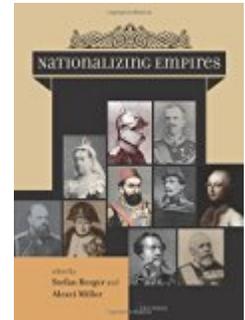


Stefan Berger, Alexei Miller, eds. *Nationalizing Empires*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014. 700 pp. \$85.00, cloth, ISBN 978-963-386-016-8.



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Until a few years ago, many of us inhabited a historical universe that seemed neatly divided among an imperial past, a national present, and a supra-national future. The decolonization of Asia, the Middle East, and Africa in the postwar decades appeared as the climax of a global paradigm shift that had begun with the American Revolution and that was to come to a successful conclusion with the 1989 collapse of the Soviet Union's informal empire in Eastern Europe, followed two years later by the disintegration of the USSR itself into its constituent national republics. The excesses and dangers of nationalism, in turn, would be contained and offset by the general effects of economic and cultural globalization and by the development of supra-national structures, norms, and relationships such as those institutionalized in the European Union.

Any hopes we might have had of a grand historical dialectic between the universal and the particular achieving final resolution in a post-Cold War, liberal-internationalist synthesis have since been thoroughly dashed. Today we live in an era

in which Russia is challenging post-1991 borders in Europe, China is laying claim to the South China Sea while the United States “pivots” to Asia, jihadists are aspiring to replace the nation-state with a caliphate in the Islamic world, and the great and middle-ranking powers of the Euro-Atlantic zone are drawn into a seemingly never-ending series of military interventions in areas of the world where what once were considered nation-states have partly or utterly collapsed—in some cases under the impact of those very military interventions. The European project itself is sorely threatened by the convergence of economic, demographic, and ideological challenges on a scale it has never before faced.

It is against this unsettling and disorienting backdrop that recent historiographic trends have called into question overly neat typological distinctions and normative dichotomies between empires and nation-states. Pieter Judson and Karen Barkey have pointed to some of the ways in which multinational empires (the Habsburg and Ottoman, respectively) may, at times, have better ac-

commodated hybrid identities and more effectively arbitrated ethno-political diversity than their nationalist successor states.[1] Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper have made similar arguments about the potential virtues of what they term imperial “repertoires of power.”[2] In the book under review here, the editors and contributors join this discussion by making a strong case to the effect that the stark dichotomy between imperialism and nationalism that has underlain our understanding of modern global history may have been overdrawn. The developmental trajectories of modern empires and nations have, they argue, been seamlessly interwoven with one another.

The central concept Berger and Miller introduce is that of the “nationalizing empire” referenced in the volume’s title. This concept is reminiscent of Benedict Anderson’s “official nationalism”—the term he used to describe the opportunistic adoption of nationalist agendas and mobilizational tools by imperial-dynastic regimes such as that of the Romanovs in Russia. But for Berger and Miller, the integration of nationalism into imperial world views was far less contrived and far more pervasive—one might almost say organic—than in Anderson’s account. As they put it: “nation building and empire were very much entangled processes—nation-building in the core of empires was in fact one of the key instruments of empires to enhance and improve their competitiveness” (p. 30). By implication, nationalizing empires may also have been less foredoomed to failure than is commonly supposed.

Alexei Miller’s chapter on the Russian case presents one of the most clear-cut—perhaps even paradigmatic—examples of a nationalizing empire. Miller reminds us how persistent the tsarist regime was, from Nicholas I’s reign (1825-55) onwards, in cultivating Russian nationalism and—in some regions—pursuing Russification policies as mechanisms for the extension and consolidation of political control over the empire’s vast territories. The settlement of large numbers of Russian-

speakers in parts of Romanov-ruled Central Asia and the increasing prevalence of Russian language in lands that currently constitute eastern and southern Ukraine are pointed to by Miller as indicators of how promising the trajectory appeared to be, on the eve of the First World War and Revolution, of this project to bind the empire together through a hegemonic Russianness. He also emphasizes how enthusiastically this undertaking was embraced by significant sectors of the empire’s intelligentsia as well as of its Russian-speaking commercial and entrepreneurial elites.

Stefan Berger’s chapter on Germany introduces an interesting complication to conventional distinctions between empires and nation-states in pre-1914 Europe. The thrust of his revisionist interpretation is to argue that the story of German unification and of Wilhelmine political and territorial ambitions on the European continent and beyond is best understood as one in which national and imperial identities and objectives were not just reciprocally reinforcing, but mutually constitutive: “Imperial Germany cannot be adequately understood by looking at it merely through the lens of an imperializing nation-state. One also needs to take seriously the impact of a nationalizing empire on the constructions of German nationhood” (p. 249). The Bismarckian state itself can be regarded as a vehicle for the exercise of Prussian hegemony over the other German states in the name of German nationalism. Prusso-German demographic and linguistic engineering efforts in the country’s Polish-speaking frontier zones can be compared to the deployment across the border of Russification efforts in the interests of tsarist imperialism. And Germany’s rapacious, and manifestly imperial, territorial expansionism during the two world wars was, Berger contends, deeply rooted in ideological and political-identity structures that antedated those conflicts by many years.

In his contribution to the volume, Howard Eissenstat highlights the use of Ottomanism as a

strategy for legitimizing juridical, political, and economic reform and for shoring up internal unity on the part of a beleaguered Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He employs the term in a deliberately broad manner, to encompass not only periodic efforts to cultivate a supra-ethnic and supra-religious Ottoman patriotism or civic nationalism during the empire's final decades, but to include seemingly very distinct approaches such as the rising Islamism and the Turkish nationalism of Abdülhamit II's government (1876-1908) and the post-1908 regimes. Eissenstat's point is that the boundaries among these seemingly discrete conceptions of political identity were much blurrier at the time than they came to appear in retrospect. He sees a constant, adaptive experimentation at play among the empire's rulers, administrators, and oppositional intellectuals alike, as they sought to meet the great challenge of transforming subjects into citizens in the face of foreign encroachments, internal divisions, and socioeconomic transformations. Emphasizing continuities between the Hamidian and CUP (Young Turk) regimes, Eissenstat points out that secular versions of Ottoman patriotism were often inflected by a sort of generic pride in the empire's Islamic heritage. Likewise, Muslim solidarity (connecting Turks, Kurds, and Arabs) and Turkish nationalism could be seen as constituting overlapping circles of loyalty rather than mutually exclusive categories during the empire's last years, when the loss of most of the Ottomans' remaining Balkan territory had radically reduced the proportion of non-Muslims among the polity's population. One might ask of what utility it is to deploy the concept of Ottomanism in so broad-brush a fashion that it can encompass policies and ideas ranging from the propagation of an all-embracing, supra-ethnic and supra-sectarian patriotism to the pursuit of a genocidal campaign against Armenians during the First World War. On the other hand, perhaps Eissenstat has a point; after all, we use the term "nationalism" to describe integrative projects that range

from the unificatory and inclusive to the homically exclusive. Why should projects of imperial integration demand a more finely differentiated set of analytical terms than those applied to polities we label nation-states?

Be that as it may, this volume itself explores a far richer variety of dynamic relationships between empire and nation than any one term (such as "nationalizing empires") can encompass. By setting studies of colonial-maritime and territorially contiguous empires side by side, the editors allow us to discern some of the cardinal differences between these categories—even if that was not necessarily their intention. Neil Evans's chapter highlights how important Britain's overseas empire was in forging a sense of Britishness among the population of the home islands—a point Linda Colley famously made.^[1] By the same token, he argues, elements of discreteness (yet complementarity) of identity among the United Kingdom's "Four Nations" could also be enhanced by different regions' occupation of distinct roles and niches in the shared imperial project, as in Glasgow's importance for shipbuilding versus London's predominance in finance, as well as in the organization of imperial troops along ethnic and/or regional lines (as in the case of the Scottish Highland regiments).

A similar theme emerges in Robert Aldrich's chapter on French imperialism, which shows how specialized links between certain metropolitan cities and colonial peripheries (e.g., Bordeaux and Senegal, Lyon and Indochina, Marseille and North Africa) gave those cities particularly strong stakes in the imperial enterprise. This could contribute to the development of a mutually reinforcing interplay among local identities, patriotic pride, conceptions of imperial mission, and raw material interest. Yet another variation on this phenomenon is explored by David Laven and Elsa Damien, whose chapter describes how the Venetian imperial past was invoked and mythologized during the late nineteenth and twentieth cen-

turies in ways that linked particularistic, urban/regional pride to Italian nationalism by way of Italy's latter-day overseas and Adriatic expansionism. Conversely, Xosé-Manoel Núñez reminds us of the other side of the coin: the loss of overseas empire could unleash centrifugal forces within metropolises, as appears to have been the case in a Catalunya whose business interests were disproportionately hurt by the loss of Spain's vestigial Old Empire in the Spanish-American War.

As Philipp Ther points out in the interpretive essay he wrote for this volume, the wide geographical (as well as historical and cultural) separations between national core territories and overseas imperial holdings in these latter cases were such as to make the formation of national identities in the core regions a more discrete process than was the case in the Romanov or Ottoman Empires. To be sure, as these chapters demonstrate, empire-building clearly contributed to shaping the contours and content of national identities in cases such as Britain and France. But, by my reading of these essays, those national identities remained much more closely associated with the population of (or originating from) the core lands than was the case in territorially contiguous empires, where the very distinction between core and periphery, ruling nation and subject peoples, was inherently much more difficult to draw by virtue of the geographical propinquity of, and more extensive ethno-demographic intermingling among, these polities' constituent parts.

That said, these case studies do call our attention to complicating counter-examples, such as the cases of Ireland and Algeria, which notoriously occupied ambiguous grey zones between colony and metropole. And, of course, imperialism played a fundamental role in shaping the development of national identities among subject peoples in contiguous and overseas empires alike.

Regardless of whether one finds the similarities or differences among the various imperial typologies more compelling, it is one of this book's

many virtues to have brought such a rich variety of examples into juxtaposition with one another, under the umbrella of Berger and Miller's compellingly articulated master concept. One of the volume's refreshing distinctions is its inclusion of a series of interpretive commentaries in its concluding section. This introduces an additional element of synthesis all too often missing from edited collections. Among these interpretive essays, the ones by Jörn Leonhard and Dominic Lieven bring us back to the question with which this review began: is empire a form of polity that was necessarily superseded in the course of political modernization, or is it compatible with (and indeed complementary to) nationalism? Leonhard emphasizes the role of contingent factors such as the outbreak of the twentieth century's two world wars in bringing about the disintegration of empires that might otherwise have continued to adapt to changing historical contexts and conditions. Lieven brings us back to the fundamental idea of popular sovereignty as the ever more globally recognized foundation of political legitimacy and wonders whether imperial structures of authority, hierarchy, and identity could ultimately be reconciled with it.

Perhaps the successful empires are those that have succeeded in negotiating this transition by transforming themselves into nation-states? The People's Republic of China, which has regathered most of the lands of the Qing Empire under Beijing's control, may be a case in point. Or do such examples suggest little more than a semantic shift, such that today's successful empires present themselves as nation-states even as many of the deep structures of inter-regional and inter-ethnic domination and subjugation associated with imperial rule remain in place? Conversely, may great powers' advocacy on behalf of the self-determination of nations not be construed, in some cases (e.g., in Kosovo, or Ukraine, or Abkhazia), as an instrument of informal imperialism, much as it was in past periods of inter-imperial rivalry? It is a tribute to the provocative and stimulating con-

tents of this volume that it leaves us preoccupied with such productively vexing questions.

Notes

[1]. Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[2]. Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[3]. Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, rev. ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

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