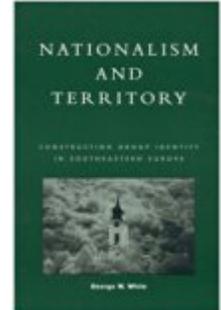


**George W. White.** *Nationalism and Territory: Constructing Group Identity in Southeastern Europe.* Lanham, Maryland & Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000. xv + 309 pp. \$69.00 (cloth), \$29.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8476-9808-0.



**Reviewed by** Charles King

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George W. White has performed a useful service in attempting to catalog the spatial dimensions of national mythology among the Hungarians, Romanians, and Serbs. White argues that, although scholars recognize that place and nationhood are intimately linked, the real geographic components of nationhood have not been adequately appreciated. After a general discussion of "territoriality" and its relationship to national myths, White provides a detailed account of the specific territories, historical sites, and cultural monuments that feature in the narratives of three of southeast Europe's major nations.

Three themes run through White's book. First is the centrality of place in the national identities of Hungarians, Romanians, and Serbs. Particular territories are seen as the "cradle" of these nations, and the states that have come to represent them have at various times had the acquisition and defense of these lands as major goals. They have also attempted to ensure, through resettlement policy and the construction of cultural monuments, that their hold on these regions remains inviolable, even though those attempts have not

been universally successful. No one would argue with White's contention that place matters, but no author has yet produced as complete a catalog of exactly which territories matter for which nations, and why.

Second, White argues that the tenacity of national sentiment applies differently in core, semi-core, and peripheral areas. All historically "Hungarian" regions, for example, have not been equally crucial to the Hungarian nation-building project, and White does an admirable job of delineating, in broad terms, which zones have been seen as vital to Hungarian, Romanian, and Serbian nationhood and which less so.

Third, White says that this schema tells us something important about the likelihood of conflict. He puts forward two formal hypotheses: First, "In those places where effective control [of key national territories] is achieved, a healthy and peaceful national psychology will emerge; in cases where that control is not achieved, conflict with neighboring ethnic groups and nations will persist." (p. 13) Second, "A nation will struggle more intensely for a core territory than for a pe-

riphery" (p. 258). Unfortunately, White does not really demonstrate that either of these hypotheses holds. The implications of his analysis for the study of conflict appear only fleetingly in the introductory chapters and the conclusion. There are, in fact, plenty of counterexamples in the book itself. Contrary to White's first prediction, Hungary has developed a "healthy and peaceful" brand of patriotism, despite the loss of Transylvania under Trianon. Similarly, Bosnia is a zone peripheral to Serbian national consciousness according to White's model, but the tenacity of the Serbs there was far greater than in Kosovo, a supposedly core zone. All this, in turn, calls into question the core/periphery distinction. What may be peripheral to the "Serb nation" as a whole may be absolutely central to the particular Serbs who live there.

Moreover, since the book is based almost entirely on English-language sources, it is difficult for White to give a genuinely nuanced account of the reasons that particular regions came to play a role in national identity or of the competition among alternative visions of the regional space. "Place" has not been defined in the same way at every point in the national histories of the three groups he considers, nor have all nationalists thought of the boundaries of the national homeland in exactly the same way.

Irina Livezeanu's work on cultural politics in Greater Romania, for example, might have served as a model for how to combine serious historical research with a geographer's sensitivity to spatial order.[1] Livezeanu argues convincingly that the project of building a Greater Romanian state came before the articulation of a clear pan-Romanian identity among the new kingdom's constituents. The local cultural and political identities in Greater Romania's new provinces had developed in vastly different historical and geographical circumstances, and transforming these local self-identifications into a solid sense of loyalty to the Romanian state occupied the new administra-

tion for much of the interwar period. Schools, universities, museums, civic organizations, the military and a host of other social, cultural, and political institutions were engaged in this process. Attachment to territory and the state's attempt to mold the individual identities of those territories' inhabitants were inextricably linked. White, however, has chosen to focus on mapping the specific regions that are important to national myths, rather than on explaining how nationalist movements, states, and individuals conceived of their place in the national narrative.

The focus on territory can also obscure the importance of people. White lists the lands important to national mythology in each case, but the reader never gets a sense of the relative ethnic populations in the areas concerned, nor how those populations have changed over time. That issue might have taken White in a direction he did not want to go; it might even have required another book. But considering who inhabited the territories concerned (rather than simply dismissing the question as a trope of nationalist historiography, as White is inclined to do) is important in accounting for why modern states pursued different territorial goals at different times.

Any book as ambitious as this must wield several languages, and the final product would have been better had White and the publisher spent more time marking page proofs and checking basic facts. Embarrassing mistakes are legion. They are also a serious obstacle to taking White's more conceptual arguments seriously. To name just a few: Both Slobodan Milosevic and Nicolae Ceausescu are subjected to multiple spellings of their names (pp. 160, 201, 218, 225); likewise for Ion Bratianu (p. 174, *inter alia*). The Dneestr river is given as *Nistra* (p. 128, *inter alia*), which is neither Romanian nor Ukrainian; Bessarabia is spelled *Besarabia* (p. 135, *inter alia*), which is neither Romanian nor Russian. The Turkish *nahiye* is given as *nahie* (p. 185, *inter alia*); the Romanian region of Oltenia is consistently mislabeled *Olen-*

tia. (p. 141) White believes that Podgorica is still called "Titograd." (p. 211) The Treaty of San Stefano is called just the treaty of "Stefano" (p. 155); the first Yugoslavia is mistakenly termed the "Kingdom of Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia." (p. 240). Odessa is placed in northeastern Romania. (p. 172) The entire Romanian Orthodox church was not, *pace* White, placed under the control of the Serbs in the eighteenth century. (p. 121) Moldova and Wallachia were never "provinces" of the Ottoman empire. (p. 121)

Reading around these and many other frustrating geographical and historical gaffes is a chore. Unfortunately, only the most ardent and sympathetic reader will be able to see through them to the kernel of what is, in its essence, an important subject of scholarly inquiry.

Note

[1]. Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, and Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930*. (Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), reviewed on HABSURG: <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=1992851702858>.

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