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Author(s)	Paškauskas, Juozapas
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Book Reviews

Darius Staliūnas and Yoko Aoshima, eds., *The Tsar, the Empire, and the Nation: Dilemmas of Nationalization in Russia's Western Borderlands, 1905–1915* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2021), 408 pp.

A few books succeed in inspiring academic discourse to rethink particular themes, open up paradigms, and launch long debates; many others have to try either to tackle challenges and questions identified earlier or to answer a fraction of the questions raised. The volume in question, edited by Darius Staliūnas and Yoko Aoshima, belongs to the latter category, as it continues the discussions over the Russian Empire's attempts to establish itself in the western borderlands in the years of 1905–1915, and seeks to probe the ways in which the national movements in these lands shaped the imperial policy. This is far from saying that the book is not inspiring. On the contrary, it echoes the highly topical issues revolving around Russia's war in Ukraine, such as the peculiarities of regional governance, policies of colonization and consolidation, episodes of subsequent violence, and the nationalists' endeavors to decide their own fates. Staliūnas and Aoshima have assembled an international team of scholars who can both capture the nuances and explore the questions raised above. The contributors corroborate their arguments with cases from intermediate geographies, i.e., covering the Ukrainian lands in the south, the Kingdom of Poland, and the Baltic provinces in the north. This territorial range is significant as it was here that the Russian Empire first faced the challenges of nationalism.[1]

The structure of the book is well thought out: the first chapter is on "Imperial Nationality Policy," presenting different imperial visions, ranging from a policy of privileging East Slavic populations and discriminating against non-Russians to tolerating non-Russians in cultural and educational spheres in the hope of preserving their loyalty to the Russian Empire. In the texts by Anton Kotenko, Staliūnas, and Malte Rolf, these themes reveal that the tsarist government was not fully capable of ruling the western peripheries and did not even have a long-term vision of maintaining multiethnic borderlands. In the specific cases of the Southwest region (Ukrainian territory), the Northwest region with the Baltic provinces, and the Kingdom of Poland, all three authors emphasize that the most prominent feature of the nationality policy in the period under discussion was inconsistency. Rolf on the Kingdom of Poland shows that even the seemingly obvious alliance between the imperial power and the local Russian community was fragile and complicated (pp. 83–98), as the stability of the power in multiethnic territories was not attainable by claims of Russians' superiority (p. 109). Staliūnas adds that this was also due to the fact that the ruling regime was becoming increasingly liberal and found it progressively difficult to apply discriminatory or social engineering-oriented schemes (p. 66).

The second and third chapters of the book address the pragmatic issues of religion and education in the imperial political discourse. Vilma Žaltauskaitė and Chiho Fukushima begin their narratives by showing that the government's policy of "depolonization" after the 1863–1864 uprising paved the way for the growing interfaith tensions. Simultaneously, they show that, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards,

1 Faith Hillis, *Children of Rus': Right-Bank Ukraine and the Invention of a Russian Nation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), p. 3.

the Church became an important factor in the formation of national movements and (dis)loyalty to imperial power.

The third part of the book examines transformations in education policy and the central government's attempts to move away from a region-by-region approach to education policy and to forge a common education policy. While the government launched educational innovations to alleviate the tensions that had erupted in 1905, Aoshima shows that the effect was counterproductive as schools turned into important junctions of political movements. Although Petr Verevkin, the then governor of Kaunas, said that "schools alone have been and always will be the best means of implanting a Russian foundation in the society of the region" (p. 259), Kimitaka Matsuzato reveals that these instruments were often underfunded. Meanwhile, Jolita Mulevičiūtė illustrates tsarist officials' efforts to incorporate the North-West into the imperial spatial framework and imperial mental maps. Taking school excursions as a practice of internal colonization, she highlights the organizers' desire to demonstrate the Russian nation as a "supra-ethnic" community. Although the sources for this topic are limited, the new educational practices seemingly helped to strengthen non-Russian identities.

The last part raises an apparently simple question: how did the right-wing groups react to the growing nationalism and multiculturalism in the empire's western frontiers? Vytautas Petronis argues that such organizations in the Lithuanian provinces and Belorussian lands found enough supporters to shape the local politics; from 1908 onwards, the state increasingly drove an anti-Semitic and discriminatory policy towards non-Russians. Karsten Brüggemann adds that, in a society fraught with profound structural and ideological changes, the imperial officials, even if they were aware of the right-wing positions, had to use their decisions so as to maintain a *de facto* stable situation on the ground; in specific cases, this worked to the detriment of the right-wing campaign. The book concludes with an article by Vladimir Levin attempting to portray a conservative Russian Jew who was loyal to the monarchy and nevertheless sought to improve the situation of Jews.

What is missing in this collection? Politics, education, and religion are major social institutions that should be discussed together because of their intertwined nature and their effects on everyday interactions. Another major area where imperialism would be particularly visible is culture, which, unfortunately, does not feature in the collection. This means that readers are left without an additional colonial frame. Without the culture that defied imperial policy, one could argue, we would not have navigated the modern politics and educational institutions so essential to national movements. Not to dwell on what the book does not contain, I should underline that the present collection assembles interesting, well-argued, and well-written texts problematizing the empire and its relationship with the nations of the western provinces, the empire's attempts to implement measures designed to strengthen the Romanov regime, and the emerging nationalists' efforts to be free from it.

Juozapas Paškauskas