

BOOK REVIEW

Empire and Belonging in the Eurasian Borderlands, edited by Krista A. Goff and Lewis H. Siegelbaum, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2019, viii+266 pages, \$51.59 (hardcover), ISBN 1-5017-3613-2.

Empire and Belonging in the Eurasian Borderlands examines how nationalism, belonging, and violence have developed since the late 19th century in the borderlands of the Russian and Ottoman empires as well as the Soviet and Turkish states that emerged from their disintegration. Comprised of eleven contributions of excellent caliber, this volume is the result of a conference organized at the University of Michigan in 2016 to honor Professor Ronald Grigor Suny, the author of important revisionist work on nationalism, empire, ethnic conflict, and genocide in the context of the history of Russia, Armenia, and the Caucasus.

This volume is divided into three parts, which are preceded by an introduction that explains the nature and goals of this contribution, and Janet Klein's chapter that assesses the treatment of minorities in studies regarding the late Ottoman and Russian empires. This chapter stands out for its significant theoretical contribution to debates concerning the use of the term "minority" in historical scholarship. Klein contends that despite recent efforts to shift emphasis from biased discussions of imperial populations to more nuanced analyses, the term "minority" has remained problematic. This is because scholars project post-imperial constructions of minorities onto a past that lacks these concepts. Klein argues that since "minorityhood" has been historically and socially constructed, scholars ought to replace the term "minority" with "minoritization," especially when examining "larger practices of violence and discrimination against particular groups that later came to be officially understood as minorities."

The first part of the volume examines cases of negation of belonging in both late Russian and Ottoman imperial contexts. Entire communities experienced terror, mass killing, deportation, and genocide at the hands of those who excluded them from particular "nations" or certain territories due to the "problematic" nature of their ethnicity. Ian W. Campbell examines an example of mass killing in the Russian context. Building on Benjamin Madley's concept of "pedagogic killing" (using violence to teach resisters how not to challenge colonial rule), Campbell argues that Russian officials used this method in the 1880s to make the Tekke Turkmens submit, in order to expand their empire in Central Asia. They deemed the carnage as "necessary," claiming that the savage, potentially treasonous, "Asiatic" Tekkes needed this experience to become "part of something greater than what they had been when independent." Norman M. Naimark argues, in a comparative chapter on genocide, that Ottoman Armenians paid greatly for "the crime of allegedly being different" during World War I. The war offered a radicalized political leadership the opportunity to unleash the persecution of people regarded as the "parasitical worms" and "vipers" that "destroyed the healthy bodies of strong and innocent Turks." The Kirgiz of the Semirech'e region, examined by Matthew J. Payne, were also "punished" for being different. In response to their 1916 rebellion, the Russian army, aided by settler peasants, killed thousands of Kirgiz, confiscating herds and lands from survivors. This was "collective punishment . . . not genocide," argues Payne, of *inorodtsy* (internal aliens) often named "dogs." Claire P. Kaiser analyzes the 1949 Operation Volna, which caused the deportation of ethnic Armenians, Turks, and Greeks from Georgia to the Soviet interior. The goal of the operation was to cleanse borderlands of people "incompatible with membership in the increasingly homogenizing yet still diverse Soviet collective."

The second part of the volume focuses on the issue of belonging via standardization of national spaces, languages, and cultures. Jo Laycock argues that the shaping of Soviet Armenia occurred along national lines in the interwar period. Indeed, while supported by various local, regional, and

foreign actors, the resettlement of Armenian refugees defined Soviet Armenia, turning a formerly diverse imperial space into a national, “more Armenian” space. Daniel E. Schafer shows how the writing of dictionaries and debates over language among the Tatars of the Volga-Ural region shaped Tatar national identity along Turkic, Islamic, Russian, and European lines. Cultivating a sense of belonging to the Soviet Union, for instance, was done via the Russification of both alphabet and vocabulary. Similar developments were present in Soviet Armenia. Jeremy Johnson shows how Armenians who adapted their speech and writing to Soviet standards had access to better resources and positions. The ancient alphabet of Armenia was modified along Soviet modernizing lines, as “new forms of language and presentation” became part of “new forms of citizenship.” Even female bodies “became part of the citizen-building literacy efforts.”

The third part of the volume regards the subject of belonging and myth-making, showing how nationalists mythologized their countries’ origins, histories, and heroes as part of their national projects. Anna Whittington demonstrates how the myth of the “Soviet people,” Nikolai Bukharin’s 1935 brainchild, helped the diverse people of the Soviet Union to identify with their country’s war effort in the 1940s. World War II, she argues, played a crucial role in the shaping of a distinctly Soviet identity and belonging, despite existing inequality and friction between the Soviet people. Stephen H. Rapp Jr. emphasizes the importance of myth-making for the Georgian national project. Nationalists described Georgia as the original European “nation” that protected Christianity and had divine origins. By exaggerating and decontextualizing certain historical moments, Rapp argues, Georgian nationalists deliberately neglected their country’s non-European connections. Jeremy Smith explains why the five Central Asian states emerging from the disintegration of the USSR failed to maintain a coherent post-Soviet space or develop a regional identity. An important explanation is that the political leadership of these republics pursued national interests instead of connections with states that shared a similar history and geography. The volume ends with the remarks of Professor Suny on each of the volume’s contributions.

This volume is a welcome addition to the historiography of borderlands and belonging for several reasons. By approaching Eurasia as an “indeterminate” region, “intertwined politically, ethno-culturally, demographically, and otherwise,” the authors avoid the pitfall of treating this space as one divided by hard borders and starkly different histories. This approach solidifies the overall argument of the volume that belonging was in both imperial and national contexts “not simply mandated or imposed but also inculcated, in certain circumstances negotiated, and in others, flatly denied.” Additionally, the use of archival sources that highlight the voices of officials, soldiers, teachers, linguists, refugees, and colonizers confers an emotional element to many of the imperial and national projects under discussion. Volume contributors also make it clear that violence was the tool that empires and nations employed predominantly in negotiations of belonging within their respective boundaries. It is likewise encouraging to see how many authors connect Eurasian history with world history, providing useful comparisons with British, French, Polish, Ukrainian, and U.S. cases. Read in conjunction with other edited volumes, including *Companion to Border Studies* (2012) and *Border Encounters* (2013), this work serves as a valuable source for undergraduate and graduate courses on imperial and national belonging in various borderlands. Notwithstanding the prioritization of Russian cases, this volume distinguishes itself from similar works through the consistent quality of its content, especially when demonstrating how the idea of Europe (as both present and imagined) became a standard for the behavior of empires and nations towards their populations. Hopefully, this excellent volume will inspire scholars with analogous interests to produce works that further our understanding of how the process of belonging works in other parts of this region and beyond.

Catalina Hunt
Kenyon College
catalinahunt7@gmail.com
doi:10.1017/nps.2020.77