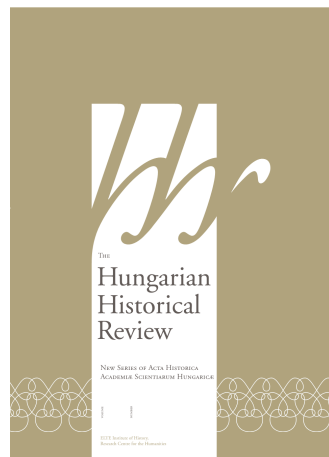


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Nationalizing Empires: Edited by Stefan Berger and Alexei Miller.
(Historical Studies in Eastern Europe and Eurasia) Budapest–New York:
Central European University Press, 2015. vi+691 pp.

Did nations follow on the ruins of empires? When Eric Hobsbawm's *Age of Empire* came out in 1987, the answer seemed clear. Empire meant the culmination of capitalism's global expansion, the apogee of European bourgeois liberalism, which acted out its conflicts and contradictions on the periphery before these conflicts and contradictions plunged the European continent into the extremes of two world wars. Even beyond this Marxist line of interpretation, the notion of empire, applied to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, implied colonies and their exploitation, to the extent that ambitious nation states such as Germany, itself an empire in name, felt the need to acquire distant colonies so as to underpin its self-proclaimed global status. Nationalism, on the contrary, was the most powerful challenge to empires, and in the long run it was victorious, at least from a late twentieth century perspective. The volume edited by Stefan Berger and Alexei Miller, two eminent scholars of Germany's and Russia's modern history, sets out to challenge this dichotomy. It is not the first book to do so, but the scope of its argument is unprecedented. It is based on a number of insightful case studies, predictable ones on the British, French, Spanish, German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Empires, as well as surprising ones on Denmark and Venice. This mere list indicates that the conventional dichotomy of sea and land empires is also being quickly dissolved, with inspiring results.

The main argument of the book can be summed up as follows: in all of the cases under discussion, nation resonated with empire. The two corresponded with each other and were far from mutually exclusive. The imperial context shaped the formation of the core nation (or two core nations in the case of the Habsburg Monarchy) and gave them a lasting imprint. In many of the cases under consideration, the distinction itself between the core nation and its imperial territories cannot easily be drawn. Colonies differed from peripheral provinces only insofar as racial hierarchies were more distinctive in the former, and access to citizenship was graded—with massive consequences for the form of administration and the use of violence, one is tempted to add. All of the chapters focus on political imagination, the discourses of empire and nationalism, and the loyalties they inspired. Some of them equally focus on institutions and governance, and the mere fact that others do not follow suit raises the question

whether, in a comparative perspective, this might be more than a matter of the predilections of the individual authors. The summarizing comments by Alfred J. Rieber on the role of the military and Jörn Leonhard on the crises of empire point in this direction, as does the concluding comment by Dominic Lieven.

Neil Evans spells out the agenda of the volume with regards to the British case. The British Empire, he argues, had a crucial impact on the integration of the British state, which had been formed by the union between England and Scotland in 1707. Had it not been for the common imperial enterprise, common experiences of identity and otherness, common imperial issues (such as the army or the debates on slavery), it would have been even more difficult to accommodate the distinctive regional consciousness of Scotland and Wales, let alone Ireland. Even the debates on women's suffrage were affected by the imperial framework. Michael Broers discusses the imperial dimensions of Napoleonic rule in Europe, which provided a strong model of government for its successors. After 1830, nation and empire came close to merging in France, as Robert Aldrich argues, and Aldrich identifies "parallel dynamisms" (p.144) in the colonization and provincialization of the colonies, which were turned into outposts of Frenchness. Xosé-Manuel Núñez follows a similar line of argument in the Spanish case. He demonstrates that, in the nineteenth century, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines were very much provinces of the liberal Spanish state, though excluded from the benefits of a liberal constitution (p.221). As was the case in Britain, governing an empire provided a strong incentive to mold the regions at home into one. Once the overseas possessions were lost, regionalism at home reemerged, with Catalan nationalism being a case in point.

Stefan Berger argues in a similar vein that German nation-building after 1871 was very much shaped by the common framework of colonialist discourse and even more so by imagining Eastern Europe as Germany's colonial frontier. Intellectual and military elites intertwined notions of *Heimat*, nation, and empire, while the colonial imagination permeated school textbooks, science, and navalist dreams. The imperial imagination in many ways defined the national core. Yet Berger is careful not to overstretch the argument: mass domestic migration and overseas emigration to North America rather than to real or imagined colonies show that economic issues were more relevant to the integration of the new German nation.

Alexei Miller's chapter on Russia makes it clear that the Romanov Empire was far from being an obstacle in the path of emerging Russian nationalism, as has often been argued. On the contrary, nationalist discourse was very much

defined by the notion of an ongoing struggle on the Western periphery between Russianness and Polishness, and later in the nineteenth century by notions of a civilizing mission towards the East. Only the collapse of the Russian Empire, the loss of Poland and the unexpected establishment of a Byelorussian and a Ukrainian Soviet Republic deprived Russian nationalism of one of its major impulses. One wonders whether this argument, convincing as it might be for the 1920s, still holds in the light of current developments in the Ukraine and their Russian repercussions (and vice versa).

Andrea Komlosy interprets the dualist setup of the Habsburg Monarchy as two parallel attempts at Austrian and Hungarian nation-building, one being political and federalist, the other ethnic and centralist, and both ultimately doomed to failure. This might not be entirely novel, but it adds substantially to the overall picture. The chapter would have been even more convincing had it been based on more than comprehensive handbook syntheses and a rather selective use of path-breaking monographs that have reshaped our understanding of the Monarchy over the course of the last two decades. There is no mention of the works by Gary Cohen, Pieter Judson or Jeremy King, to name but a few. Everything Komlosy has to say on Hungary is based on László Kontler's synthesis and Robert Nemes' equally insightful monograph on Budapest. A thorough discussion of Daniel Unowsky's work might have highlighted the lasting cohesive power of monarchical representation until the death of Francis Joseph. Finally, the omission of R. J. W. Evans' seminal works on the making of the Early Modern Habsburg Monarchy results in a surprising failure on Komlosy's part to consider baroque Catholicism and its legacy as a distinct and integrating cultural foundation for Austria-Hungary.

In a way, Komlosy's argument concerning the multinational character of Austrian nation-building is linked to Howard Eissenstat's chapter on the Ottoman Empire. Eissenstat sets out to demonstrate that Ottomanism, Islamism, and Turkism should not be seen as a successive series of distinct attempts to reform the Ottoman Empire. Ottomanism was rather a pragmatic set of shifting reformist ideas which turned more Muslim with the loss of the Balkan provinces. Empire and nation can be seen in the Turkish case as an ideational continuum, where the imperial idea was continually narrowed down to its national elements.

David Laven and Elsa Damien unfold the Venetian expansionist legacy to reveal Italian nationalism and, subsequently, Italian fascism. Thus, they add another facet to the amazing variety of ways in which empire was inscribed into

national discourse. Uffe Østergård follows a different path in his chapter on the forgotten history of the multiethnic Danish state, which ruled large parts of the northern Atlantic before it lost Norway in 1818. With this loss, the previous balance of nations collapsed, and Enlightenment reform discourse spilled over into Danish–German national conflict. Aside from offering an inspiringly novel interpretation of Danish history, this chapter raises substantial questions concerning the entire volume. If Denmark is included, why not Sweden, about which, as Østergård argues, a very similar story could be told? Why not the Netherlands, Belgium or Portugal, one might add? Do not all European states in one way or another have an imperial history? What would the US-American experience add to the picture? Østergård quickly concedes that empire might be a misleading concept and that, in the case of Denmark, one should speak rather of a composite state.

This remark presents a substantial challenge to the entire volume. Empire, as depicted throughout all of the chapters, might indeed well be seen as a specific, or maybe even not so specific version of the Early Modern composite state that had been common throughout Europe for centuries, transferred by some onto a global scale. Seen in this way, empires, as much as nations, were legitimate heirs to the Early Modern state, its accumulation of power, and its changing aspirations for legitimacy. They were defined not so much by their multiethnic nature and even less by colonial possessions, but by their composite nature. Or, as Jean-Frédéric Schaub puts it at the end of his insightful comment, “[a]re we sure we can analytically distinguish national kingdoms from multinational empires?” (p.571). Anyone seeking an answer to questions of this sort will find a wealth of material in this significant volume.

Joachim von Puttkamer