

BOOK REVIEW

Derek HASTINGS, *Nationalism in Modern Europe: Politics, Identity, and Belonging since the French Revolution*
(London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2018)

Ibrahim SAYLAN

Asst. Prof. Dr., Dokuz Eylul University, Department of International Relations

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E-mail : bilgi@uidergisi.com.tr

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Nationalism in Modern Europe: Politics, Identity, and Belonging since the French Revolution

Derek HASTINGS

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İbrahim SAYLAN

Asst. Prof. Dr., Dokuz Eylül University, Department of International Relations, İzmir

E-mail: ibrahim.saylan@deu.edu.tr

Orcid No: 0000-0002-7395-9963

Although nationalism has played a profound role in shaping modern European history, few works have been devoted exclusively to the history of nationalism in Europe. As an historian of modern Europe, Derek Hastings in *Nationalism in Modern Europe – Politics, Identity, and Belonging since the French Revolution* seeks to fill this gap, by exploring historical manifestations of nationalism in the whole continent from the French Revolution to Brexit. While specifying the scope and methodology of his work in comparison with similar books by other historians like Oliver Zimmer's *Nationalism in Europe, 1890-1940* and Timothy Baycroft's *Nationalism in Europe, 1789-1945* both of which thematically and analytically focus on nationalism,¹ Hastings clearly states that he aims to accomplish a chronological, comprehensive and descriptive narration of nationalism (p. 2 and note 5 in p. 263).

Hastings's objective explains his methodological preference which is also in tune with his theoretical approach to nationalism. Unlike many social scientists and historians who contributed to the literature of nationalism, Hastings is reluctant to advance a general theory of nationalism. Concerned with the complexities and varieties of nationalism, he suggests that nationalism as an historical subject can be best understood by taking into account the specific temporal and geographical contexts (p. 2). Although many theories of nationalism acknowledge the significance of the historical context, Hastings considers the narrative method more appropriate for historical study. Accordingly, a narrative account does not only inform the reader about the course of historical developments as framed by historians but also shows the ways in which historical personalities envisioned their actions. While Hastings has a specifically defined objective, he commences the book with a necessary, although brief, theoretical discussion in the introductory chapter. As his periodization for the history of nationalism starts with the French Revolution reveals, Hastings endorses the modernist approach to nationalism, which sees both nationalism and nations as modern creations. Selective references to Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson provide theoretical guidance for Hastings's work. However, without referring much, Hastings seems to be greatly influenced by John Breuilly as well, according to whom nationalism combines ideas, movements, and sentiments. It is true that Hastings disagrees with Breuilly, since the latter puts forward a general theory of nationalism. Nevertheless, located

¹ Oliver Zimmer, *Nationalism in Europe 1890-1940*, Houndmills, Red Globe Press, 2003; Timothy Baycroft, *Nationalism in Europe 1789-1940*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1998.

within the broader context of modern European political history, Hastings' descriptive narrative still effectively makes use of Breuilly's three components of nationalism. While dealing with the emergence and development of nationalist ideas and movements, Hastings assigns personalities, specifically political elites and intellectuals the leading role in the creation, dissemination and institutionalization of nationalist ideas. In addition to that, since nationalism is based on a mutual belief in national community, Hastings is engaged with both the construction of emotionally charged national identities and their interaction with other markers of identity and belonging, specifically religion and gender.

Hastings largely achieves his objective. In eight chapters, he competently summarizes the intellectual roots of nationalism from Rousseau to Herder and Fichte. Social Darwinism and Racism, which served as an intellectual pretext for imperialist expansion of European powers in the second half of the 19th century, shed light on the radicalization of nationalism and national belonging. Hastings reveals the ways in which imperial structures needed to articulate nationalist symbols, festivities, monuments in order to reproduce dynastic legitimacy amidst their gradual erosion in the 19th century, as exemplified by the historical event that the French king Louis Philippe assumed the throne as 'the citizen king' (p. 63). The volume is also able to successfully reflect a mostly conflictual relationship between the liberal and romantic interpretations of nationalism in the various countries of 19th century Europe. Hastings explores the roots of the national socialist ideology in the *fin-de-siecle* Habsburg territories and Germany. While competently portraying the dynamic interplay between national, religious and gender identities during the Italian and German unifications in Chapter 4, he rightfully points to World War I as a turning point in terms of national identities which subsequently have been systematically enhanced with the memorialization of war fought for the 'sacralized nations' (p. 161). Young German students' war letters make an excellent choice to illustrate the role of sentiments in nationalist mobilization (pp. 145-147). After covering nationalist tensions during the Cold War and violent ethnic strife in the 1990s, Hastings's narrative journey of nationalism ends with a postscript, including several generalizations about nationalism in the light of its historical manifestations since 1789 and the author's concerns about the future of Western democracies in the face of rising 'populist nationalism'.

This book is not the first of its kind. Nevertheless, with its narrative method it is the most comprehensive in terms of its broad geographical and temporal sweep. It covers the whole modern period, starting from the French Revolution until the very present time. Geographically, it covers the whole Europe. Obviously, this is not a book for specialists but intended primarily for undergraduate students and interested lay readers. Relying on primary and secondary sources, but only in English, it is enriched with a long list of illustrations such as figures and maps, and excerpts from political thinkers and nationalist leaders. In addition to the select bibliography, it includes 66 endnotes which provide detailed knowledge about the major contributions to the literature of nationalism from various social sciences and humanities disciplines.

Despite its strengths, Hastings's book is impeded by several critical drawbacks. First of all, although the author acknowledges the significance of broader social, political and cultural processes as well as scientific-technological developments in the historical development of nationalism, his narrative method limits the extent to which these wider processes are incorporated in the text. Thus, despite his strong emphasis on the context, Hastings seems to have overlooked the fact that contexts for historical manifestations of nationalism are shaped by the interactions of those processes with nationalism as well as various factors of agency and contingency. A second weakness relates to theory

in that the way Hastings engages theories of nationalism to lay the groundwork for his narrative journey remains unelaborated and contains controversial inferences. For example, while broadly drawing on the modernist scholarship on nationalism he also presents modernism as an approach which can be easily accommodated within ethnosymbolism (p. 6). Furthermore, he adopts Kohn's old fashioned civic-ethnic distinction but does not elaborate on the merits of employing such binary oppositions (p. 7-8). Nevertheless, it can be considered that retaining such a distinction is functional for many scholars in order to distinguish liberal nationalism from other interpretations. Another critical drawback of the book is the exclusion of social class from the narrative even though class has been just as significant an identity marker as religion and gender. The main upshot of this exclusion is that it impedes a proper appreciation of the interplay of communism and socialism with nationalism. Finally, the book contains two typos which should be corrected as Wilhelm I instead of Wilhelm II (p. 105), and *autunno caldo* instead of *autumno caldo* (p. 221).

These drawbacks aside, Hastings' volume still provides a valuable and comprehensive chronological account of the history of nationalism in modern Europe. Undergraduate students of social sciences and history will benefit from it as an introductory text, both in courses on the history of nationalism and in European political history. It can also provide a useful empirical grounding for analytical studies of nationalism.