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The Dawn of Total War

The concept of a nation-state, or even a nation for that matter, is all but new to human society. Being arguably less than two centuries old, the unification and mobilization of geographic, ethnic, and cultural groups under a single banner is a relatively modern invention. Further, the forming monolith of the nation and the expanding state towards the end of the nineteenth century broke open Pandora's Box. The formation of new nation-states as well as the development of existing ones, along with their fuel of nationalism caused one primary factor that spilled over to the dawn of total war in World War I (WWI). The eagerness for wider societies to fight for their nations, along with the mass mobilization of civil society into war efforts caused an egregious and overzealous push for all-encompassing warfare.

To start, the evolution of nationalism in the nineteenth century was most certainly not a mistake. Whether being pushed from the side of new leaders like Napoleon Bonaparte or from the collective consciousness rising in nations, the average person was being pushed in several new directions. From *What is a Nation*, "... a nation is above all a dynasty, representing an earlier conquest, one which was first of all accepted, and then forgotten by the mass of the people." (Renan 46) A rise in literacy and schooling meant people were more informed and educated, and a more educated populous will more often engage in politics. During this time the size of states were also increasing. Whether it be from the rapid turn to imperialism in Europe during the Scramble for Africa or consolidation and alliances of states through pan-slavism in Russia and the Balkans during the lead-up to WWI, states were starting to become more of a daily thought in the average citizen's mind. Taxes, confounding and bloated bureaucracy, tracking, documentation, and laws about interracial marriage were just some of the ways the

most 'ahead of the curve' nation-states were becoming more directly involved in civil life. National identity was one of the largest factors accelerating the emergence of nationalism. People who would have never met each other in their lives before were now each other's kin and would fight and die for each other. Even minorities not too excluded from societies were heavily pushed to 'become' apart of the whole, for example when Poles living on the borders of newly established Germany were essentially forced to 'become' German or expelled. (Ault, Nations and Nation-States, 31 January 2022, 25) Not all states were in favor of the push towards the nation-state. The landed elite and ruling classes of several countries were unhappy with growing dissent from the populous and feared what growing nationalism and demands for better conditions would lead them to. Their fears were founded, though, as several coups and revolutions occurred in the mid 19th to early 20th centuries. These include the Revolutions of 1848 (The French Revolution of particular note), the Serbian coup of 1903, and of course Archduke Franz Ferdinand's assassination in 1914 all go to show how nationalism drove people in various regions to all forward related goals. All of these tensions would, of course, individually tip the bucket towards WWI, however their themes and similarities in terms of the push towards large nation-states and nationalism which would boil over into WWI.

The evolution and development of nationalism in the Balkans was also one of the more massive dominos to topple, eventually leading to the outbreak of WWI. The creation of new nation-states before the war would push the heat in Europe to sweat-inducing levels. Serbia's independence in 1878 and its conflict with Austria and their claim on Bosnia would be the deciding factor, however other tensions caused by nationalism in the Balkans were important as well. The Ottoman Empire's insistent control on countries in the region of course did not help, as well as the push for the creation of a southern Slavic nation (Yugoslavia). Bulgaria also became

its own nation-state in 1908, increasing tensions with the Ottomans. Ultimately this would lead to a precursor to WWI (or rather two), contained within the Balkans. The conflict from 1912-1913 of the Balkan League (Montenegro, Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia) and the Ottoman Empire, as well as the subsequent conflict with Bulgaria, Romania, and the Ottomans against the rest of the Balkan League, would be another driving factor in the events of the following year.

The eagerness for the populations of several nation-states entering into WWI without a doubt pushed the size and consequences of the war to its totality. For reference, Russia had 3.5 million conscripted men, Germany had 2.1 million, France had 1.8 million, and Austria-Hungary had 1.3 million. (Ault, World War I Outbreak and Early Years, 27 January 2022, 7) Propaganda was abundant and ubiquitous, and volunteer armies were en-masse in some countries like Britain at the start of the war with 450,000 volunteer soldiers by September. (Ault, World War I Outbreak and Early Years, 27 January 2022, 13) Morale and support was high during the early stages of the war. Military strategists and generals predicted conflict would occur even before the July crisis, and plans like Germany's Schlieffen Plan and France's Plan XVII showed the willingness various nation-states had for combat. Otto von Bismarck even said in 1878, "I cannot tell you when [an] explosion will occur, but I can tell you where ... Some damned foolish thing in the Balkans will set it off." He and many other leaders at the time predicted what would eventually come to pass in 1914, and were willing and pushing to aggressively push their nationalistic ideals.

Rising nationalism in various regions would lead to a metaphorical enscription of entire populations of citizens. Men, women, and sometimes even children were all pushed to support war efforts in a way they had not before. In the U.S., the work done by women during the time of involvement in the war would eventually lead to the 19th amendment and suffrage for women.

This trend was mirrored in other countries as well. After conscription was instituted in Britain and the number of men able to work was diminished, women had to step up as well to support domestic efforts. Often this was compounded by forced compliance policy from states. Although some objected to this, for many it was a natural extension of their existing support for war efforts. From Belinda Davis' *Home Fires Burning : Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I*, "Commercial and agricultural lobbies found themselves convinced by Richard Calwer's argument that tight control of consumption would permit a more open market in the arena of production and distribution; Calwer hoped that farmers, in turn, would be induced to grow more." (Davis 9)

Nationalism is the single most discernable driving factor in the outbreak and execution of WWI. Particularly, the mass brainwashing that took place as a result of nationalism such as war hero stories pushing volunteer soldiers in Britain, or the creation of mass propaganda campaigns across various nation-states, created a sense of valiance around supporting war efforts. The development of new nation-states and the rejection of empires in the Balkans led to complicated conflicts and alliances which would ultimately lead to the *other* 'shot heard round the world.'