

Nationalism: A Very Short Introduction¹

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Steven Grosby's significant contribution to the nationalism studies, *Nationalism: A Very Short Introduction*, underlines the historical process of nation (then nation-state in Europe) construction cycles across the world. Hence, it is a classic in terms of its comparative analysis among distinct societies, countries, and tribes by focusing on essential similarities of different communities on the road of their nation-building experiences. One of its main focuses is about the relation between the process of the emergence of nations and individual liberalities (p. 5). In other words, Grosby discusses the concept of nation as a threat against individual rights and liberties in different societies. Thus, the book is not just a chronological history book on nation, it also has debates on political philosophy.

Grosby also refers to his expertise, religion and nationalism, in the conceptualization of nation, and he distinguishes nations and nationalism and indicates the sharper role of religions, especially Abrahamic religions, on nation and nationalism. Furthermore, he underlines the ancient origins and discussions on nations to draw a clear theoretical and chronological

¹ By Steven Grosby, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. Pp. 142, \$11.94, ISBN: 978-0192840981.
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framework for distinct nations (or nation-states) in order to demonstrate unique formation stories of distinct nations across the world. On the other hand, he lists certain similarities on the process of nation-building to show a pattern in nations and nationalism studies in order to display the essence of identity politics: national self and national other.

There are eight chapters in the book, and consecutively: “The problem”, “What is a nation”, “The nation as social relation”, “Motherland, fatherland, and homeland”, “The nation in history”, “What god is mightier”, “Human divisiveness”, and “Conclusion”. Each chapter is interconnected with each other, and each chapter aims to display how the concept of nation is a social construct through socialization processes of district groups and communities in history. He notes that nation is the most concrete form of “social relations of kinship” (p. 42) because “nations are human creations” (p. 27) that centralize family. He gives different examples from Greek, Latin, Arabic, and Hebrew communities, and he demonstrates the pattern of territory and tie of loyalty for an over-arching umbrella, nation, even among religiously and traditionally different lands.

Grosby utilizes historical and religious texts, classic theoreticians’ ideas from the nationalism studies, and historical-anthropological studies to demonstrate supreme characteristics of the concept of nation. He especially concentrates on the importance of monotheisms (i.e. Colossians, p. 95) and their purpose to create a cement among distinct ethnic groups to constitute over-arching national identities. Hence, readers can clearly understand the direct relation between religion and nation.

Furthermore, he highlights the previous race-based studies on nations, and demonstrates “culture as an explanation” (p. 99) while studying and analysing the construction process of nations. He argues that culture and its distinctiveness among various groups, especially in the nexus of Orient and Occident, “might be exaggerated” (p. 101) since he conceptualizes

those distinctiveness as historical differentiations for the sake of survival across the world. Therefore, Grosby’s book also challenges the argument of “Clash of Civilizations” by looking at differentiation processes of distinct cultures (interchangeable with nations in this context) and by demonstrating material and pragmatic reasons of differentiations, instead of primordial narrations. Overall, Grosby’s *Nationalism: A Very Short Introduction* became an indispensable handbook to understand historical essences of nations in distinct communities and affiliations while discussing the social roots of nations through nuanced differences and religious perspectives.