

Timothy Baycroft and Mark Hewitson, *What is a Nation?: Europe:*

1789-1914. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. 377 pp., £58.00,

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This volume, named after Ernest Renan's famous essay of 1882, revisits Renan's question more than a century later. In so doing, it provides an important synthesis of the vast literature on European nationalism which has emerged from the historical profession. Theoretical frameworks for the study of nationalism and ethnic conflict have largely emerged from historical sociologists like Ernest Gellner, Anthony Smith, Rogers Brubaker and Benedict Anderson, or occasionally from a political scientist like Donald Horowitz. Yet, the study of nationalism occupies a far more important place in history than in any social scientific discipline. The theme of the American Historical Association's 2006 conference, for example, was 'Nations, Nationalism, and National Histories', yet the subject does not even merit disciplinary recognition within the AHA's counterparts in Sociology and Politics. Nonetheless, the stringent emphasis on primary sources in the historical profession has directed attention to particular case studies - often within a restricted time period - at the expense of wider theorising. It is a considerable task to excavate this goldmine of case research in all its multicausal complexity and bring it to bear on wider theoretical paradigms. This book does precisely that. It therefore represents a more grounded, 'theory from below' and seeks to sharpen our conceptual tools for understanding nationalism by questioning the prevailing 'ethnic-civic' dichotomy within the field of nationalism studies. In the process, it aims to convey a sense of the complexity, nonlinearity and contingency which is a hallmark of nationalist processes on the ground. This invariably involves a thoroughgoing assault on the ethnic-civic dichotomy as 'too imprecise and anachronistic to form the basis of an explanatory model' (p. 336).

In addition to an introduction and a substantial conclusion, the book consists of fifteen essays, grouped into four sections, roughly corresponding to identity, regionalism, language and the role of the state. Each section leads off with a more theoretical and comparative piece on the section theme, and is followed by case studies. In truth, however, all essays cover similar theoretical talking points and even the conceptual essays are heavily anchored in one or more cases. In *toto*, they traverse Europe from Scandinavia to Spain, Britain to Russia, and span the breadth of the 1789-1914 period. The authors are generally younger or mid-career scholars with a sound grasp of both theories of nationalism and recent historical scholarship in their respective geographic bailiwicks. They therefore bring a fresh and timely approach.

The essays address a number of important themes. The first, naturally, is the weakness of the ethnic-civic schema. Generally speaking, the authors find that ethnic and civic aspects of nationalism often complemented each other regardless of which aspect came first. Thus the French entertained the notion of active civic participation and popular will. But, as Timothy Baycroft notes, French nationalists - including Republicans - eagerly used 'ethnic' characteristics, with Republican school textbooks tracing French history back to 'our ancestors the Gauls' and Joan of Arc. Oliver Zimmer adds that the ostensibly 'civic' Swiss also made as much as they could of their ascribed, 'natural' characteristics like their Alpine geography and their pre-modern

history of resistance to the Habsburgs. In other supposedly civic settings like Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Spain and Britain, political institutions complemented rather than crowded out genealogical myths of ancestry. The influence of the romantic movement invariably led to a search for roots, as with the Vikings, Goths and 'greater Germans' in Scandinavia, Anglo-Saxons in England and lowland Scotland, and pre-Roman Iberians in Spain. On the other hand, in central and eastern Europe, nationalist idioms - though initially based on culture and *völkish* themes - also incorporated as much 'civic' material as was available, such as Czech industrial pride. Serbia's rapid extension of the franchise in 1877 suggests that those outside western Europe were no less likely to avail themselves of civic mechanisms where circumstances permitted it. Moreover, remarks Maiken Umbach, regions rather than the nation served as repositories of civic traditions in central and eastern Europe. In Germany, a dense network of civic associations included those with both 'ethnic' and 'civic' orientations. Brian Vick adds that German language policy was also often pragmatic, seesawing from assimilation to toleration depending on local circumstance and resistance. Consequently, during a period of ostensibly 'national' linguistic toleration in Prussia in the 1820s, local actors took it upon themselves to complete the assimilation of the (unselfconscious) Sorbs but not the resistant Poles. (p. 160) At other times, policy was more draconian, but unevenly applied if local resistance was effective.

Many of the papers take care to examine the trajectory of citizenship laws, a major focus of Rogers Brubaker's landmark study on France and Germany. These are shown for what they generally were: an unimportant policy area subject to all kinds of practical vagaries and hence a poor litmus test of the character of nationalism. First of all, the foreign-born population of states, even in the industrialised west, was less than 1 percent of the total at the turn of the twentieth century, and typically much less than that. (p. 328) Debate was instead focused upon translating between local and national citizenship laws. In Switzerland, writes Zimmer, resistance to more inclusive citizenship laws came from local communes which mistrusted Swiss migrants and foreign immigrants alike. (pp 115-16) In Germany, states and cities largely determined the vector of citizenship law, and, here again, municipal interests - mainly directed against German domestic migrants - drove policy. (p. 71-4) In both cases, the prime concern was domestic rather than international migration, yet the result seems 'ethnic'. Meanwhile, in 'civic' France, those arguing in favour of a change to *jus sanguinis* were not reactionaries, but modernisers who claimed that this principle was more in keeping with the spirit of the times than that of *jus soli*, an aristocratic holdover. In the end, *jus soli* was retained as much for contingent and pragmatic reasons as anything else.

The book proffers that liberalism was the order of the day across both eastern and western Europe during the long nineteenth century. This is not to deny the advent of social democracy, conservative and confessional politics in the latter part of the century, but these movements generally partook of the liberal framework of politics, as in the Low Countries, where Catholic parties moderated their claims and agreed to work within the secular strictures of liberal constitutions and cultural policies. Yet, as Mark Hewitson writes in his conclusion, liberalism in the nineteenth century meant many things beyond constitutional liberties: popular sovereignty, a shared *lingua franca*, 'progress' and civilisation were at the forefront of the liberal creed. (p. 333) Liberalism in this period was squarely focused on prising apart church and state and winning political freedoms from aristocratic or dynastic interests. It favoured nation over king or Pope, but generally remained noncommittal on questions of national symbolism. This left liberal nationalism protean and nimble, quick to adopt

genealogical and 'natural' symbols where circumstances were favourable. Conservatives and socialists did not deviate widely from these tendencies, and it is a mistake to view cultural politics in this period through post-1945 spectacles.

Could the collection have been improved? The book generally delivers on its aim of foregrounding the multicausal, zigzagging and complex nature of 'real' nationalism. However, having knocked down the ethnic-civic straw man, it is less innovative in proposing an alternative. Most papers seem to fall back on contingency and case-specificity, a stance which - while containing much truth - does not allow us to put the ethnic-civic beast behind us. The low-level theory proposed by Hewitson in his conclusion, based on five sources of conflict, while sound, seems a bit cautious, and prompts us to reach for Occam's razor. In this respect, Oliver Zimmer's fine-grained attempt to prise apart the voluntary-organic dichotomy ('mechanisms') from the various 'resources' at nationalists' disposal (i.e. history, language, geography, institutions) stands out as the only essay tall enough to rise above this parapet. Clearly, further theoretical work remains to be done. That said, Baycroft and Hewitson have produced a superb collection that will certainly make a scholarly impact and help to define the terms of reference for nationalism studies in the coming generation.