

"A COMPREHENSIVE AND STIMULATING INTRODUCTION TO
THE MOST POWERFUL POLITICAL FORCE ON EARTH TODAY . . .
A PROFOUNDLY THOUGHTFUL AND DEEPLY FELT BOOK."

—WALTER RUSSELL MEAD, THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW

WILLIAM PFAFF

CIVILIZATION
AND THE FURIES OF
NATIONALISM

**THE
WRATH
OF
NATIONS**



BOOKS BY WILLIAM PFAFF

The Wrath of Nations

Barbarian Sentiments

Condemned to Freedom

With Edmund Stillman

Power and Impotence

The Politics of Hysteria

The New Politics

WILLIAM PFAFF

Civilization and the

The
WRATH
of
NATIONS

Furies of Nationalism

A TOUCHSTONE BOOK

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TO C., A., AND N.

*Home is where one starts from. As we grow older
The world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated
. . . Not the intense moment
Isolated, with no before and after,
But a lifetime burning in every moment . . .*

And when you hear of wars and revolts, do not be alarmed by it; such things must happen, but the end is not so soon. . . . Nation will rise in arms against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes in this region or that, and plagues and famines; and sights of terror and great portents from heaven.

—LUKE 21:9-12

Les Morts gouvernent les Vivants.

—AUGUSTE COMTE

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1

Nationalism

T

his book is about the most powerful political force of the twentieth century, which is likely to prove the most powerful of the twenty-first as well: nationalism. Nationalism is a profound, if often malign, expression of human identities, a negative force, but also a positive one. It is an expression of love as well as of hate. It is a fundamental element in modern political life and international relations. It demands to be better understood.

The book describes where nationalism comes from, why, and when, and estimates where it is taking us. It considers the historical sources of nationalism, and also its counterparts and counterfeits in the evolution of modern society, not only in Western Europe, where the nation-state originated and is dominant, and in America, but in Asia and Africa as well, where western ideas of nationalism, as of internationalism, have exerted decisive, and frequently destructive, influence during recent years.

Nationalism has been the cause of much hateful violence in modern history, and is so again today in the Balkans and the states of the former Soviet Union. The related phenom-

- 14** ena of communal and racial violence afflict parts of Asia and Africa. However, nationalism is also the force which confounded and broke the imperialism of Lenin's heirs, and Nazism's domination of Europe in the 1940s. The two totalitarian internationalist movements of this century have crimes to their account much worse than any of the crimes yet produced by nationalism, horrifying as the latter are.

Nationalism is usually thought a primordial historical phenomenon, the emotional binding by which political communities originally emerged, and through which the ethnic community finds its historical expression and maturity. It also is usually taken to be an essential but passing stage in the march of history, necessary in producing the modern nation, but also to be left behind as more rational and progressive forms of political society take the place of the more backward.

This is not true. Nationalism is a phenomenon of the European nineteenth century. It is a political consequence of the literary-intellectual movement called Romanticism, a Central European reaction to the universalizing, and therefore disorienting, ideas of the eighteenth-century French Enlightenment.

Nationalism is not an ideology because it has no universality. It is impossible to be a nationalist as such, only a German or Croatian or American nationalist. However, nationalism occupies the moral and emotional ground otherwise held by political ideology. It is unreasonable, considered as a general phenomenon, while natural as a specific one. It is contradictory as well as preposterous as a general proposition that the values and interests of every country are superior ones, yet it is evident that all nations are the same as

objects of the loyalty of their citizens. Only a Serb can appreciate why Serbia is worth dying for, since Serbia otherwise represents nothing of more value or moment to the detached observer than does Croatia, or Guatemala, or Tibet.

The nation-state itself is modern. The number of nations with a more or less coherent history of independent existence before modern times is fairly small: England (Britain), Japan, France, Denmark (but not in its present borders), Sweden, Russia (Muscovy), Poland, Spain and Portugal. . . . Even here there is doubt. France, for example, existed as a kingdom, an empire—a revolution; but it has been argued that there was no French nation until Jules Ferry established universal free education in the nineteenth century. The emergence of a Russian nation, subsequently an empire, based on Muscovy's ascendance over the Tatars of the Golden Horde, took place only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Spain even today experiences Catalan as well as Basque separatism.

Germany's unification, under Prussia, occurred only in 1871; its reunification, without most of Prussia, in 1990. Austria-Hungary was never a nation, but an empire. Austria itself became a nation in 1918, but the Austrians willingly gave up their nation when Hitler launched the *Anschluss* in 1938. The Roman empire was Italian, but Italy did not exist until the mid-nineteenth century. Lombardy, the kingdom of Sicily, the kingdom of Naples, the Venetian Empire, the Papal States, Savoy and Piedmont—they are what existed before. Greece vanished into the Roman Empire before the birth of Christ and reemerged from the Ottoman Empire only in the nineteenth century.

Outside Europe, there have been no nations other than those, among them the United States, which were estab-

- 16 lished as Europe's outposts. Japan is the serious exception to that generalization. Siam and Cambodia, like China, were kingdoms, realms, not nations with corporate consciousnesses. India was a Hindu civilization dominated—after the Moghuls came—by an Islamic elite, and, after that, by a British one.

France and England were the original nation-states, and their history as nations dates from the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453). Most of the other European nations, as such, originated in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. The United States is an older nation than Germany or Italy. The original form of human political organization was the agricultural or hunting community, leading to the city, the religious civilization with a god-king, and the dynastic realm or empire of expanding and inclusive borders. The Dutch Republic (1652–1672) was the first non-dynastic, non-city state.

The ethnic nation is an invention, also a modern one. Of the major contemporary nation-states, none can seriously claim to be, or to have ever been, ethnically homogeneous, except for Japan (yet Japan has its aboriginal population), Finland, possibly the Scandinavian states (but there are four of them, so they are not exclusive), Albania, and possibly Hungary (but what is historical Hungary without its Jews?).

There has been no “natural” evolution from the primitive community, ethnic or otherwise, to the nation. There is no discernible general progressive movement towards international community, even though the twentieth century has seen five major formal attempts to create a new international system (six, if we include the Japanese effort to establish an Asian “coprosperity sphere”). Two were totalitarian, repressive, and genocidal. Three have been liberal and voluntarist,