

Western Europe

ANDREW MORAVCSIK

Eurowhiteness: Culture, Empire, and Race in the European Project

BY HANS KUNDNANI. Hurst, 2023, 248 pp.

Kundnani, a noted commentator on European affairs, recently decided that he no longer believes in the EU. He turned on Brussels because he feels the EU espouses a type of regional nationalism that defines itself against the “other,” actively seeking to exclude (or convert) all those who are not Catholic, Christian, or white. The author does not explain why this supposedly racist and religiously intolerant form of regional nationalism should be viewed as the primary motivating force underlying European integration, a claim for which he provides next to no empirical evidence or scholarly backing—beyond the obvious fact that Europe limits immigration. Yet the book remains instructive because, as with so many polemics, a flawed central premise hints at some important truths. To survive in an interdependent world, any wealthy polity, especially a democratic welfare state, must necessarily regulate flows of goods, finance, and people in its own interest—even if its inhabitants are sincere cosmopolitans. And Kundnani is right that some Europeans—although never a majority and now vanishingly few—cling to the misguided idealist belief that the EU should be hailed as a “universal model” that can eradicate genocide, war, colonialism, human rights abuse, and other global problems. This

book remains a useful counterpoint to such complacency by showing how the world’s most peaceful, egalitarian, green, and increasingly diverse continent is still far from utopia.

National Questions: Theoretical Reflections on Nations and Nationalism in Eastern Europe

BY ALEXANDER MOTYL.
ibidem-Verlag, 2022, 312 pp.

Motyl, an eminent scholar of nationalism and central Europe, has of late established himself as a valuable analyst of the war in Ukraine. This book assembles some of his most influential essays on the role of nationalism, particularly in eastern Europe. In one essay, he argues with reason and rigor why Russian President Vladimir Putin’s regime might best be described as “fascist.” In another, he discusses the beliefs and rhetoric of Ukrainian nationalists before the 2022 invasion, which were troubling for their exclusionary character. Elsewhere, he analyzes the memory of the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin’s deliberate and genocidal starvation of millions of Ukrainians in 1932–33, known today as the Holodomor. An engaging essay asks why New Yorkers tolerate the existence of a Soviet-themed bar called КГВ in the East Village, whereas the existence of a bar named after the SS—the infamous Nazi paramilitary organization—would surely elicit howls of protest; he reaches the provocative conclusion that the first helps preserve the myth that the second is historically unique. Motyl’s essays are engaged scholarship at its best, with deep intelligence wedded to great concern for the concrete problems of global politics.

Southern Europe in the Age of Revolution

BY MAURIZIO ISABELLA. Princeton University Press, 2023, 704 pp.

From the American Revolution to the current war in Ukraine, a fundamental force in world politics has been revolutionary nationalism. This path-breaking book examines revolutions in southern Europe—Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and elsewhere—in the 1820s. Revolutions are often imagined as spontaneous popular upheavals, but these uprisings began with local elites dissatisfied with centralized control. Educated and influential people formed secret societies, studied the constitutional models of other countries, kept up with similar events abroad, and sought international support. Eventually, these southern European elites helped mobilize their societies into rebellion, leading to remarkably widespread public participation in a visible public sphere. That process, in some cases, spurred civil wars between supporters and opponents of change. At the core of these conflicts lay the tension between those who held a civic and constitutional view of politics and those who held a religious worldview, backed by an established church hierarchy. The revolutions produced a set of political systems that balanced the privileges of property-owning elites, professional groups, and the church with broad popular sovereignty and individual rights—a balance that characterizes many political revolutions to this day.

Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness: Britain and the American Dream

BY PETER MOORE. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2023, 592 pp.

Much that Americans value came from Europe. In this meaty yet readable book, the author, a nonacademic historian, sketches the prehistory of Thomas Jefferson's famous phrase in the Declaration of Independence: "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." He explores how these specific words were chosen, what exactly they meant to Jefferson's contemporaries, and their origins in earlier British political thought and experience. This is not a work of original scholarship—for a century, professional historians have explored the British origins of the political ideas that inspired the Declaration—as much as a distillation of existing work. Yet those willing to accept the author's penchant for writerly clichés and his almost exclusive focus on individual biography—especially that of Benjamin Franklin—to the exclusion of broader factors may well find this a lively, intelligent, and colorful introduction to the topic.

National Dish: Around the World in Search of Food, History, and the Meaning of Home

BY ANYA VON BREMZEN. Penguin Press, 2023, 352 pp.

Trying different national cuisines is perhaps the most common way people experience modern globalization. Yet it is paradoxical. Many people imagine their willingness to eat foreign food as

evidence of their cosmopolitanism. At the same time, they crave unfamiliar food as ways to experience ostensibly authentic historical and indigenous cultures as if they were natives. In this work, a veteran cookbook writer visits six global cities—four in Europe—and uncovers the hollowness in this quest for authenticity. Iconic national dishes are almost invariably artificial constructs of recent invention. In Naples, the pedigree of the pizza margherita, supposedly concocted to celebrate the queen of a newly united Italy, proves to have been invented in the 1930s. In Seville, tapas turns out to be a twentieth-century upper-class luxury, and beloved regional cuisines a politically constructed bulwark for Franco's authoritarian rule. Turkish cuisine is revealed to be an amalgam of Armenian, Greek, and Iraqi recipes. Borsch(t) is Ukrainian or Russian or perhaps Tatar. If one skims the chatty travelogue and conversations with local intellectuals, this book of tall tales about food makes for an engaging read.

Mussolini's Grandchildren: Fascism in Contemporary Italy

BY DAVID BRODER. Pluto Press, 2023, 240 pp.

Broder starts by hinting that, beneath the surface, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and her associates are unmistakably fascist. They come from a political tradition dating back to the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini in the early twentieth century. They promote a resentful nationalism and express concern about the dilution or extinction of *italianità*, or Italian identity. They occasionally invoke postwar extreme-right symbols as “dog

whistles.” Yet the author, an extremely well-informed nonacademic historian of the Italian and French far right, does not seem to believe his own thesis. Soon he concedes that the Italian right has embraced democracy, renounced fascism, rejected anti-Semitism, left behind violent tactics, lost interest in grand projects for reorganizing society, and turned to generic global conservatism. Politically, Meloni got where she is by moving far to the center; she is now a staunchly anti-Russian, pro-Ukrainian, pro-European, and pro-NATO leader. Now that Meloni's Italy has made its peace with the European Union, he concludes, the worst one can expect is an effort to transform Brussels from within—a quest that seems destined to fail. Far from harking back to the dark days of the 1920s, Italy today is, according to the author, firmly “post-fascist,” although it is unclear what that means.

Western Hemisphere

RICHARD FEINBERG

The House on G Street: A Cuban Family Saga

BY LISANDRO PÉREZ. New York University Press, 2023, 344 pp.

In pre-revolutionary Cuba, Pérez's extensive family made its fortune marketing tobacco leaf to New York-based cigar manufacturers. In this nostalgic and reflective multigenerational story, Pérez proudly recalls a joyful family life built around sumptuous Sunday barbecues, exclusive country clubs, bilingual private