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Introduction

The story of how Europe grew and changed is a long and arduous one, fraught with anguish brought on by none other than itself. The most brutal chapter is the most recent, but the foundations for destruction were being laid centuries beforehand. This was a foundation of nationalism that would eventually sprout into the calamities of World War I and II, though these were not the only things brought on by this ideology as its development allowed for many to find an identity and avert oppression.

Thesis

In this paper, I will argue nationalism emerged during the early modern period and has been developing ever since. Furthermore, I will argue that it was the changing ideology of nationalism that was a driving force behind the story of Europe and shaped much of its modern history. I will show how nationalism began and its development until WWI when it became not a mere idea, but a basis for government, and how these ideas were radicalized in WWII.

The beginning of nationalism

Nationalism is the idea that ones' nation is their greatest responsibility, and thus should support, endorse, and protect it to the best of their abilities; its the belief that citizens make the state. Nationalism began to emerge in Europe during the 1700's with the French revolution. Europe had never seen a revolt of this magnitude. From our lectures on the French revolution, E-J Sieyès argues that the common man, or Third Estate, is the only necessary ingredient for a state; going on to say that if the privileged order were to be abolished, the state would not be less but something 'more.' Finally, Sieyès summarises his point by posing the question: "What is the Third Estate? It is the whole." From these remarks, one can glean the nationalistic principles of the French revolution. This early form of nationalism, however, is based on a principle of collective rule and thus lacks the totalitarian tendencies of subsequent iterations. Later, during the spring revolutions of 1848, this early nationalism emerged again for very similar reasons. Citizens in the German Lands, the Hapsburg Empire, and France had found that the elite that governed their countries were unfit to do so. These riots quickly spread but were also promptly quelled and did not result in much tangible change, though the memory of the revolutions remain significant in the heads of the people who wanted freedom. In the spring revolutions, nationalism was not just citizens revolting against the government, but also about peoples within peoples finding a voice and national identity. This emergence of nations from nations was thanks to the ethnic heterogeneity of the region; the Hapsburg Empire alone contained over ten distinct nationalities. While no new nations were formed, it placed the idea in the heads of citizens that it was possible.

Nationalism after WWI

Leading up to the Great War, nationalist sentiment only grew in Europe; accept, it was growing away from its original roots into something more sinister. Nationalism became less about dissatisfaction with who ruled and more about what one's ethnicity was. This became very clear during and after WWI, as many people were displaced because of the war. Countries decided that instead of bounding a state's peoples by its borders, a state may define its people by their ethnic background, and exclude and include people as they see fit. Since this was the view of nationalism, countries deported 'enemies of the state' as, under this new model of nationalism, they weren't seen as citizens of the state they were being deported from. This ethno-territorial iteration of nationalism would come to a peak after WWI with the reattribution of the Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman empires. States were formed by the treaty of Versailles as the victors partitioned the land by ethnic background, changing the landscape of Europe forever. While their formation wasn't by revolution, the original sentiment of nationalism can still be seen: peoples being able to find their voices and advocate for themselves. Though, this is shrouded in the ethnic tensions brought on by this more modern form of nationalism.

Nationalism during WWII

But it wasn't until WWII that the extent of nationalism could be reached. Germany's unification and subsequent defeat in WWI were both nationalistic catalysts for the Third Reich. The Nazis focused on genetics in their iteration of nationalism. Primarily they were interested in one's physical appearance and genetics. The Nazis believed that the German' race' was perfect, and thus, if you didn't match this description you would be sent away, or later on in the war, exterminated. Propaganda posters from the war show they even were interested in not only their citizens' genetic fitness, but their physical fitness as well, believing that the citizen made the state and as such should be as strong as it. The Nazis' obsession with genetic 'purity' can be traced back to nationalism and its prior, albeit lesser, focus on one's ethnicity. Because of this, one could argue that, while WWII wasn't directly caused by nationalism, the horrors that occurred during it were.

Conclusion

as one follows the growth of nationalism, from its beginnings in the French revolution and 1848 uprisings as a tool for liberation. Later, as a tool for division in WWI as Europe grapples with its new idea of identity. And finally, as an implement for oppression and destruction during WWII as people try to draw lines between who deserves to live. In conclusion, nationalism has gone through many iterations and developments that have shaped both European history and the world.