

Review of:

Michael Jonas, *Scandinavia and the Great Powers in the First World War*. London, Bloomsbury, 2019, 231 pp.

In his latest contribution to the history of the First World War, Michael Jonas presents an eclectic collection of essays. Each chapter offers a case study of the war experiences of Scandinavians - Danes, Norwegians, Swedes and Finns alike – and asks questions of neutrality in the 1914-1918 age of total war.

As Jonas himself acknowledges, neutrality is hard to tie down as a historical concept. It is both diffuse and context specific. Its applications altered as the needs of states at war and peace altered, as the geostrategic parameters of international systems adapted and as people co-opted principles of war, peace and international morality into their political and cultural identities. Neutrality scholars often struggle to communicate the exact 'what' of their study, as neutrality invariably meant different things to different audiences. Was neutrality a legal concept presenting a distinct range of actions to a non-belligerent state? Yes. Was neutrality a political concept affecting the domestic and foreign policies of a state as well as the national identities and cultures of the societies who adopted it? Yes. Does neutrality offer an analytical frame for the history of war? Yes.

Jonas' book presents neutrality largely as a foreign policy and analyses its implications across a variety of political environments in the Scandinavian context between 1914 and 1918. Norway, Denmark and Sweden all declared their neutrality at the outbreak of the war and all three managed to retain that neutral status, in contrast to many other countries that started out as neutrals but became belligerents during the war. Jonas uses six of his seven chapters to investigate elements of Scandinavians' diplomatic culture and cultural identity as neutrals in a world of war. The outlier chapter focuses on the wartime experiences and diplomacy of the Grand Duchy of Finland, with a particular focus on its post-1917 establishment as an independent state.

The book's introduction and opening chapter, which focus on 'small state' status and neutrality, set the stage for the ensuing chapters. Across these chapters, Jonas uses neutrality as a context to analyse the diplomacy and wartime politics of the Scandinavians. Chapter 3, for example, focusses on the diplomacy of the three Scandinavian monarchs, Gustav V of Sweden, Haakon VII of Norway and Christian X of Denmark. Positioning themselves as a 'neutrality bloc', the monarchs hoped that their collaborative efforts might help to off-set the repeated incursions by the belligerents into their countries' neutral rights. The focus of the chapter is primarily on the symbolic nature of monarchical agency in a stressed conflict-ridden environment. Chapter 4 emphasises the ways in which Sweden's foreign relationships during the war were dependent both on highly fluid formal diplomatic interactions and on activist renderings of Sweden's national identity and purpose in the international arena. In turn, Chapter 5 addresses the mobilisation of ideas of war, peace and neutrality in Denmark through the analysis of the work of the intellectual, Georg Brandes. In Chapter 6, Jonas strays away from neutrality to analyse the impact of the First World War on the Finnish independence movement in the wake of the Russian revolutions of 1917. The chapter plays with national myths, royal visits and cultural diplomacy. The chapter feeds into Jonas' final case study and chapter on the post-war future of the Åland archipelago. The

question of who would control this geo-strategic territory was as important to the European great powers as it was to Sweden and Finland.

There is much to be said for highlighting the diversity of Scandinavians' war experiences and of their political considerations of neutrality but overall, I am not sure that Jonas' experiment with eclecticism worked. The chapters function well as singular pieces, but they do not connect up easily into book form. A conclusion might have helped Jonas draw the interconnected themes together more clearly, but sadly that was lacking. Most of the chapters also left me begging for more comparative work on the same theme (for example, by contrasting Sweden's public activists with those in Norway, Denmark and Finland or by comparing Brandes with other intellectuals). Altogether, there seemed to be seven distinct book projects presented here, each of which were not given space to come to full fruition.

None of this critique, however, takes anything away from the fact that an English-language work on the history of Scandinavia in the First World War is a welcome addition to the field. Jonas has certainly expanded and complicated our understanding of the myriad faces of this global total war and has opened up all manner of avenues for future research.

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