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Review of [Debating nationalism: the global spread of nations] by [Florian Bieber]

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Debating nationalism: The global spread of nations

Florian Bieber

London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. 246 pp. £17.99 (pbk), £49.50 (hbk).

Debating Nationalism provides a succinct and readable overview of recent developments within the field of nationalism studies. Such a short introduction according to the author 'cannot claim to be either comprehensive or groundbreaking' (p. 19). In fact, Florian Bieber basically adopts Michael Billig's argument from *Banal Nationalism*, distinguishing between 'latent' and 'virulent' nationalism, while putting particular emphasis on the mechanisms by which people are included and excluded from the nation.

The book is organized thematically, and all chapters deal with some of the most important scholarly debates on that particular topic. Chapters 2 until 5 provide a brief historical overview, while exploring respectively the origins of nationalism, the spread of nationalism in Europe, decolonization and the nation-building process. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 focus on inclusion and exclusion, treating ethnic conflict, migration and the recent rise of populism. The most original and probably also most contested interpretation can be found in the chapter on populism and the new nationalism of the 2010s, in which he argues—based on worldwide surveys—that there is no 'discernible global increase of nationalist, isolationist tendencies'. However, he admits that nationalism has become more visible, due to the effective mobilization of nationalist feelings by populist parties and politicians such as Donald Trump, Narendra Modi and Marine Le Pen. This can be explained in part because those who before chose to remain silent now feel encouraged to express their 'nationalist or xenophobic views' (pp. 198–202).

The author is a political scientist and historian and an expert on nationalism and ethnic conflict in Yugoslavia and its successor states. As a consequence, the chapters on current issues are more convincing than the somewhat conventional overview of the rise and dissemination of the nation-state from the 18th century onwards. In the first chapters, he even conflates ethnically defined nations and the nation-state as a particular form of statehood based on popular sovereignty, arguing for instance that after the First World War, many new countries in East-Central Europe were—because of their multiethnic makeup—'far from being nation-states in anything but name' (p. 56), thus implicitly taking the nationalist view as a normative starting point. Fortunately, such dubious views are very rare in the rest of the book.

Although the author analyses both 'latent' and 'virulent' forms, the book is titled towards the more 'hot' expressions of nationalism. There is only one short subsection on 'everyday nationalism', while the more virulent aspects of nationalism, such as violent separatist movements, racism and the exclusion of migrants and ethnic minorities are discussed more extensively. Even though he pays much attention to nationalism in the current day world, he does not expand upon the crucial role of sports, popular culture, commercial television and the internet in reconfirming national identities, and maybe even hardening the boundaries between them.

Probably the best aspect of the book is its very didactic tone. Bieber really makes an effort to explain developments and theories to those who are new to the field, and the book will especially be useful to undergraduate students in a variety of disciplines, such as political science, history, nationalism studies and international relations. The text also contains 14 short primary sources, mainly legal texts and speeches by prominent nationalist leaders,

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while a final chapter provides suggestions for further reading. It can be used together with more extensive historical overviews, such as *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism* (2013) or Derek Hastings's more concise and focused *Nationalism in Modern Europe* (2018). For more challenging overviews of the theoretical debates, I would suggest Umut Özkirimli's revised *Theories of Nationalism* (2017), the edited volume *Writing the History of Nationalism* (2019), or the original interpretation of the rise of nations and nationalism in Siniša Malešević's *Grounded Nationalisms* (2019).

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