Week 5 – JY Roig

In the book *Dark Continent* Mark Mazower examines the political landscape in Europe. He adopts a unique approach, combining a high politics and low politics approach. Most of the work adopts a high politics approach. It looks at broad ideologies, like liberalism and fascism. The ideologies are used to explain certain state action. He also discusses the use of state policy in service of state ends. This perspective provides interesting insights regarding the nazi regime and their total politization of public and private.[[1]](#footnote-1) He discusses the process of politization as a consequence of particular state interests. An example of this is the politization of science, using racial science to justify treatment of minorities and demographic policy. There is also a low politics perspective presented in the book, Mazower does address the impact of protests on state action. An example is the post war order. Statesmen were met a concerted effort to address certain issues like Poland and Jews.[[2]](#footnote-2) It was the failure of guaranteeing minority rights which fed into the events of World War Two.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The issue of minorities brings in a second element within the book: Nationalism and the nation-state. Mazower views the nation as constructed, mostly through the exclusion of minorities and political ideologies. He belongs to the modernist school, discussing nations and nation-states as a result of modernity. His conception of the nation is narrow, conceptualizing it as a non-permeable entity. The nation is discussed in the political sense as well as cultural aspects like the family unit. The concept of the nation-state is rigid, looking at it as people residing in nations. Mazower does not manage to shake of methodological nationalism entirely. His use of comparative history means he avoids the pitfalls of national narratives however he still uses the nation as a unit of comparison.

The book looks at elements of culture within Europe. The book understands that Europe shares certain cultural elements and concerns. However, it acknowledges that, as a result of regimes, culture developed differently. For example western Europe developed differently than the soviet dominated eastern Europe. This approach links cultural trends with political trends. As a result, the analysis is mostly of high culture, looking at broad political thought in literature and religion. He does not adopt an anthropological approach. However, Mazower also discusses low culture, looking at family and traditions.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Mazower adopts comparison in his work. He compares countries with each other but also broadly compares ideologies. Democracy and liberalism vs fascism for the first half of the book. For the later half of it he compares democracies vs communism, which ends up being a comparison between western and eastern Europe. The book highlights the difference of ideologies to explain central points, such as the development of democracy in the post-war era.[[5]](#footnote-5) Transnational history is not the main focus of the book. He discusses certain migration movements but there is little discussion on this particular aspect.

**Sources**

Mazower, Mark. 1999. *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century*. London: Penguin Books.

1. (Mazower 1999, 15) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. (Mazower 1999, 53) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. (Mazower 1999, 57) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. (Mazower 1999, 226) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. (Mazower 1999, 290) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)