Introduction

I

Europe was the birthplace of the nation-state and modern nationalism at the end of the eighteenth century, and it was supposed to be their graveyard at the end of the twentieth. If we take 1792, when war and nationhood were first expressly linked and mutually energized on the battlefield of Valmy,\(^1\) as symbolizing their birth, we might take 1992 as symbolizing their anticipated death, or at least a decisive moment in their expected transcendence. Chosen by Jacques Delors as the target date for the completion of the ambitious program of the Single European Act, “1992” came to stand for the abolition of national frontiers within Europe; for the free movement of persons as well as goods and capital; for the emergence of a European citizenship; and – with the signing of the Treaty of Maastricht in 1991 – for the prospect of a common European currency, defense, and foreign policy. Just as Europe took the lead in inventing (and propagating) nationhood and nationalism, so now it would take the lead in transcending them; and “1992” served as a resonant symbol of that anticipated transcendence.

Deeper and more general forces, too, were seen as undermining the nation-state and rendering nationalism obsolete. Nationalism, discredited by the “Thirty Years War” of the first half of the century, seemed to have been dissolved in Western Europe by the subsequent thirty years of prosperity – “les trentes glorieuses,” as they are called in France. Moreover, the organization of political space along national

\(^1\) On September 20, 1792, at Valmy, in northeastern France, the ragtag French army, under fire from the much better trained and better equipped Prussian infantry, held its ground to the revolutionary battle-cry of “Vive la Nation.” This led Goethe, who was present at the battle, to declare – notwithstanding the immediate military insignificance of the battle – that “this date and place mark a new epoch in world history.” See François Furet and Denis Richet, La Révolution française (Paris: Hachette, 1965), p. 185; Albert Soboul, “De l’Ancien Régime à l’Empire: problème national et réalités sociales,” L’Information historique (1960), 58.
lines seemed increasingly ill-matched to social, economic, and cultural realities. The nation-state was seen as simultaneously too small and too large: too small to serve as an effective unit of coordination in an increasingly internationalized world, too large and remote to be a plausible and legitimate unit of identification. Global financial integration, dense global networks of trade and migration, a global communications infrastructure purveying an incipient global mass culture, the global reach of transnational corporations, the border-spanning jurisdictions of a host of other transnational organizations, and the inherently transnational nature of terrorism, drug trafficking, nuclear weaponry, and ecological problems all reinforced the conviction that the world was moving beyond the nation-state. The drive toward institutionalized supranationality symbolized by “1992” may have been unparalleled outside Europe. But since underlying forces were seen as working in the same direction elsewhere, an incipient post-national Europe was seen as showing the rest of the world “the image of its own future.”

The future displayed recently by Europe to the world, however, looks distressingly like the past. The first half of the 1990s has seen not the anticipated eclipse but the spectacular revival and rebirth of the nation-state and the national idea in Europe. “1992” was rudely preempted by 1991, when war, once again entwined with powerfully mobilizing myths of nationhood, broke out in Europe. Other developments, too, have conspired to chaste the heralds of supranationality and to place the scheduled transcendence of nationalism and the nation-state on hold. Not only was “Europhoria” shattered by the unforeseen resistance to the Maastricht treaty, by the currency crisis of 1992–93, and by the ignominious failure of a common European response to the Yugoslav crisis. Not only has immigration sparked a major revival of nationalist rhetoric in most European countries. Not only has German unification in the heart of the continent—unification predicated on a conception of state-transcending nationhood—engendered concern about a revival of German nationalism. Most important, the spectacular reconfiguration of polithical space along national lines in Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia has suggested that far from moving beyond the nation-state, history—European history at least—was moving back to the nation-state. The “short twentieth century” seems to be ending much as it had begun, with Europe entering not a post-national but a post-multinational era through the wholesale nationalization of previously multinational political space.

Yet currently faddish sweeping pronouncements about the resurgence and ubiquity of nationalism, like earlier sweeping declarations of its demise and obsolescence, obscure more than they reveal. Rather than engage in an unproductive debate about nationalism and the nation-state in general, this book grapples with the “actually existing nationalisms” of a particular—and particularly volatile—region. The region can be roughly defined as the vast and variegated swath of Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia that (along with parts of the Middle East and North Africa) was occupied in the nineteenth century by the Habsburg, Ottoman, and Romanov Empires. Their loosely integrated, polyethnic, polyreligious, and polylinguistic realms sprawled eastward and southward from the zone of more compact, consolidated, integrated states of Northern and Western Europe. As the category “nation” diffused eastward in the second half of the nineteenth century as a salient “principle of vision and division” of the social world, to use Pierre Bourdieu’s phrase, these imperial realms were increasingly perceived, experienced, and criticized as specifically multinatinal rather than simply polyethnic, polyreligious, and polylinguistic, and the “principle of nationality” — the conception of states as the states of and for particular nations—became the prime lever for reimagining and reorganizing political space.

Beginning with the gradual erosion of Ottoman rule in the Balkans in the nineteenth century, but occurring mainly in a concentrated burst of state-creation in the aftermath of World War I, the great multinational land empires were reorganized along ostensibly national lines. This massive reorganization of political space, to be sure, remained incomplete: the Soviet Union was reconstituted, largely within the frame of the Romanov territories, as an expressly multinational state; and Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, although constituted as national states, that is, as states of and for putative trunoe “South Slav” and Sluwe Czechoslovak nations respectively, came increasingly to be understood and experienced as multilingual and binational, respectively. Today, however, with the breakup of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia, the last of the region’s avowedly multinational states have disappeared. Everywhere, political authority has been reconfigured along putatively national lines.

Yet nationalism remains central to politics in and among the newly created nation-states, just as it remained central to politics in and among the newly created (or enlarged) nation-states that issued from the post-World War I settlement. Far from “solving” the region’s national question, the most recent nationalizing reconfiguration of political space,
like its early twentieth-century analog, has only reframed the national question, recast it in a new form. It is this reframing of nationalism that I explore in this book.

II

Nationalism has been both cause and effect of the great reorganizations of political space that framed the “short twentieth century” in Central and Eastern Europe. But the forms of nationalism that have resulted from the nationalization of political space are different from — and less familiar than — those that helped engender it. The nationalist movements that preceded and (in conjunction with a variety of other factors) produced the redrawing of political boundaries have been intensively studied. By contrast, the nationalisms that (again in conjunction with a variety of other factors) were produced by this redrawing of political boundaries have received much less attention. This book addresses the distinctive forms and dynamics of these latter nationalisms, those that have emerged in the wake of the nationalization of political space.

These nationalisms are interlocking and interactive, bound together in a single relational nexus. This can be characterized on first approximation as a triad linking national minorities, the newly nationalizing states in which they live, and the external national “homelands” to which they belong, or can be construed as belonging, by ethnocultural affinity though not by legal citizenship. This triadic nexus involves three distinct and mutually antagonistic nationalisms. The first are the “nationalizing” nationalisms of newly independent (or newly reconfigured) states. Nationalizing nationalisms involve claims made in the name of a “core nation” or nationality, defined in ethnocultural terms, and sharply distinguished from the citizenry as a whole. The core nation is understood as the legitimate “owner” of the state, which is conceived as the state of and for the core nation. Despite having “its own” state, however, the core nation is conceived as being in a weak cultural, economic, or demographic position within the state. This weak position — seen as a legacy of discrimination against the nation before it attained independence — is held to justify the “remedial” or “compensatory” project of using state power to promote the specific (and previously inadequately served) interests of the core nation.

Directly challenging these “nationalizing” nationalisms are the transborder nationalisms of what I call “external national homelands.” Homeland nationalisms assert states’ right — indeed their obligation — to monitor the condition, promote the welfare, support the activities and institutions, assert the rights, and protect the interests of “their” ethno-national kin in other states. Such claims are typically made when the ethnonational kin in question are seen as threatened by the nationalizing (and thereby, from the point of view of the ethnonational kin, de-nationalizing) policies and practices of the state in which they live. Homeland nationalisms thus arise in direct opposition to and in dynamic interaction with nationalizing nationalisms. Against nationalizing states’ characteristic assertion that the status of minorities is a strictly internal matter, “homeland” states claim that their rights and responsibilities vis-à-vis ethnonational kin transcend the boundaries of territory and citizenship. “Homeland,” in this sense, is a political, not an ethnographic category. A state becomes an external national “homeland” when cultural or political elites construe certain residents and citizens of other states as co-nationals, as fellow members of a single transborder nation, and when they assert that this shared nationhood makes the state responsible, in some sense, not only for its own citizens but also for ethnic co-nationals who live in other states and possess other citizenships.

Caught between two mutually antagonistic nationalisms — those of the nationalizing states in which they live and those of the external national homelands to which they belong by ethnonational affinity though not by legal citizenship — are the national minorities. They have their own nationalism: they too make claims on the grounds of their nationality. Indeed it is such claims that make them a national minority. “National minority,” like “external national homeland” or “nationalizing state,” designates a political stance, not an ethnodemographic fact. Minority
were linked by shared (or in the case of Macedonians, putatively shared) ethnic nationality to equally irredentist Bulgaria. Some 6 or 7 million Ukrainians and Belarusians in the eastern borderlands of nationalizing Poland were linked to larger co-ethnic populations in the Soviet Union who possessed their own nominally sovereign (and in the 1920s, culturally quite autonomous) “national states” in the Soviet federal scheme.

The post-Communist reorganization of political space has had similar consequences. Again, tens of millions of people became residents and citizens of new states conceived as “belonging to” an ethnic nationality other than their own. Most dramatically, some 25 million ethnic Russians have been transformed, by a drastic shrinkage of political space, from privileged national group, culturally and politically at home throughout the Soviet Union, into minorities of precarious status, disputed membership, and uncertain identity in a host of incipient non-Russian nation-states. But many other groups in the region – including large numbers of Hungarians, Albanians, Serbs, Turks, and Armenians – found themselves similarly “mismatched,” attached by formal citizenship to one state (in most cases a new – and nationalizing – state) yet by ethnonational affinity to another.

III

This is a book of essays, not a monograph. The essays are linked by a common concern with the recasting of nationalist politics in post-Communist Europe and Eurasia, but they approach this subject from a number of distinct angles. The book is in two parts. My theoretical argument is developed in most sustained fashion in the first part. The opening chapter argues that the upsurge in nationalism should not lead us to reify nations. Nationalism can and should be understood without invoking “nations” as substantial entities. Instead of focusing on nations as real groups, we should focus on nationhood and nationness, on “nation” as practical category, institutionalized form, and contingent event. “Nation” is a category of practice, not (in the first instance) a category of analysis. To understand nationalism, we have to understand the practical uses of the category “nation,” the ways it can come to structure perception, to inform thought and experience, to organize discourse and political action.

Chapter 2 takes up this challenge in relation to the Soviet Union and its successor states. Drawing on “new institutionalist” sociology, it analyzes the unique Soviet system of institutionalized multinationality and its unintended political consequences. The Soviet regime repressed

---

1 For an overview, see Milton Esman, “The Chinese Diaspora in Southeast Asia,” in Gabriel Sheffer, ed., Modern Diasporas in International Politics (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1986).
nationalism, of course. But this does not mean (as is often assumed) that it repressed nationhood and nationality. Quite the contrary: in fact the regime went to remarkable lengths, long before glasnost and perestroika, to institutionalize both territorial nationhood and ethnocultural nationality as basic cognitive and social categories. Once political space began to expand under Gorbachev, these categories quickly came to structure political perception, inform political rhetoric, and organize political action. They made claims to national autonomy, sovereignty, and secession conceivable, plausible, and ultimately compelling. And they continue to orient political understanding and political action in Soviet successor states today.

Chapter 3 develops a dynamic and relational approach to nationalism in post-Communist Europe and the former Soviet Union, focusing on the potentially explosive interplay, sketched above, between national minorities, the newly nationalizing states in which they live, and the external national “homelands” to which they belong by ethnocultural affinity though not by legal citizenship. National minority, nationalizing state, and external national homeland are bound together in a single relational nexus, linked by continuous mutual monitoring and interaction. Moreover, the three “elements” in the triadic relation are themselves not fixed entities but fields of differentiated and competing positions, arenas of struggle among competing stances. The triadic relation between these three “elements” is therefore a relation between relational fields, as it were; this is part of what makes it unstable and potentially explosive. This chapter illustrates the dynamics of the triadic relational nexus with a sustained discussion of the breakup of Yugoslavia.

The three essays comprising Part II develop historical and comparative perspectives on the national question in the “New Europe.” They take as their point of departure a basic structural analogy between the interwar period and the present. Then, as now, a set of new states, conceived as nation-states, arose from the rubble of multinational empires. Then too the boundaries between states and nations did not coincide. Then too states with ethnic kin living as minorities in neighboring states presented themselves as the “homelands” of those minorities and sought to “protect” (and often to incorporate) them. Then too an elaborate international machinery was set up to monitor and protect the rights of national minorities. In the interwar period, national tensions contributed significantly to the outbreak of war. Without making prognoses, the historically informed chapters in Part II bring the past to bear on the present, focusing on key aspects of the national question today that have striking parallels in the interwar period.

The literature on nationalism has focused on state-seeking nationalisms, neglecting the “nationalizing” nationalisms of existing states. Chapter 4 reverses the emphasis, addressing what I call “nationalizing states.” These are states that are conceived by their dominant elites as nation-states, as the states of and for particular ethnocultural nations, yet as “incomplete” or “unrealized” nation-states, as insufficiently “national” in a variety of senses. To remedy this defect, and to compensate for perceived past discrimination, nationalizing elites urge and undertake action to promote the language, culture, demographic preponderance, economic flourishing, or political hegemony of the core ethnocultural nation. The new states of post-Communist Eurasia, like the new states of interwar Europe, can usefully be conceptualized as nationalizing states in this sense, although there is of course great variation among states (and even within states: over time, across regions, among political parties, between government agencies) in the intensity and modalities of nationalizing policies and practices. This chapter analyzes one particular nationalizing state—interwar Poland—in detail in order to work out an analytical vocabulary for the comparative analysis of contemporary nationalizing nationalisms.

Chapter 5 takes as its point of departure the striking—and unsettling—similarities between Weimar Germany and post-Soviet Russia. These include loss of territory; a “humiliating” loss of status and standing as a Great Power; the retention of preponderant economic and military power vis-à-vis a neighboring zone of incipient and extremely weak states; deep economic crisis; incipient, fragile, and only weakly legitimate democratic institutions; and concerted mobilization by the radically nationalist extreme right. This chapter focuses on one further similarity: on the presence of millions of aggrieved and vulnerable co-ethnics in neighboring nationalizing states, more precisely on the responses to their predicament in Weimar Germany and contemporary Russia. I conceptualize those responses as variants of a distinctive form of nationalism, oriented to noncitizen co-ethnics in other states. The chapter probes the homeland nationalism of Weimar Germany in order to gain analytical leverage and comparative perspective on the homeland nationalism that has become so salient in post-Soviet Russia.

The final chapter analyzes post-imperial migrations of ethnic unmixing in historical and comparative perspective. Political reconfiguration always has important consequences for migration. This is true both for the expansion and for the contraction of political space. The expansion of political space—for example through the creation of empire—regularly induces large-scale migrations. By creating a political roof over a large multiethnic population, empires often promote the mixing of
peoples. Much of the world’s ethnic heterogeneity – and many of its severest conflicts – can be traced to movements of peoples under imperial regimes. But if empires tend to promote the mixing of peoples through migration, the shrinkage of political space in their aftermaths tends to promote unmixing. This chapter examines the post-Soviet reflux of ethnic Russians to Russia in the light of the migrations of other once-dominant “new minorities” engendered by transitions from multinational empire to incipient nation-states: Balkan Muslims during and after the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, Hungarians after the collapse of the Habsburg Empire, and Germans after the collapse of the Habsburg Empire and the German Kaiserreich.

IV

This book is not about the resurgence of nationalism. Nationalism is not a “force” to be measured as resurgent or receding. It is a heterogeneous set of “nation”-oriented idioms, practices, and possibilities that are continuously available or “endemic” in modern cultural and political life.6 “Nation” is so central, and protean, a category of modern political and cultural thought, discourse, and practice that it is hard indeed to imagine a world without nationalism. But precisely because nationalism is so protean and polymorphous, it makes little sense to ask how strong nationalism is, or whether it is receding or advancing.

My concern in this book is not with the resurgence but with the reframing of nationalism, not with how much nationalism there is but with what kind, not with the strength but with the characteristic structure and style of nationalist politics in post-Communist Europe and Eurasia. These old–new nationalisms, while strikingly similar in some respects to those of interwar Central and Eastern Europe, differ sharply from the state-seeking and nation-building nationalisms on which most theories of nationalism have been built. To attend seriously to the distinctive forms, dynamics, and consequences of these old–new nationalisms will be a key challenge for the study of nationalism in the next decade. This book is offered as a preliminary step toward meeting that challenge.

---

6 I place “nation” in quotation marks to signal that I am talking about practices and discourses oriented to a putative nation, or invoking the category nation, and to refrain from treating the putative nation of nationalist practice and discourse as a real entity, a substantial collectivity. See Craig Calhoun, “Nationalism and Ethnicity,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 19 (1993); Katherine Verdery, “Whither ‘Nation’ and ‘Nationalism’?,” *Daedalus* 122, no. 3 (Summer 1993); and Chapters 1-3 below.