

Political Studies Book Note Form

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Andreas Wimmer (2002) *Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic Conflict*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 319, £14.90, ISBN 0 521 01185-X

Please type your review in the box below and return by e-mail to politicalstudies@lse.ac.uk. If you do not have access to email, then send to **Book Notes - *Political Studies*, Department of Government, LSE, Houghton Street, London, WC2A 2AE**. We ask that all book note reviews are limited to a maximum of 250 words.

Andreas Wimmer has written an ambitious book that takes issue with those 'modernists' who claim that nationalism is in decline (or in transition from an 'ethnic' to 'civic' mode) as well as those who view the post-1989 upsurge in ethnic conflict and xenophobic politics as evidence of a return to a 'perennial' ethno-nationalist condition. Instead, he contends, the ethnically-bounded nation is a cardinal principle of modernity - the integrating/excluding mechanism which is an escape-proof fact of our modern world. Drawing upon his anthropological fieldwork and historical research on Mexico, Iraq and Switzerland, Wimmer presents a subtle, theoretically-rich application of his main theses on a) twin-track ethnic closure and b) cultural compromise. The latter notion refers to a pool of shared national meanings and goals by diverse class and status actors. The former idea contends that ethnic closure is intrinsic to a modernity that takes the shape of our nation-state system. Where civil society is weakly developed prior to the emergence of the modern state, or where the state lacks the resources to distribute public goods effectively across all ethnic constituencies (i.e. Iraq or Mexico), ethnicity is politicised at the sub-state level. Conversely, where civil society had deep roots prior to the rise of the state and economic abundance ensures an easing of the conflict for resources, even a multi-ethnic society (i.e. Switzerland) can constitute a successful nation-state. Though Wimmer's analysis might have been enriched by more consideration of the literature on 'post-ethnic' value change in the West, the book deserves to be read by staff and students alike.