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European National Identities: Elements, Transitions, Conflicts edited by Roland Vogt, Wayne Cristaudo and Andreas Leutzschs

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Vogt, Roland, Wayne Cristaudo, and Andreas Leutzsch, eds. *European National Identities: Elements, Transitions, Conflicts*. New Brunswick: Transaction, 2014. xii+ 346 pages. Hardcover, \$54.95.

In the current climate it is perhaps difficult for many people to conceive of the notion of national identity in Europe. In recent years it has been Europe's divisions and differences—not its uniformity—that has garnered the most attention from scholars and the general public. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, European nation states have been riven by numerous internal challenges including a heightened emphasis on regionalism evident in the emergence of popular separatist movements in countries like Spain, Belgium, and, most recently, the United Kingdom. In many ways, the 2014 referendum for Scottish independence might be seen as just another piece of evidence to support the view that national identities in Europe are actually becoming more and more fragmented along regional lines. Furthermore, mass-immigration into Europe during the post-colonial era and the resultant multiculturalism has only compounded existing divisions. Yet, despite these growing challenges to the view of European nationhood, political scientists Roland Vogt, Wayne Cristaudo, and Andreas Leutzsch still see value in exploring what they call Europe's "Cultural Grammar" (p. 7). Their collection of essays, *European National Identities: Elements, Transitions, Conflicts* argues that, while no European state is mono-national in that its various national identities are constantly evolving, it is still possible to detect key elements of nationality in Europe that can provide insights into the historical nature of European state formation and help scholars comprehend current European conflicts.

Two major themes are interwoven within the pages of this work: the incessant fluidity of European national identities and the centrality of Christianity in shaping and defining Europeans' conception of themselves. In the first instance, most of the contributors to this edition demonstrate the ways in which, over time, national identities have been repeatedly disputed and reconstituted. For the editors, there is no such thing as a single European identity; rather, they effectively demonstrate that each European nation consists of multiple national identities that are ever-changing. For instance, Cristaudo touts the existence of two Britains - one Old and one New. Old Britain, he suggests, is predominantly "white [and] nostalgic for empire" (p. 32), while New Britain is defined by multiculturalism and multi-nationalism. According to Vogt, the same image is largely true today of Belgium, which has become deeply divided along linguistic lines. For Arie Amaya-Akkermans, the source of division in Dutch society has been between those who maintain a traditional cultural emphasis on tolerance, and increasingly common backlashes by those speaking out against large-scale immigration and Islamization. These case studies are representative of the kind of nationalistic schizophrenia that has come to characterize the experiences of many European nation states.

However, in spite of the inherent challenges in identifying monolithic qualities of European nation states, Vogt argues that there are common elements of a shared European identity. Most important of all, Vogt says, there is Christianity. "Christianity," he claims, "is not a major theme of European identities because of the piety or religious observance of Europeans. Rather, it is a major theme of European identities because [it] is at the root of much of European philosophy, European values...beliefs...institutions...as well as politics and state affairs" (p. 314). Regardless of the denominational divide or gradual shifts toward secularism in some circles, Vogt contends that Christianity has always been part of the story for European nation-building. It was, after all, as a consequence of religious war that the European nation-state model was born in 1648 at Westphalia. He explains that conflicts between Christianity and

Islam created, for many Europeans, an identifiable ‘other’ through which they could distinguish themselves. Even secularism and backlashes against Christianity, he says, gradually gave rise to a “culture of criticism” (p. 316), definitive of much of the eighteenth and nineteenth century European experience. Although extremely diverse, these varying manifestations of Christianity have, Vogt maintains, contributed to a degree of unity among the extremely heterogeneous peoples of Europe.

It is when Europe compares itself to the outside world, though, that the most glaring features of European identity begin to come into focus. An adherence to democracy, social welfare, collective security, and shared historical recollections of the two devastating World Wars, all tend to serve as pillars of twenty-first century Europeanism. Although, Europe is still largely dominated by regional and national affiliations, the editors maintain that Europeans have become more aware of their own tradition and heritage in recent years. One explanation for this lies in the increased presence of immigrants making their way into Europe from around the world. The prevalence of what Denis Meyer refers to in his chapter as the “visible minority” (p. 62) has only heightened the relevance of questions of identity, and has contributed to the forging of new European identities in the twenty-first century.

There is no question that the subject of identity, particularly in today’s political climate, remains extremely relevant to the European discourse. As such, the editors, with this well-written book, are to be commended for keeping the conversation alive and well. However, it should be said that there are some curious omissions from this study. It is not entirely clear why some countries were included and others ignored. Why did the former territories of Yugoslavia warrant two chapters, whereas the likes of Switzerland and Ireland remained almost entirely ignored? Furthermore, given its large size and recent unrest, an examination of how the Ukraine and its people have come to view themselves in the wake of renewed confrontations with Russia, would have made for a valuable addition to this inquiry. Regardless, *European National Identities* covers a huge expanse of geographical territory and outlines a wide-array of historical and social trends. It is accessible to both scholars and the general reader. Due to its interdisciplinary nature, it is relevant to historians and social scientists alike, and this well-scripted and lively book remains a valuable contribution to students of European studies.

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