offered as a prime example. In contrast to the first three, in the fourth scenario of 'denial and repression', the state forcefully rejects demands for political autonomy, and actively promotes cultural assimilation, as in the cases of Catalonia and the Basque Country before the end of the Franco regime, the Baltic countries under the USSR, or the Kurds up to the present.

These ideal typical situations do impose some initial order on a messy subject matter, but they also call out for more historical and processual analysis. Sticking close to home, how was it possible for Scotland to move from 'cultural recognition' to 'political autonomy'? Surely part of the answer lies in the considerable de facto political autonomy Scotland enjoyed under successive managerial elites from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, a point that tends to undermine the utility of Guibernau's scenarios. More generally, shifts in the political statuses of Scotland, Catalonia, and the Baltic states each involve very different transformations of the political regimes in which these 'nations without states' are or have been embedded. This typology serves little purpose in helping us understand how these changes came about, nor in drawing comparisons between their changing fortunes.

Chapter 3 is intriguing and curious. Guibernau bravely attempts to bring the autonomist struggles of native peoples of North America into the picture. Indeed, it is not entirely clear why such cases are so often left out of general discussions of nationalism, apart from the relatively infrequent use of the term nationalism in those movements. She acknowledges the very significant

historical differences between indigenous peoples of the US and Canada and stateless nations such as Scotland and Catalonia, in terms of colonialism, demographic crises, geographical relocation, and conditions of legal tutelage in relation to the state. None the less, she sees important parallels in terms of cultural groups with established territorial claims seeking greater political autonomy. But we should ask why, if we are expanding our remit, it is the marginalised indigenous peoples of North America that seem most suitable for comparison, rather than those of say Latin America, Africa, or Indonesia. It seems likely that the encompassing political context is again relevant, that the location of these struggles within stable liberal democracies with established traditions of ethnic pressure for civil rights is part of what encourages comparisons with the more benign nationalisms of Western Europe. Guibernau's tendency to rest her comparisons on the presence of an enduring, territorialised ethnic core, rather than on more dynamic relationships between such cultural groups and their political and historical contexts, renders them somewhat quixotic.

The second half of the book argues the crucial importance of elites, intellectuals, and media in nationalist mobilisations (Chapter 4), and attempts to come to some understanding of why in some instances cultural resistance, and in others political violence, comes into play (Chapter 5). Here the primary contrast is between the relatively pacific struggles of Catalonia and Wales, and the armed struggles of the Basque Country and Northern Ireland. Again, her conclusions are largely typological - some do and some don't. She lightly suggests that the differences between Catalonia and the Basque Country involve the former having stronger civic traditions and a more secure linguistic heritage, while the latter had early on been shaped by more racist discourses and the precarious situation of Euskera (pp.133-34). But the conclusion is not any general hypothesis about why these differences occur, but rather a simple (and understandable) assertion of preference for the use of peaceful, democratic means in seeking autonomy.

The final chapter and the conclusion return us to the theme of globalisation. The gist is that profound changes are indeed underway, exemplified especially by changes within the European Union. Guibernau cites the now familiar indicies of this transformation: the growth of supra-national institutions; evermore economically and politically permeable frontiers; the rise of new social movements and quests for collective identity in an unstable world (pp.176-79). The upshot is a fairly uncritical acceptance of the inevitable rise of the latest version of global capitalism, and an assertion that nations without states have a special role to play in this brave new world.

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Traditional nation states are indeed obliged to cede economic decision making in two directions, upward to transnational trade negotiating bodies, and downward to the regions. Thus a final plea is made for the still only nascent Europe of the regions. But this is not an even terrain - some regions are more equal than others. More precisely, by merit of their greater cultural cohesiveness, and in some instances economic viability, it is suggested that among Europe's regions, nations without states are naturally situated to become the leaders. Conspicuously missing in this discussion is the fate of the welfare state, which still enjoys a great deal of popular support throughout Europe, despite decades of retrenchment. This is part of the complexity of the reception of the homogenising force of the traditional nation state in the West over the last century; the cultural hubris of the 'ethnic core' was often bound up with very real benefits in terms of mutual provisioning within the modern state. It may well be that all sorts of cultural and administrative ties are loosening, and for the general enhancement of valuable social diversity. But it is one thing to locate this process within a renegotiation of political and economic structures and obligations at a transnational level, and quite another to suggest that we are dealing with survival strategies within a naturalised political-economic environment that must be taken a face value. While ambiguous, Guibernau's interpretation leans disturbingly toward the latter position.

To conclude, this has been a fairly critical review of a book that is not without merits. It helps lay out the issues involved in relating literatures on neo-nationalism and globalism to each other. The attempt to integrate Native Americans into the discussion of nationalism is warranted, if somewhat awkward. And, because substantial portions of several chapters are devoted to synopses of the long term histories of the cases under discussion, these can provide useful, if somewhat thin and arbitrary introductions to key cases for the student of nationalism. But in the final analysis, the book is rather too cautious to serve as a polemic to generate debate about the merits and futures of nations without states, and rather too superficial to provide a framework for comparative analysis of actual cases. It is a place from which to start an investigation of neo-nationalism, but not a very satisfying place to end up.

REFERENCES

Keating, M. (1996), **Nations Against the State: the new politics of nationalism in Quebec, Catalonia and Scotland**, London: Macmillan.