Imagining Solidarity: Cosmopolitanism, Constitutional Patriotism, and the Public Sphere

Craig Calhoun

Globalization and the coming of postnational and transnational society are often presented as matters of necessity. Globalization appears as an inexorable force—perhaps of progress, perhaps simply of a capitalist juggernaut, but in any case irresistible. European integration, for example, is often sold to voters as a necessary response to the global integration of capital. In Asia, Latin America, and elsewhere, a similar economistic imaginary is deployed to suggest that globalization moves of itself, and governments and citizens have only the option of adapting. Even where the globalist imaginary is not overwhelmingly economistic, it commonly shares in the image of a progressive and imperative modernization. Many accounts of the impact and implications of information technology exemplify this.

Alternatives to globalization, on the other hand, are generally presented in terms of inherited identities and solidarities in need of defense. Usually this means nations and cultural identities imagined on the model of nations; sometimes it means religions, civilizations, or other structures of identity presented by their advocates as received rather than created. The social imaginary of inherited cultural tradition and social identity is prominent in ideologies like Hindutva and

essential Ethiopianness, for example, as well as widespread notions of "cultural survival." These are denigrated by proponents of transnational society, who see national and many other local solidarities as backward or outmoded, impositions of the past on the present. Both nationalist economic protectionism and Islamist movements, thus, are seen as being simply the regressive opposite of globalization. In each case, such a perspective leaves obscure the transnational organization of the resistance movement.

In many settings, the economistic, or technologistic, imaginary of globalization is embraced by the very political leaders who advocate nationalist, religious, or other imaginaries that emphasize inherited cultural identity. The contradiction is avoided by assigning these to separate spheres. The Chinese phrase *ti-yong* has long signaled this, a condensation of "Western learning for material advancement, Eastern learning for spiritual essence." Similarly divided imaginaries inform many Asian, Middle Eastern, and other societies. Even in Canada, a recent *Financial Times* article reported, "the country wants to become a lean global competitor while maintaining traditional local values."[1]

In this essay, I take up two aspects of this discourse of globalization. First, I want to call attention to the dominance it grants social imaginaries that emphasize necessity and obscure options for political choice. Second, I want to address the inadequacy of most approaches to social solidarity in this literature. I will focus especially on the work of advocates of "cosmopolitan" approaches to transnational politics, including Jürgen Habermas with his notion of "constitutional patriotism."

I don't mean to denigrate cosmopolitanism—in which I hope I share—but to problematize its acceptance of economistic, modernizing imaginaries without giving adequate attention to the formation of solidarity and the conditions that enable collective choices about the nature of society. In addition to questioning whether "thin identities" are adequate underpinnings for democracy, I will suggest that the public sphere be conceptualized not simply as a setting for rational debate and decision making—thus largely disregarding or transcending issues of identity—but as a setting for the development of social solidarity as a matter of choice, rather than necessity. Such choice may be partly rational and explicit, but is also a matter of "world-making" in Hannah Arendt's sense. The production of new culture is as important as inheritance (and distinctions between the two are less clear than common usage implies). We should accordingly broaden the sense

1. Scott Morrison and Ken Warn, "Liberals Strive to Sharpen Competitive Edge," in "Canada Survey," *Financial Times*, 11 June 2001, 1–2.

of constitutional patriotism to include culture-forming and institution-shaping senses of *constitution*, as well as narrowly legal-political ones. New ways of imagining identity, interests, and solidarity make possible new material forms of social relations. These in turn underwrite mutual commitments. The moment of choice can never be fully separated from that of creativity or construction.

Cosmopolitanism and Constitutional Patriotism

Contemplating simultaneously the questions of German integration and European integration, Habermas has called for grounding political identity in constitutional patriotism.[2] This is an important concretization of a more general and increasingly widespread but not uncontested cosmopolitanism. The concept suggests both constitutional limits to political loyalty and loyalty to the legally enacted constitution as such. In the latter dimension, which Habermas emphasizes, the constitution provides both a referent for public discussion and a set of procedural norms to organize it and orient it to justifiable ends. The specific contents of any conception of the good life may vary, then, and modern societies will always admit of multiple such conceptions. Constitutional patriotism underwrites no single one of these, but rather a commitment to the justification of collective decisions and the exercise of power in terms of fairness. It is thus compatible with a wide range of specific constitutional arrangements, and with a variable balance between direct reference to universal rights and procedural norms on the one hand and a more specific political culture on the other.

Similarly, ideas of rights and justice underpin a new movement of calls for cosmopolitan democracy, democracy not limited by nation-states.[3] Though this is

2. Habermas's abstract theoretical formulations are not altogether separate from his contributions to German public debate—notably, in this case, in relation to the incorporation of the East into a united but West-dominated Germany; to the "historians' debate" over the legacy of the Third Reich; and to the debate over changes in the citizenship law, enacted in watered-down form to grant the children of immigrants naturalization rights. See, among many others, the essays collected in Jürgen Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, ed. Ciaran Cronin and Pablo De Greiff (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998).

3. For thoughtful examples, see essays in Daniele Archibugi and David Held, eds., *Cosmopolitan Democracy: An Agenda for a New World Order* (Cambridge, Mass.: Polity, 1995); and Daniele Archibugi, David Held, and Martin Köhler, eds., *Re-Imagining Political Community: Studies in Cosmopolitan Democracy* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998); and the more sustained exposition in David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995). Habermas issues a similar call in *Inclusion of the Other.* See also the essays connecting the present to Kant's cosmopolitan project in James Bohman and Matthias Lutz-Bachmann, eds., *Perpetual Peace: Essays on Kant's Cosmopolitan Ideal* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997).

not a uniquely European development, there is a notable link between the cosmopolitan message and a certain sense of "movement" in European intellectual life. It harks back directly to the Enlightenment (complete with residual echoes of eighteenth-century aristocratic culture). It also commonly expresses a sense of what Europeans have learned about living together in a multinational region and of how Europeans may take on a civilized (if not precisely civilizing) mission in a conflict-ridden larger world. Cosmopolitanism is potentially consonant with a vision of a Europe of the nations—preserving not only cultural difference but also political autonomy—so long as nationalism is not ethnically communitarian and is subordinated to human and civil rights. But it has a stronger affinity with visions of confederation or of an even greater degree of integration, although it emphasizes the outward obligations of Europeans. What it eschews most is nationalism—especially in its separatist forms, but also any application of the nationalist vision of cultural community to supranational polities. What it claims most, in the spirit of Kant, is that people should see themselves as citizens of the world, not just of their countries.

Central to both cosmopolitanism and constitutional patriotism is an image of "bad nationalism." Nazi Germany is paradigmatic, but more recent examples, like Slobodan Milosevic's Serb nationalism, also inform the theories. At the core of each instance, as generally understood, is an ethnic solidarity that triumphs over civility and liberal values and ultimately turns to horrific violence. Indeed, the negative force of the nationalist imaginary is so strong that each of these theoretical positions is defined more than its advocates admit by its opposition to nationalism—by the Other it would avoid.

But advocates of "postnational" society do themselves, and theory, no favors by equating nationalism with ethnonationalism and understanding the latter primarily through its most distasteful examples. Nations have often had ethnic pedigrees and employed ethnic rhetorics, but they are modern products of shared political, cultural, and social participation, not mere passive inheritances. To treat nationalism as a relic of an earlier order, a sort of irrational expression, or a kind of moral mistake is to fail to see both the continuing power of nationalism as a discursive formation and the work—sometimes positive—that nationalist solidarities continue to do in the world. As a result, nationalism is not easily abandoned even if its myths, contents, and excesses are easily debunked.[4] Not only this, the attempt to equate all nationalism with problematic ethnonationalism

4. I discuss nationalism as a discursive formation in Calhoun, *Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

sometimes ends up placing all "thick" understandings of culture and the cultural constitution of political practices, forms, and identities on the nationalist side of the dichotomy. Only quite thin notions of "political culture" are retained on the attractive, postnationalist side.[5] The problem here is that republicanism and democracy depend on more than narrowly political culture—they depend on richer ways of constituting life together.

Recognizing this, Habermas suggests that "the question arises of whether there exists a functional equivalent for the fusion of the nation of citizens with the ethnic nation."[6] He is right that democracy has depended on national identities to a greater degree than many critics of nationalism recognize. His formulation, however, tends to equate all nationalism with ethnic nationalism. "The nation-state owes its historical success to the fact that it substituted relations of solidarity between the citizens for the disintegrating corporative ties of early modern society. But this republican achievement is endangered when, conversely, the integrative force of the nation of citizens is traced back to the prepolitical fact of a quasi-natural people, that is, to something independent of and prior to the political opinion- and will-formation of the citizens themselves."[7] It is true that nationalist rhetoric often invokes the notion of a prepolitical people as the basis for all legitimate politics. Relying only on the negative image, though, leads Habermas to neglect the importance of other nationalist imaginaries to the nurturance of democratic politics. The founding of the United States and subsequent U.S. constitutionalism offer one useful example. It is true that the colonists-turned-nationalists thought of themselves largely as bearers of "the rights of free-born Englishmen." But their appeal was not, in the main, to an ethnic identity. Crucially, in fact, it was an appeal to an identity forged by public discourse itself.[8]

5. See, for example, "Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State," Jürgen Habermas's surprisingly fierce response to Charles Taylor's "The Politics of Recognition," both in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, rev. ed., ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994). On the cosmopolitan side, see Janna Thompson's distorting examination of "communitarian" arguments, "Community Identity and World Citizenship," in Archibugi, Held, and Köhler, *Re-Imagining Political Community*.

6. Habermas, *Inclusion of the Other*, 117.

7. Habermas, *Inclusion of the Other*, 115.

8. Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), is especially informative on the ways in which debate in print informed the constitutive U.S. public. For a discussion of the surprising asymmetry between the intensive and intellectually vital public discussion that informed the founding of the United States and the relative absence of such debate in contemporary Europe, see Larry Siedentop, *Democracy in Europe* (London: Penguin, 2000). It is in this sense, I am suggesting here, that Europe is being given shape and solidarity by economic integration, political institutions, and even certain growing cultural commonalities far more than by any foundational public sphere.

This is part of what Arendt celebrated, seeing the Revolution as a prime example of the capacity of public life for world-making, founding.[9] In this sense, the nation seems more a common project, mediated by public discourse and the collective formation of culture, than simply an inheritance.

The U.S. example could inform a different conception of constitutional patriotism, stronger than that advocated by Habermas. Although, in this new formulation, the emphasis on the norms that underwrite a justifiable life together would remain, this would no longer appear so much to be a matter of getting the abstractly "right" procedures in place on an abstract level. Rather, the idea of a basic law (especially a written document) would be complemented first by the Arendtian notion of founding. This idea of constitution as world-making helps clarify the role of the social imaginary. This is not simply about the imagining of counterfactual possibilities—utopias, for example—however instructive. Rather, it foregrounds ways of imagining social life that actually make it possible. World-making is a way of approaching culture that emphasizes agency and history in the constitution of the languages and understandings by which populaces give shape to social life. To speak of the social imaginary is to assert that there are no fixed categories of external observation adequate to all history; that ways of thinking and structures of feeling make possible certain social forms, and that such forms are thus products of action and historically variable.[10] It follows that cultural creativity can be seen to be basic even to such seemingly "material" forms as the corporation or the nation. These exist precisely because they are imagined; they are real because they are treated as real; and new, particular cases are produced through the recurrent exercise of the underlying social imaginary.

The notion of *constitution as legal framework* thus needs to be complemented by the notion of *constitution as the creation of concrete social relationships*: of bonds of mutual commitment forged in shared action, of institutions, and of

9. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 1977); see also Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

10. The idea of a social imaginary is prominent in the work of Cornelius Castoriadis, although my own usage is different. For Castoriadis, the concept addresses the dimensions of society not graspable as a functional system or a network of symbols, but crucial to the idea that there can be a collective choice about the functional and symbolic order of social life. The imaginary includes "significations that are not there *in order to* represent something else, that are like the final articulations the society in question has imposed on the world, on itself, and on its needs, the organizing patterns that are the conditions for the representability of everything that the society can give to itself." Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 143. Cf. Charles Taylor: "The social imaginary is not a set of ideas; rather it is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society." Taylor, in this issue.

shared modalities of practical action. This expanded sense of constitution would, I think, be much richer. It would also imply an understanding of "peoplehood" much stronger than that acknowledged in Habermas's account of constitutional patriotism (or in the common variants of cosmopolitanism). This is important, as Charles Taylor argues forcefully, because of "the need, in self-governing societies, of a high degree of cohesion."[11]

Democratic states, in other words, require a form and level of "peopleness" that is not required in other forms of government. They offer a level of inclusion that is unprecedented—the government of *all* the people—but they place a new pressure on the constitution of this people in sociocultural and political practice. This makes it clear, I think, that—although not all aspects of constructing peoplehood can be brought into explicit political contention—constructing the relevant people should not be treated as a prepolitical process, as simply a taken-as-given basis for politics. Of course, this is precisely what much nationalist discourse does, and it is also what much political philosophy does—even in classic forms like John Rawls's theory of justice.[12] It says, in effect, "given a people, how should it be governed or socially organized?" It is important to see the constitution of "the people" as much more theoretically, and practically, problematic. One of the consequences of doing so, however, is that such a move entails rejection of any purely external or objective approach to resolving questions of political identity.

Neo-Kantian and, more generally, liberal models of collective life run into difficulties in grappling with the reliance of democracy on a strong notion of "the people." Yet, as Habermas's question about the functional equivalent of the ethnic nation implies, it is crucial to understand not simply which constitutional arrangements are in some abstract sense good, but what makes them have force for specific people. Attempts to resolve this question without addressing how a population conceived as many individuals can constitute itself as a people are deeply problematic, perhaps fatally flawed. This is because it is crucial to account not only for closure in relation to outsiders (so long as the polity is not a single-world polity), but also for mutual commitments among the members of the polity—including commitments to the constitution. Citizens need to be motivated by solidarity, not merely included by law.

In particular, external approaches to identifying "the people" fail to provide an understanding of why and when the definition of the whole becomes a political

11. Taylor, in this issue.
12. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1971).

problem, and which issues become the key signifiers in debate. Why, for example, are there contexts where race matters less than language, and others in which that ordering is hard to imagine? Why are religious identities sometimes critical and at other times trivial? Belonging to (or being excluded from) "the people" is not simply a matter of large-scale political participation in modern society. It is precisely the kind of question of personal identity that produces passions that escape conventional categories of the political. We can see this is so, following Taylor, because of the extent to which ideas and feelings about "the people" are woven into the moral frameworks of "strong evaluation" in relation to which we establish our senses of self.[13]

There is thus an important Hegelian relation at work here, a dialectic of the whole and its parts. Without grasping this dialectic, we can understand neither of its polar terms—*nation* and *individual*. We are also especially apt to be misled into seeing them as opposites, rather than terms that are complicit with each other. But in fact, the ideas of nation and individual developed together in Western history and continue to inform each other. Far from being an objective distinction of collective from singular, the opposition of nation and individual reflects a relation laden with tension. Nations are themselves treated as individuals—by ideologues, of course, but also by diplomats, lawyers, and comparative sociologists. Moreover, the relation between human persons and nations is commonly constructed as immediate, so that intermediate associations and subsidiary identities—family, region, trade—are displaced by it. In this way, nations commonly appear in rhetorical practice as categories of similar individuals as well as organic wholes.[14]

An external account of peoplehood is apt to rely on identity (cultural similarity) and/or interest (and, implicitly or explicitly, a social contract). Identity and/or interest can then be invoked to explain why people accept shared institutions and, indeed, accept each other. The dominant discourses about membership in a European polity work on these bases. Either people are Europeans because they are culturally similar to one another, or they are Europeans because to be so is in their interest (usually described in economic terms). In either case, the emphasis is on passive preconditions, not projects; on adaptation to external necessity, not creative pursuit of an attractive solidarity. The implication is that the persons in question are already formed as either similar or different in cultural terms; as

13. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

14. I explore these issues in *Nationalism*.

either having or lacking common interests. Such accounts rely on a notion of the public sphere as a setting in which such ready-constituted people exercise reason, and on that basis debate what institutions and policies they should have. It is understood crucially as the setting in which people transcend differences in identity and particularities of interests. What is missing from such accounts is the role of public life in actually constituting social solidarity and creating culture.

Taking ethnic nationalism as his model, Habermas treats the attempt to ground European unity in some form of peoplehood as tantamount to ethnic exclusion. He sees peoplehood, in other words, as necessarily a matter of some preestablished, passive cultural affinity rather than as the potential result of an active process of public engagement. Habermas hopes the public sphere will produce a rational agreement that can take the place of preestablished culture as the basis for political identity. He works, however, with an overly sharp dichotomy between inherited identity and rational discourse. He identifies voluntary public life entirely with the latter, and thus obscures the extent to which it is necessarily also a process involving modes of cultural creativity and communication not the less valuable for being incompletely rational.

This model allows for a decidedly thin form of identity, to be produced by the rational discourse of the cosmopolitan public sphere. It is thus hard to see how the cosmopolitan public can overcome the disjuncture between such favored sources of legitimation—which are, ideally, rational—and the too commonly irrational sources of integration. "Whereas the voluntary nation of citizens is the source of democratic legitimation, it is the inherited or ascribed nation founded on ethnic membership that secures social integration."[15] As I have argued, in Habermas's dichotomous view, the alternative to such ascription is conscious, rational agreement. But such a formulation neglects the extent to which not only common culture but also all sorts of politically significant agreements are produced and reproduced in social action—as opposed to being either consciously chosen or passively inherited.

For similar reasons, the actual conditions of membership are not restricted to a choice between thick but irrationally inherited identities on the one hand and thin but rationally achieved ones on the other. First, neither of these ideal types fits well with how identities are actually produced and reproduced in society. Second, the opposition obscures the possibilities for producing new and different, but still relatively thick, common identities. Third, we should take care not to reduce social solidarity to common identity—and especially not to naturalize or

15. Habermas, *Inclusion of the Other*, 115.

essentialize its sources by locating them as somehow anterior to political action or its legitimation.

The problem with which Habermas is grappling is real, for there is indeed a widespread tendency to treat common culture as always inherited, and to separate the normative analysis of legitimacy from the givenness or facticity of actually existing collectivities. But his solution to the problem is inadequate. In the first place, however common in political argument it may be to treat cultural similarity as the basis of solidarity, this is not a sociologically adequate account. Common membership of such a category may be one source of solidarity, but hardly the only one. Functional integration, concrete social networks, and mutual engagement in the public sphere are also sources or dimensions of solidarity. Moreover, there is no reason to accept the rhetoric of ethnic nationalists who treat tradition as "the hard cake of culture," simply to be affirmed on the basis of its prepolitical antiquity. Culture is subject to continual reformation or it dies; reproduction involves an element of creative practice.

It is important to emphasize that ethnicity is not the whole of the nationalist imaginary. Nations are also imagined through representations of collective action —the taking of the Bastille, for example. They are constituted through images of collective participation in processes of nation-building. Nationalism does not just provide democracy with a vocabulary for establishing what counts as "the people" on a priori grounds (e.g., ethnicity). It also provides an account of the subjectivity of ordinary people, the collective action of the people, processes of self-making, and the popular guidance of government. In this sense, the honor of membership in the nation is not simply ascribed but achieved; ethnic members can fail when called upon to live up to nationalism, and nonethnic members can be assimilated by active choice.

The nineteenth-century historian Ernest Renan's famous description of the nation as a "daily plebiscite" is expressive of the close relation between nationalism and democracy.[16] But it presents this link in interestingly ambiguous terms, placing individuals in the position of responding (or choosing not to respond) to the calls of the nation. It doesn't clearly describe individuals as authoring the nation through participation in collective action—including, sometimes, public discourse. For Renan, the idea of democracy as genuine self-rule and self-making demands political participation as a good in itself. It is not met simply by government purporting expertly to serve the interests of the people (let alone determin-

16. Ernest Renan, "What Is a Nation?" in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990).

ing in nondemocratic ways what the people's interests ought to be). Varying degrees of constitutional patriotism may thus also be incorporated into nationalist self-imagining, as normative ideals or substantive features of collective life.

A collective European identity may thus be growing, but although this process involves creativity, the extent to which it involves widespread choice is questionable (and no doubt will be widely debated). Marketing, product design, food, and leisure activities all convey images of a European identity. Although news media are not effectively organized on a European scale, entertainment is a bit more so. And both news and entertainment media carry more and more content about an integrated Europe—and, implicitly, a European culture.

Participation in democratic public life is not, however, separate from the processes through which culture is produced and reproduced in modern societies; it is integral to them, and likewise part of the process by which individual and collective identities are made and remade. The problem with which Habermas rightly wrestles remains insoluble so long as culture is treated as inheritance and placed in sharp opposition to reason, conceived in terms of voluntary activity. I have invoked the notion of the social imaginary partly to suggest an approach that recognizes culture as activity, not simply inheritance. It is a figuration that also marks the impossibility of fully disembedding reason from culture. At work in the choice of social institutions is not only an exercise of abstract reason in relation to phenomena outside itself; simultaneously, there is an imaginative constitution of those very institutions in the process of the formation and reformation of culture.

Habermas's call for constitutional patriotism—like most appeals to cosmopolitanism—tries to establish political community on the basis of thin identities and normative universalism. The key questions to ask here are not simply whether such a community would be ordered by good principles, but whether it would achieve a sufficient solidarity to be truly motivating for its members.[17] There is no intrinsic reason why constitutional patriotism could not work on a European scale, but the project courts questions about whether it can stand alone as an adequate source of belonging and mutual commitment. It is therefore important to address legitimacy and solidarity as related issues.

This need not involve a reduction of the normative content of arguments about

17. Emphasis on the public sphere also suggests a greater freedom in the important sense that it treats culture-forming activity as an open-ended process. As Arendt suggested, it is never entirely possible to know where activity in public will lead, what will be created. Just as culture is produced and reproduced, not simply inherited, so creativity, not simply tolerance, mediates cross-cultural relations.

legitimacy to a mere recognition of the facticity of existing solidarities. On the contrary, it could involve the development of a stronger normative analysis of the legitimacy of different forms and concrete organizations of solidarity. Attending to the dynamic processes by which culture is produced and reproduced also makes it easier to conceptualize the introduction into public space of other kinds of identities besides those that unify the polity as a whole. To take such a position is not to deny the challenge posed by multiculturalism, but it does question its characterization as the introduction of radically new elements into a previously unproblematic uniformity and fixity of collective identity. The key is to reject the notion—which nationalist ideologies indeed commonly assert—that the cultural conditions of public life, including both individual and collective identities, are established prior to properly public discourse itself.

The Public Sphere and Solidarity

Can we conceive of public discourse as (among other things) a form of social solidarity? Such a framing flies to some extent in the face of common usage. Solidarity or integration is treated as a question distinct from, and generally prior to, that of collective decision-making or legitimate action. The implication is that the collective subject is formed first, and activity in the public sphere is about steering it, not constituting it.

One reason for this is that in the most influential early modern works of political theory—and not just the extreme example of Hobbes—the collective subject was conceived, to a great extent, not as "the people," but as the state. Or, more precisely, the people were arguably the subject of *legitimacy* (in a modern, "ascending" approach to the question of legitimacy, as distinct from a medieval, "descending" approach emphasizing divine right or heredity). But the state was the subject of collective *action*, which was either legitimate, or not. So in a sense, states were actors, and public discourse—where it was influential—steered states. The collective action of the people might have created states in the mythical past of social contract theory or in the language of the U.S. Declaration of Independence. But both for liberals in the tradition of Locke and conservatives like Hegel, the state became the proper collective subject, either ensuring the freedom of individual actors within it or subsuming them into its larger whole. Legitimacy came in some combination from serving the interests of the people or from the process by which the people contributed to the steering of the state. But in approaches deriving from this sort of account (notably, for example, Haber-

mas's classic exposition) a clear distinction was made between the public sphere and the state.[18]

The public sphere appeared, then, as a dimension of civil society, but one that could orient itself toward and potentially steer the state. In this sense, the public sphere did not itself appear as a self-organizing form of social solidarity, although another crucial part of civil society—the market (or economic system)—did. Rather than a form of solidarity, the public sphere was a mechanism for influencing the state. Civil society provided a basis for the public sphere through nurturing individual autonomy. But the public sphere did not steer civil society directly; rather, it influenced the state. The implication, then, was that social integration was accomplished either by power (the state) or by self-regulating systems (the economy). If citizens were to have the possibility of collective choice, they had to act on the state—which could then, in turn, act on the economy (although too much of the latter would constitute a problematic dedifferentiation of spheres according to many analysts, including the later Habermas). What was not developed in this account was the possibility that the public sphere was effective not only through informing state policy, but also through forming culture—that through the exercise of social imagination and the forging of social relationships the public sphere could constitute a form of social solidarity.

The public sphere is important as a basic condition of democracy. But it signals more than simply the capacity to weigh specific issues in the court of public opinion. The public sphere is also a form of social solidarity. It is one of the institutional forms in which the members of a society may be joined together with one another. In this sense, its counterparts are families, communities, bureaucracies, markets, and nations. All of these are arenas of social participation. Exclusion from them is among the most basic definitions of alienation from contemporary societies. Among the various forms of social solidarity, though, the public sphere is distinctive because it is created and reproduced through discourse. It is not primarily a matter of unconscious inheritance, of power relations, or of the usually invisible relationships that are forged as a by-product of industrial production

18. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989). It is worth noting that the classical vision of the public sphere that Habermas presents does stress that citizens forge a public sphere through their interactions with one another; it is not simply called into being top-down by subjection to a common power. Indeed, in line with a long tradition of political theory that includes Locke, in Habermas, subjects of a state become citizens by virtue of their capacity for lateral communication.

and market exchanges. People talk in families, communities, and workplaces, of course, but the public sphere exists uniquely in, through, and for talk. It also consists specifically of talk about other social arrangements, including but not limited to actions the state might take. The stakes of theories and analyses of the public sphere, therefore, concern the extent to which communication can be influential in producing or reshaping social solidarity.

What are some of the other choices? Let me borrow Emile Durkheim's famous distinction of mechanical from organic solidarity to illustrate two main alternatives.[19] Mechanical solidarity, Durkheim suggested, obtains in societies where people and social units are basically similar to each other; it is produced, above all, by a shared *conscience collective*. Organic solidarity, on the other hand, is characteristic of differentiated societies with a complex division of labor, considerable variation among individuals, and constituent groups formed on different principles. Durkheim used the distinction largely to analyze the contrast between "traditional" and "modern" societies.[20] It may be more helpful, however, to think of these as suggesting two dimensions of solidarity formation at work in modern societies.

We can rename organic solidarity "functional interdependence," encompassing within this category market relations as well as other ways in which different social institutions and groups depend on each other. Perhaps less intuitively, we can rename mechanical solidarity "categorical identity," with nationalism as a prime example. Think of it as describing the ideology of equal membership in a whole defined by the similarity of its members—complete, in the nationalist case, with a strong sense of the whole's primacy over its members, such that they will die for it and kill for it. Both forms of solidarity are at work in every country today: material relations of interdependence, more or less managed by states and markets; and collective identities, reflecting various combinations of inheritance and energetic reproduction and shaping by intellectuals and cultural producers. Neither of these types of solidarity describes a process of choice, however. Both are externally determined.

Let me round out this discussion by incorporating these categories in a list of four forms of social solidarity:[21]

19. Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: Free Press, 1975).
20. Durkheim has puzzled a century of commentators by insisting that, in principle, organic solidarity knits people together more tightly than mechanical solidarity, and all the failures of modern social integration are merely exceptions to the rule. What is clear is that organic solidarity can knit together larger populations.
21. Note that power is not in itself the basis for a conception of social solidarity; subjection as such is not solidarity, although it may create a polity. This is why the ideal cases of pure despotism place a premium on the absence of active unity among subjects.

1. *Functional interdependence*. This is loosely analogous to "system" in the sense in which Habermas employs the term, as informed by Niklas Luhmann and Talcott Parsons. An interdependence based on various kinds of flows—for example, of goods—joins people in a mutuality that is not primarily manifest in their common recognition of it but instead can operate, as it were, behind their backs. Much of modern life depends on such quasi-autonomous systems. While in principle it may be possible to "unmask" systems of functional integration as products of human choices, in social practice, they are not chosen as such.

2. *Categorical identities*. Nation is the primary example here, but race, class, and a range of other identities work in the same way. They posit a set of individuals equivalent to each other insofar as they share a crucial category of similarity. This is not the same as sharing culture (despite some attempts to treat it so, by nationalist ideologues, among others), because it refers to sharing a specific dimension of culturally significant similarity; how well that stands for participation in a common way of life is an empirical question. While those who try to mobilize others on the basis of categorical identities commonly claim that one identity is a kind of "trump" against other possible identities or interests, there is in fact always some element of choice as to which identity one accepts as salient.[22]

3. *Direct social relations*. Here, the referent is concrete networks of actual connections between people who are identifiable to each other as concrete persons. Much reference to *community* privileges such worlds of direct relations, although when the term is used to refer to solidarity in nation-states, scale dictates that this cannot be the primary meaning and that some other sense of solidarity is at least implicitly being invoked. Referring to *direct relations* also avoids the implication of harmony or affection common to some usages of *community*.[23] While

22. By the same token, interests are not fixed or objectively ascertainable. They vary with the salience of different identities to individuals. Not all individual identities reflect categories of similarity to others, of course, and while there may be an element of choice at work, much identification happens outside conscious choice or recognition.

23. On the effort to distinguish networks of relations from shared sentiments, see Craig Calhoun, "Community: Toward a Variable Conceptualization for Comparative Research," *Social History 5* (1980): 105–29. On the problematic extension of the concept of community from networks of concrete, interpersonal relationships to broad cultural or political categories, see Calhoun, "Nationalism, Political Community, and the Representation of Society: Or, Why Feeling at Home Is Not a Substitute for Public Space," *European Journal of Social Theory* 2 (1999): 217–31. Such networks are sharply limited in their capacity to constitute the social order of a complex, large-scale society, which is necessarily shaped much more by the mediation of markets, formal organizations, and impersonal communications. See Calhoun, "Imagined Communities and Indirect Relationships: Large Scale Social

social structure and other largely external conditions shape patterns of direct relations substantially, there is also room for choice. This occurs both directly, as people choose relationships, and indirectly, as they choose forms of social participation (say, social movements or jobs) that introduce them to particular populations of potential network partners.

4. *Publics*. Publics are self-organizing fields of discourse in which participation is not based primarily on personal connections and is always in principle open to strangers.[24] A public sphere comprises an indefinite number of more or less overlapping publics, some ephemeral, some enduring, and some shaped by struggle against the dominant organization of others. Engagement in public life establishes social solidarity partly through enhancing the significance of particular categorical identities and partly through facilitating the creation of direct social relations. Beyond this, however, the engagement of people with each other in public is itself a form of social solidarity. This engagement includes, but is not limited to, rational-critical discourse about affairs of common concern. Communication in public also informs the sharing of social imaginaries, ways of understanding social life that are themselves constitutive of it. Both culture and identity are created partly in public action and interaction. An element of reasoned reflection, however, is crucial to the idea of choice as a dimension of this form of solidarity—to the distinction of public culture from the simple expression of preexisting identity.

Emphasizing the public sphere thus presents a challenge to speaking of institutions as though they were produced simply by adaptation to material necessity (as neoliberal and other market ideologies would suggest). It presents a no less powerful challenge to the ways in which nationalists present membership in France, say, or Serbia or China, as being an undifferentiated and immediate relationship between individuals and a collective whole that is always already there

---

Integration and the Transformation of Everyday Life," in *Social Theory for a Changing Society*, ed. Pierre Bourdieu and James S. Coleman (Boulder, Colo., Westview, 1991), and "The Infrastructure of Modernity: Indirect Social Relationships, Information Technology, and Social Integration," in *Social Change and Modernity*, ed. Hans Haferkamp and Neil J. Smelser (Berkeley: University of California Press). My conception of categories and networks is indebted to Siegfried Nadel, *The Theory of Social Structure* (London: Cohen and West, 1957), and Harrison White, *Identity and Control: A Structural Theory of Social Action* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992). White, however, sees networks as basic and categories as more typically epiphenomenal, and believes a structural network theory can dispense with the need for separate reference to functional integration. He does not consider publics.

24. In his "Publics and Counterpublics," in this issue, Michael Warner identifies seven criteria for defining publics.

and about which there are few legitimate variations in opinion. The public sphere is an arena simultaneously of solidarity and choice.

This duality is brought out more clearly in Arendt's account of public action and public spaces than in Habermas's. The term "public," she writes, "signifies two closely interrelated but not altogether identical phenomena: It means, first, that everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity. . . . Second, the term "public" signifies the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it."[25] Public action, moreover, is the crucial terrain of the humanly created, as distinct from the natural world; of appearance and memory, of talk and recognition. We hold in common a world we create in common, in part by the processes through which we imagine it. It is these processes that the social imaginary shapes.

Arendt emphasizes creativity, including the creation of the forms of common political life through founding actions—as in revolution and constitution-making. But imagination is involved not only in founding moments but in all social action, and the notion of a social imaginary points our attention to broad patterns of stability in imagination as well as to occasional, more or less radical, changes. Equally important, Arendt's account of public space approaches people as radically plural: not necessarily similar, but bound to one another by promises that are explicit or implicit in their lives together.[26]

In the accounts of both Arendt and Habermas, the emphasis is on political publics, but in Arendt, the notion of politics is extended to include all public action. The public sphere is a crucial site for the production and transformation of politically salient identities and solidarities—including the basic category and practical manifestation of "the people" that is essential to democracy.[27] In his

25. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 50, 52.

26. The plurality Arendt emphasizes extends not only to subjects but also to public spaces, which she thought would inevitably need to be many and imperfectly integrated in modern, large-scale societies. See Hannah Arendt, *Crises of the Republic: Lying in Politics, Civil Disobedience on Violence, Thoughts on Politics, and Revolution* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1972), 232; see also Craig Calhoun, "Plurality, Promises, and Public Spaces," in *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics*, ed. Calhoun and John McGowan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

27. There has been debate over whether Habermas's theory implies a unitary public sphere or multiple publics: see Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992); and Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics." Clearly, in several senses, publics may be multiple, but where public discourse addresses, and/or is occasioned by, a state, there is pressure for reaching integration at the level of that state. It is necessary for plural publics to sustain relations with one another if they are to facilitate democracy within that state by informing its actions.

classic early account of the public sphere, Habermas works with a narrower, state-centered notion of politics, although he recognizes the ways in which a literary public sphere foreshadows, shapes, and overlaps with the political one—making the distinction between the two an analytic one, at best, rather than a purely empirical one.[28]

Recognizing politics at work at sites beyond or outside the state is especially important to seeing how transnational public spheres might be effective. The questions of how a European public sphere might be organized and what influence it might have are as basic to Europe's future as the rise of democratic institutions within nation-states was to its past. Indeed, Habermas himself has returned to this theoretical framework recently in considering the relations among nation, rule of law, and democracy in a changing Europe:

> The initial impetus to integration in the direction of a postnational society is not provided by the substrate of a supposed "European people" but by the communicative network of a European-wide political public sphere embedded in a shared political culture. The latter is founded on a civil society composed of interest groups, non-government organizations, and citizen initiatives and movements, and will be occupied by arenas in which the political parties can directly address the decisions of European institutions and go beyond mere tactical alliance to form a European party system.[29]

This is clearly a statement of hopes and conditions for a desirable future as much as a description of trends. Such a European public sphere is a question more than a reality, as is an integrated European party system. But the conceptual point is clear. The creation of such a public sphere is the condition of a democratic, republican integration of Europe and the safeguard against a problematically nationalist one.[30]

28. Habermas reaffirms this emphasis in more recent work: "The 'literary' public sphere in the broader sense, which is specialized for the articulation of values and world disclosure, is intertwined with the political public sphere" (Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996], 365). However, it may be noted that his recent work is less centered on the state.

29. Habermas, *Inclusion of the Other*, 153.

30. In *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas's attention is focused not just on the ideals of public life but on the question of why apparently democratic expansions in the scale of public participation had brought a decline in the rational-critical character of public discourse, a vulnerability to demagogic and mass media manipulation, and sometimes a loss of democracy itself. The distorted publicity of American-style advertising, public relations, and political campaigns was a manifest focus, but an underlying concern was also the way in which German public life lost its links to both democracy and rational-critical understanding under the Third Reich.

The production of a flourishing public sphere, thus, along with a normatively sound constitution, offers a good answer to Habermas's orienting question: "When does a collection of persons constitute an entity — 'a people' — entitled to govern itself democratically?" But as Habermas notes, the answer most commonly provided is much less promising: "In the real world, who in each instance acquires the power to define the disputed borders of a state is settled by historical contingencies, usually by the quasi-natural outcome of violent conflicts, wars, and civil wars. Whereas republicanism reinforces our awareness of the contingency of these borders, this contingency can be dispelled by appeal to the idea of a grown nation that imbues the borders with the aura of imitated substantiality and legitimates them through fictitious links with the past. Nationalism bridges the normative gap by appealing to a so-called right of national self-determination."[31]

At the heart of the notion of a democratic public sphere lie differences, both among participants and among possible opinions. If a public sphere is not able to encompass people of different personal and group identities, it can hardly be the basis for democracy. If people have the same views, no public sphere is needed — or at least none beyond a space for plebiscites or ritual affirmations of unity. Differences among opinions challenge not only nationalist pressures to conform, but also technocratic insistence on the application of expertise, as though such expertise (or the science that might lie behind it) embodies perfect, unchanging, and disinterested solutions to problems.

Differences among participants also pose a challenge. If a public sphere needs to include people of different classes, genders, even nations, it also requires participants to be able — at least some of the time — to adopt perspectives distanced from their immediate circumstances, and thus carry on conversations that are not determined strictly by private interest or identity. The point is not that any interlocutors escape influences from their personal lives, but that none are strictly determined by those influences, unable to see the merits in good arguments presented by those who represent competing interests or worldviews. If there are no meaningful differences within the public sphere, the lack may reaffirm solidarity and *conscience collective*, but it cannot address choices about how solidarity and institutional arrangements could be other than what they are.

The differences within a public sphere may be bases for the development of multiple publics (specific fields of discourse) and public spaces (settings for discourse). We can speak of a public sphere to the extent that examples of both of

31. Habermas, *Inclusion of the Other*, 141.

these categories overlap and produce an open-ended discourse that addresses some common concerns—for example, about how people should live together or what a state should do. Some of the multiple publics may claim to represent the whole, while others oppose dominant discursive patterns, and still others are neutral.

Nancy Fraser has influentially emphasized the importance of "subaltern counterpublics" such as those framed by race or gender.[32] In thinking about the multiplicity of publics forming a public sphere, however, it is important to be critical about the distinction of some publics as marked while others remain unmarked. Unmarked does not automatically equal either universal or univocally dominant. If the attempt to establish closure to outsiders is sometimes a strategy of counterpublics, as Michael Warner has suggested, the deployment of claims on an unmarked public as *the* public sphere is also a strategy, generally a strategy of the powerful.[33] In speaking of counterpublics, it should be kept in mind both that their existence as such presupposes engagement in some larger public sphere and that individuals may participate in multiple publics. Thus, a newspaper opinion essay by a gay rights activist, for example, may address simultaneously members of a specifically gay public—and even a queer counterpublic within that—and participants in the unmarked broader public.[34]

Furthermore, the segmentation of a distinct public from the unmarked larger public may be a result of exclusion, not choice. During the classic heyday of the eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century British public sphere, many artisans and workers were denied participation in the public sphere. But such subalterns should not be regarded simply and unambivalently as members of a separate, proletarian public sphere, although they did develop their own media and organiza-

32. Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere."

33. Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics." Warner rightly questions Fraser's identification of counterpublics with subalterns, noting that many groups not clearly in subaltern positions identify themselves by contraposition to the dominant culture or institutions of a society and may constitute counterpublics opposed to the dominant patterns of the public sphere. His chief example is the Christian right in the United States. The new populist right wing in Europe seems largely similar in this respect. Electoral victors take pride in describing themselves as outsiders to dominant institutions, even while claiming to be the ultimate insiders within, and defenders of, national traditions.

34. I distinguish the idea of a gay public from a queer counterpublic to make two points. First, per Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (New York: Free Press, 1999), there is a tension among gay men and lesbians—at the levels of both practical politics and discursive practices—over the question of whether to demand reduction of the demarcation of gay from straight or to assert queer identities in a potentially disruptive (and/or liberating) fashion. Second, distinguishing a gay public from a queer counterpublic reminds us that not all demarcation of publics is necessarily the production of counterpublics.

tions and to some extent constitute a counterpublic. They simultaneously claimed the right to participate in the dominant, unmarked public sphere and challenged those who introduced restrictive measures to make it a specifically bourgeois (or, in more general terms, propertied) public sphere.[35] The very people who excluded those with less wealth from the public sphere were nevertheless claiming it, in unmarked form, as simply *the* British public.

The issue of *democratic inclusiveness* is not just a quantitative matter of the scale of a public sphere or the proportion of the members of a political community who may speak within it. While it is clearly a matter of stratification and boundaries (e.g., openness to the propertyless, the uneducated, women, or immigrants), inclusiveness is also a matter of how the public sphere incorporates and recognizes the diversity of identities that people bring to it from their manifold involvement in civil society. It is a matter of whether, for example, to participate in such a public sphere, women must act in ways previously characteristic of men and avoid addressing certain topics defined as appropriate to the private realm (the putatively more female sphere). Marx criticized the discourse of bourgeois citizenship for implying that it fit everyone equally, when in fact it tacitly presumed an understanding of citizens as property owners; the same sort of false universalism has presented citizens in gender-neutral or gender-symmetrical terms without in fact acknowledging underlying conceptions that are highly gendered. Moreover, the boundaries between public and private are part of the stakes of debate in the public sphere, not something neatly settled in advance.[36]

35. Habermas famously focused on the "bourgeois" public sphere, contrasting it with an earlier aristocrat-dominated public, an emphasis that has sparked complaints that he neglected the proletarian public sphere. See Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *The Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, trans. Peter Labanyi, Jamie Daniel, and Assenka Oksiloff (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); see also Geoff Eley, "Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century," in Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere.* Their differences notwithstanding, Habermas and Negt and Kluge alike accept the separation between bourgeois and proletarian as already established, a distinction based on objective economic conditions rather than something forged largely in contestation within and above the public sphere. For Habermas, the issue of inclusion is thus tied to a later broadening of the public sphere rather than posited as a formative theme from the start. Tactics such as raising taxes on newspapers to discourage the popular press—or disparaging workers as insufficiently rational—were then, in a sense, counterpublic mobilizations from above.

36. Salient examples of this large literature include: Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), and *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993); and Michael Warner, "Public and Private," in *The Blackwell Companion to Gender Studies*, ed. Catharine R. Stimpson (Cambridge, Mass.:

All attempts to render a single public discourse authoritative privilege certain topics, certain forms of speech, certain ways of constructing and presenting identities, and certain speakers. This is partly a matter of emphasis on the single, unitary whole—the discourse of *all* the citizens rather than of subsets, multiple publics—and partly a matter of specific demarcations of public from private. If sexual harassment, for example, is seen as a matter of concern to women, but not men, it becomes a sectional matter rather than a matter for the public in general; if it is seen as a private matter, then, by definition, it is not a public concern. The same goes for a host of other topics that are inhibited from receiving full recognition in a public sphere conceptualized as a single discourse about matters consensually determined to be of public significance.

The classical liberal model of the public sphere, on Habermas's account, pursues discursive equality by disqualifying discourse about the differences among actors. These differences are treated as matters of private, but not public, interest.[37] The best version of the public sphere was based on "a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether."[38] It worked by a "mutual willingness to accept the given roles and simultaneously to suspend their reality."[39] This "bracketing" of difference as merely private and irrelevant to the public sphere was undertaken, Habermas argues, in order to defend the genuinely rational-critical notion that arguments must be decided on their merits rather than on the identities of the arguers. This was, by the way, as important a factor as the fear of censorship in the anonymous or pseudonymous attributions of authorship that were a prominent feature of the eighteenth-century public sphere.[40] Yet bracketing has the effect of excluding some of the most important concerns of the members of any polity—both those whose existing identities are suppressed or devalued and those whose exploration of possible identities is truncated. If the public sphere exists in part to relate individual life histories to public policies—as Habermas himself suggests

---

Blackwell, forthcoming). See also the early response to Habermas and the very different development of the idea of the public sphere in Negt and Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience.*

37. In a similar sense, many approaches to multiculturalism treat ethnicity and community as domains of "privacy"—protected precisely because they are not public. The discourse of rights encourages both advocates of communitarianism and liberal critics to ask what kind of private right—of individuals or groups—might protect differences, rather than questioning what kind of public good difference may serve or what kind of public claim supports it.

38. Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 36.

39. Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 131.

40. See Warner, *Letters of the Republic.*

—then bracketing issues of identity is seriously impoverishing.[41] In addition, the bracketing of differences also undermines the self-reflexive capacity of public discourse. If it is impossible to communicate seriously about basic differences among members of a public sphere, then it will also be impossible to address the difficulties of communication across such lines of basic difference.

Conclusion

Constitutional patriotism depends on a vital public sphere. It is entirely possible, however, to achieve collective identity without an effective public sphere. Such solidarity might be based on nationalism or religion, or grow out of economic relations and marketing. To undergird democracy, however, more than mere inheritance or a thin identity is required. Democracy depends on a public sphere, and must be realized largely within it. Public life must offer a realm of social solidarity and culture formation as well as critical discourse. This is needed for the nurturance of a democratic social imaginary as much as for informing any specific policy decisions.

Given the recent wave of celebrating civil society as the potential cure to all the ills of democracy, it is important to recall that the dominant forces in transnational civil society remain businesses and organizations tied to business and capital. Businesses are important in ways that distinguish them from markets—as institutions, they organize much of the lives of their employees, and they coordinate production as well as exchange across continents. The business dimension of global civil society is not limited to multinational corporations: it includes NGOs that set accountancy standards and provide for arbitration and conflict resolution, as well as the business press, lawyers, and a range of consultants. The point is not whether this is good or bad, but that this is civil society—on a global scale, to be sure, but not totally unlike what such pioneer theorists as Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson saw on a local and national scale in the late eighteenth century. Civil society meant then, and still means, the extension of more or less self-organizing relationships on a scale beyond the intentional control of individual actors and outside of the strict dictates of states. It offers many freedoms—but so do states. Neither is automatically liberal or democratic. The development of an effective public sphere lags behind functional integration and powerful organizations in constituting civil society.

At the same time, it is equally important to remember the extent to which life

41. See Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, chap. 8.

together is made possible not simply by systemic integration, the construction of formal organizations, and rational-critical discourse. It is made possible, as Arendt argued, by promises that bind people to one another. This is a crucial dimension of constitution-making. Collective life is made possible also by acts of imagination, communicated and incorporated into common culture.

Think for a moment of the ways in which such acts of promising and imagining are implicated in the creation of the institutions of our shared world. Not only the nation but also the business corporation, for example, exists as the product of such imagining (and is none the less real and powerful for that). How is the corporate whole called into being, granted legitimacy in law and the capacity to act, in contracts, suits, or property holding? It is a product of the social imaginary. But—as with ideas of the individual self and the nation—the acceptance of corporations is deeply rooted in much modern culture. It is reproduced in a host of quotidian practices as well as in more elaborate legal procedures. This is indeed part of what turns a merely formal organization into an institution. Such a process can be grasped only from within the very culture that makes it possible, not externally to it. It can never, therefore, be rendered altogether objective.

The most helpful conception of the public sphere is thus one that includes within it *both* a dimension of rational-critical discourse and a dimension of social imagination and promising. Among the many virtues of the former is the capacity to challenge and potentially to improve existing culture, products of social imagination, and social relations. But among its limits is the fact that in itself it cannot create them.

Alternative imaginaries are operative in the constitution of global culture and social relations. From Islamism to deep ecology, there are multiple ways of imagining the possible institutions of a new and different social order. A common humanity is imagined most prominently in discourses of human rights. And in fact the most powerful postnational or cosmopolitan social imaginary is that of the market.[42] Affirmation of global society comes less from the expression of some positive value than from the notion that the market demands it. *The market* in such discourse is always represented in external and deterministic terms, as a force of necessity rather than an object of choice.

And this raises the basic issue. The speed with which global civil society is

---

42. Bruce Robbins notes that the first cited usage under "cosmopolitan" in the *Oxford English Dictionary* comes from John Stuart Mill's treatise of 1848, *Political Economy*: "Capital is becoming more and more cosmopolitan" (Robbins, *Secular Vocations: Intellectuals, Professionalism, Culture* [New York: Verso, 1993], 182).

gaining the capacity to self-organize autonomously from the state may be debated. But there is little doubt that the global public sphere lags dramatically behind the less democratic, less choice-oriented dimensions of global society. Among the many questions to ask about global society is: What kinds of identity and solidarity will orient participation within it? Are there attractive forms of collective identity that offer nationalism's potential to integrate large populations and produce mutual commitment—without assuming its tendencies of external exclusion and the rejection of internal difference?

Fear of bad nationalism leads many to hope that relatively thin identities will predominate. Cosmopolitans and constitutional patriots may presumably orient themselves to multiple spheres of action, from the very local to the global. But are these forms of identity that can create a new social imaginary that will commit people to each other on a global scale? Further, are they by their nature restricted to elites, and meaningful only in relation to the nationalism of others? Or are they attractive possibilities that follow from, rather than lay the basis for, more democratic public institutions?

I have argued that the idea of constitution is deepened by attending to the question of what kind of social imaginary underpins the creation of institutions and the organization of solidarity—that is, what ways of understanding life together actually make possible specific forms of social relations. Not least in this regard, it is important to conceive of solidarity not only in terms of common economic interests, but also in terms of a range of relations of mutual interdependence, including engagement in shared projects of imagining a better future.

The importance of the public sphere lies not only in achieving agreement on legal forms and political identity, but in achieving social solidarity as such. For this to happen, it needs to be a realm of cultural creativity as well as rational discourse, and a realm of mutual engagement. For nationalism to give way to some postnational organization of social life will not simply be a matter of new formal structures of organization, but of new ways of imagining identity, interests, and solidarity. A key theme will be the importance of configurations of mutual commitment—solidarity—that are more than reinscriptions of preestablished interests or identities. Can shared participation in the public sphere anchor a form of social solidarity in which the nature of life together is chosen *as it is constructed*?

Craig Calhoun is president of the Social Science Research Council and a professor of sociology and history at New York University. A longer version of his argument on constitutional patriotism will appear in the forthcoming volume *Transnational Politics*, edited by Pablo De Greiff and Ciaran Cronin.