

primary aim: providing a comprehensive account of Islam's place in the history of the Kurdish movement in Turkey.

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From Peoples into Nations: A History of Eastern Europe, by John Connelly, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2020, 966 pp., \$35 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0691167121.

This is a massive and masterfully written account of the political history of Eastern Europe from the early modern period to the present. Connelly begins the book with bold pushback against much of the current scholarly skepticism of nationalism. The leading trifecta (Ernst Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson) has yielded a generation of historical works to justify such skepticism. The most influential research in this field tells us that national identity is a modern construction, a late 19th-century deception of elite radicals to force people into strict ethnic groups. Tara Zahra even introduced the idea of “national indifference” to strike down the consensus that nationalism was always popular and dominant in history. Connelly responds that although this perspective is not technically wrong, it describes something peripheral and does not apply to the heartlands in Poland, Serbia, or Romania, for example. Although Zahra and many others tried to write about nationalism without adopting nationalist frameworks, Connelly claims that we cannot escape the embrace of nationalism. Rather than avert our gaze, we must stare into the abyss to understand “an ideology of unrivalled force” (787) that answers many whys in Eastern European history.

The sections of *Peoples into Nations* that cover the pre-1919 period are a teleological exploration of the origins of national movements. The author tends to jump through time for comparisons and points of reference. Connelly cleverly threads the needle to say that the historical roots of nations – often beginning with medieval kingdoms – are both a manipulation and a fact that we cannot deny. The existence of Serbian or Bohemian nobles – the *natio* – became the basis for Serbian and Czech nationalism in the 19th century. Political movements and print capitalism, according to Connelly, only served to “spread national ideas and identities that already existed” (798).

As a complement to history, whether legendary or factual, language was the other determinant that led to the rise of nationalism. Connelly highlights Joseph II's centralizing state program to build a unified German-speaking administration in the Austrian Empire that created a situation in which nationalists began to defend themselves from certain extinction or assimilation into Germanism. As peoples of each language and culture faced down their own threats, the fear of disappearance propelled Eastern European nationalist projects out of obscurity.

The Paris Peace Treaties of 1919 constitute Connelly's “big bang” (799), which is when the principle of nationality became the basis upon which states could be formed, and democratic self-government among ethnic units became the rule rather than the exception. This principle had first gained prominence in international politics with the Treaty of Berlin (1878), which effectively granted independence to Serbia, Bulgaria, and Montenegro. The apparent victory of democratization, however, proved to be fleeting in the interwar period as each constitutional regime in the region (with the exception of Czechoslovakia) succumbed to some form of authoritarian government. Rather than succeed at their mission of forming “national” states, several countries became untenable “miniature Habsburg empires” (364), and irredentism and national discontent led to the outbreak of war.

The chapters on the Second World War and the Holocaust are not historiographically original, but they provide a readable narrative in which nationalist conflict takes center stage as the cause of violence, resistance, or collaboration. In the aftermath of the war, communists also adopted nationalism: “They went further than their predecessors in some ways, linking social to ethnic understandings of the people” (792). Nationalism was used to legitimate unpopular regimes, and party leaders adopted its most toxic elements, as seen in the “anti-Zionist” campaign in Poland in 1968.

The end of communism in Eastern Europe was a victory for the “people,” understood in strictly nationalist terms within ethnically homogeneous countries (outside of Yugoslavia, which Connelly treats separately). Many of the most popular books on the region were written with a hopeful, if not gloating, tone that celebrated 1989 as the fulfillment of the promises of 1919. The “end of history” proved that justice and freedom would be victorious in the long run. The rise of illiberal and populist politics in many countries of the region (Poland, Hungary, Czechia, Slovenia, among others) has left those neat bookends in tatters. Democratization perhaps reached its apogee in the early 2000s, but it has fallen into disrepair and faces serious challenges from disinformation and right-leaning radicalization. The final chapter before the conclusion is a biting *feuilleton* that skillfully weaves together the entire historical narrative of the book to make sense of the present political challenges in Eastern Europe.

Because Connelly takes on a huge endeavor, there is no doubt that some readers may be disappointed with certain aspects of the book. The geographical focus is somewhat mercurial, given that it includes some areas of the Balkans, with Bulgaria shifting in and out. Albania gets little more than an honorable mention. The Baltic States are all but ignored, and East Germany joins in toward the end. Undoubtedly Jewish nationalism is an Eastern European phenomenon, but the author devotes little space to the subject. For practical purposes, this volume could be called a history of the West and South Slavs, along with Hungarians and Romanians. Moreover, there is unevenness in the treatment of each case. The author is far more comfortable writing about the complexities of Polish or Czech nationalism than the experiences of Serbs, Bosnians, or Croats – a natural reflection of his extensive research and expertise on the northern half of the region.

I would not recommend this as an undergraduate textbook, but the later chapters on World War II, the Holocaust, and the end of communism would all be appropriate for survey courses. The first half assumes too much prior knowledge, and Connelly’s tendency to jump through time for comparison presents some problems for the unfamiliar reader.

These are minor critiques of a major work that serves as a key synthetic contribution to the historiography of the region and of nationalism more broadly. Ultimately, this book does what the best historians have always done: use the facts of history to build a narrative that supports an argument.

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