

## Book Review

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Andreas Stynen, Maarten Van Ginderachter and Xosé Manoel Núñez Seixas ed., *Emotions and Everyday Nationalism in Modern European History*. Routledge, London and New York, 2020. 224 pp. ISBN 9781032236476

The study of nationalism has of late been extending its explorations downward, from international relations and the state's public sphere into small-scale regional communities and, lately, into the private sphere and even the intimate sphere. 'Affect theory' – the study of unreflected emotional responses to one's social and cultural environment – has made it mark in nationalism studies, and a good example of this trend is the volume under review here.

How did people, actual individuals, actually feel about the nation? Was the collective discourse in public opinion a proper reflection of what people sensed in their own heart of hearts? Even to ask the question is to avert a certain scepticism on that score. The trendy approach of 'national indifference' forecloses that question in its very phraseology. Not unlike modern political distrust of the 'mainstream media', historians are often moved by an ingrained tendency to second-guess the official story and to seek proof that 'it ain't necessarily so'. Media reports of massive, fervent crowds enthusing about the declaration of war in 1914 are now suspected of being, at least in part, propagandistic 'fake news'. And so, in the realm of the emotions, too, there may be an a priori



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tendency to explore this new source of information as a corrective to the established, collective, public frame.

Luckily, the present volume steers clear of such a reductive a priori. What we see here is really an ideological history from below (as the editors' afterword phrases it), dealing with political ideas rather than material living conditions, and realizing that most private testimonies were written by ordinary people for whom politics and the nation were a matter of spontaneous, emotional response rather than professional, expert analysis. When studying the impact of the national ideologies in private ego documents we encounter unreflected rather than analytical responses, and that is where emotions need to be factored into 'everyday nationalism'.

The chapters in this collection are arranged in roughly chronological order, taking the reader from the decades around 1800 to the post-1945 period. Various social groups are represented, from indigent paupers seeking financial support to soldiers. Some articles gravitate towards sociology: the appeals for sustenance analysed by Oddens seem to invoke charitable philanthropy rather than nationality, and Wiktor Marzec, in choosing to concentrate on issues as they presented themselves to workers in late-imperial Russian Poland, finds that these elicited class-defined and economic responses rather than nationality-driven ones. Others shed light on political ideologies like fascism. The testosterone-fuelled raging-bull fervour of Italian irredentists around Fiume/Rijeka (*Arditi*, indeed), well described by Blanck, presents an interesting counterpart to Cărstocea's analysis of the fey cult of the Fallen Warrior in Romanian fascism. Both articles offer powerful testimony that fascism is (as Goya's drawing already realized) one of those nightmare monsters produced by the somnolence of Reason: fundamentally predicated on the need to drown out rational thought and sober judgement, and replacing cerebral responses by hormonal ones. Against this background, the study of lyrical, poetic material (Kivimäki's

analysis of verse written by Finnish front-line soldiers) stands out as an intriguing internalization of the national affect long propagated by Finnish national romanticism and now suffusing even the very capillaries of the body politic. The chicken-and-egg question that the editors ask themselves (is the nation emotionalized, or are emotions nationalized?) here comes to a fine point. My own overriding impression was how easy the two 'click', how very close the family relationship between chicken and egg is. One would be hard-put to find poetry by Liberals expressing love and adoration of market forces. And even the literature of communism is Brechtian, epic, stern, un-lyrical.

How private emotions relate to the larger, public ideology – through what conduits individual affect and political agenda are communicating vessels: that comes into focus as an intriguing and complex field of research. One such conduit is that of pedagogics: sensitizing developing personalities to the allure of the nation. Josephine Hoegaerts studies testimonies from Flemish school classrooms; Martina Niedhammer looks at the lyrical, communitarian appeal of Mistral's Occitan dictionary - a case that could be applied to other cases, e.g. Dinneen's Gaelic dictionary and its widely-ramifying appeal to Gaelic revivalists in Ireland. Such further study could fruitfully factor in how Mistral and Dinneen transformed an earlier, philological, bardic and troubadour-oriented interest into a contemporary, rusticist, peasantry-oriented one, moving from antiquarianism to communitarianism.

The overall impression I took away from this rich volume is how very successful nationalism has been in winning individual hearts and minds. Evidence that in their private emotions people dissociated themselves from the public discourse of national loyalty is comparatively weak, and in many cases we can see that the collective public manifestations of national agendas could channel and collectivize, or cultivate, individually-held emotive support. Nationalism, in other words, is an

emotive ideology; something to ponder, since it may help to explain both its thin-centeredness and its powerful agency.

As a historian, I particularly liked Moreono Almendral's opening essay on ego-documents and the discourse of national character. But here and in this entire volume, I found one term missing which sharply focuses the historical and ideological relationship between affect and the nation. It is 'Romanticism'. As early as 1813, the Prussian general Neidhart von Gneisenau told his king Friedrich Wilhelm III that 'the security of the throne is founded on poetry'. From the very beginning of modern nationalism, Romanticism has been its powerful ambience and amplifier. Glorifying the agency of subjectivity; presenting natural human affects such as filial piety, parental love and homesickness as anthropological indicators that love of the fatherland is not a civic duty but a natural human instinct; that inspiration and enthusiasm tell us higher truths than rational cogitation; that fervour and passion are the heroic mode of proper citizenship; that the nation is best expressed in its native language and in poetry. All that legacy, traced in the *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe*, suffuses the case studies assembled here; but the concept itself is strangely overlooked. In studying how affects and emotions went public and meshed with politics, surely Romanticism was the name of the game, and mentality history should not be neglected.

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