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Citation: Giannakopoulos, G. (2025). Nationality before internationalism in the age of empire: Robert W. Seton-Watson and the shifting landscape of eastern Europe (1900-1940). *English Historical Review*, 140(606), pp. 1079-1108. doi: 10.1093/ehr/ceaf145

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Nationality before internationalism in the age of empire: Robert W. Seton-Watson and the shifting landscape of eastern Europe (1900-1940)

Word count (incl. footnotes): 14.834

Word count (excl. footnotes): 8.843

1. Introduction

The article surveys the political, historical, and international thought of the British historian Robert W. Seton-Watson. Combining the writing of European history with liberal politics, Seton-Watson forged an extensive network of contacts across eastern Europe and became one of the most influential experts on the region in the first decades of the twentieth century.¹ Historians of British-European relations have scrutinized his political activities, and his historical writings are permanent fixtures in the historiography of the region.² Seton-Watson

¹ A.J. P. Taylor, *The Trouble Makers: Dissent over Foreign Policy 1792-1939* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1957), 96; R.J. Evans, *Cosmopolitan Islanders: British Historians and the European Continent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 106-7; R.J. W. Evans, “The Creighton Century: British historians and Europe, 107-2007”, *Historical Research* 82/216 (2009), 320-339, at 328.

² Shannon Monaghan, *Protecting Democracy from Dissent: Population Engineering in Western Europe, 1918-1926* (London: Routledge, 2017); Dragan Bakic, *Britain and Interwar Danubian Europe: Foreign Policy and Security Challenges 1919-1936* (London: Bloomsbury 2017); Eugene Michail, *The British and the Balkans: Forming Images of Foreign Lands 1900-1950* (London: Continuum, 2011); Robert W. Evans ed., *Great Britain and Central Europe 1867-1914* (Bratislava: Veda, 2002); Mark Cornwall, *The Undermining of Austria-Hungary: The Battle for Hearts and Minds* (London: Palgrave Macmillan: 2000); Kenneth Calder, *Britain and the Origins of the New Europe 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 18; Harry Hanak, *Great Britain and Austria-Hungary during the First World War: A Study in the Formation of Public Opinion* (Oxford: Oxford

has also been one of the pioneers of a long-standing historiographical approach viewing the dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy teleologically as a story of a predetermined collapse originating from unresolved ethnic conflicts and tensions of autocratic rule.³ In recent years this explanatory framework has been replaced by a rival historiographical orthodoxy arguing for the essential stability of the imperial and constitutional system of the Habsburg state and viewing the empire as an evolving multinational constitutional polity.⁴ Seen from this

University Press, 1962); Nicholas J. Miller, “R.W. Seton-Watson and Serbia During the Reemergence of Yugoslavism, 1903-1914,” *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* XV, no. 1-2 (1988): 59-69; N.M. Wingfield, “The Historian as a Political Force in East Central Europe: R.W. Seton-Watson and the Anglo-American Public Opinion concerning Czechoslovakia in the inter-war period” in S.B. Winters and E. Schimdt-Hartman, eds. *Great Britain, the United States and the Bohemian Lands 1/848-1938* (Munich: Verlag, 1991), 132-142; S. Matković, “Ivo Pilar and Robert William Seton-Watson: two Political Viewpoints on the Southern Slav Question”, *Croatian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 2, no.2 (2006): 17-42;.

³ John Deak and Jonathan E. Gumz, “How to Break a State: The Habsburg Monarchy’s Internal War, 1914–1918,” *American Historical Review* 122, no. 4 (October 2017), 1105-11136; See also Wickham Steed, *The Habsburg Monarchy* (London: Constable, 1913); Lewis B. Namier, “The Downfall of the Habsburg Monarchy” in *A History of the Peace Conference of Paris*, ed. Harold W.V. Temperley, vol. 4 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1921), 58–119; Oscar Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1929).

⁴ Mark Cornwall, ed. *Last Years of Austria-Hungary: A Multi-National Experiment in Early Twentieth-Century Europe* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2004); Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands 1900-1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); John Deak, *Forging a Multinational State: State Making in Imperial Austria from the Enlightenment to the First World War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014); Pieter M. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 2016); Paul Miller and Claire Morelon, eds. *Embers of Empire: Continuity and Rupture in the Habsburg Successor States after 1918* (London: Ashgate, 2018); John Deak and Jonathan E. Gumz, “How to Break a State: The Habsburg Monarchy’s Internal War, 1914–1918,” *The American Historical Review*,

perspective, the British and the Habsburg empires had much more in common than what British observers were willing to acknowledge.⁵

The paradigm shift in the historiography of the Habsburg imperial state, and the turn to the comparative study of European empires renders possible a critical assessment of Seton-Watson's writings on central and eastern European affairs from the time of his first acquaintance with the region, in 1905, until the outbreak of the Second World War. Despite the substantial documentation of his regional activities, especially during the Great War,⁶ there is no comprehensive account of his thinking on democracy, nationalism, and empire - themes that consumed his writing for more than four decades.⁷ The reconstruction of Seton-Watson's writings in a period marking the fall of continental empires and the reconfiguration of British imperial power illustrates how discussions on national questions in the continent affected debates on nationalism and imperial order in the British context.

122, Issue 4, no. 1 (October 2017)1105–1136; Axel Körner, “Beyond Nation-States: New Perspectives on the Habsburg Empire,” *European History Quarterly* 48, no.3 (July 2018): 516-533; Chad Bryant, “Habsburg History, Eastern European History...Central European History?”, *Central European History* 51 (2018), 56-65.

⁵ Benno Gammerl, *Subjects, Citizens and Others: Administering Ethnic Heterogeneity in the British and Habsburg Empires, 1867-1918* (Oxford: Berghahn 2018).

⁶ Hugh and Christopher Seton-Watson, *The Making of a New Europe: R.W Seton-Watson and the Last Years of Austria-Hungary* (London: Methuen, 1981).

⁷ Partial critical appreciations are to be found in Harry Hanak, “The Early Life of Scotus Viator,” *The Contemporary Europe* 200, no. 1149 (1961), 539-42; László Péter, “R.W.Seton-Watson's Changing Views on the National Question of the Habsburg Monarchy and the European Balance of Power”, *Slavonic and East European Review* 82, no. 3 (2004): 655-679; Mark Cornwall “R.W. Seton-Watson and Nation-Building Clashes in Late Habsburg Space”, https://eprints.soton.ac.uk/416880/1/SETON_WATSON_BUDAPEST_PAPER.docx (accessed 7 November 2018).

Seton-Watson's thought belongs to what Holly Case has referred to as the "age of questions".⁸ Viewing national disputes as international problems requiring solutions, his writings on the national questions in Austria-Hungary and on the successor states in eastern Europe circulated in an international public sphere which "was cast in a role of the stern judge of the action and inaction of governments, a talisman wielded to pre-empt or shame representative bodies or governments."⁹ His would-be solutions typify a deeply paradoxical age of insoluble contradictions: an age of nationalism and patriotism, imperialism and anti-imperialism, emancipation and progress, destruction and genocide.

The core co-ordinates of Seton-Watson's understanding of international politics revolve around what Casper Sylvest has referred to as the ideology of British liberal internationalism: a worldview motivated by a belief in progress, and the upholding of order and public morality in international affairs.¹⁰ His liberal internationalist vision was moulded in a nineteenth-century tradition that understood the "nation" as an organic, distinct and "natural" unit in international affairs.¹¹ The excavation of Seton-Watson's writings therefore has two main aims. First, it makes manifest a core feature of liberal internationalism, the belief in the

⁸ Case, *the Age of Questions*.

⁹ Case, *the age of Questions*, 48.

¹⁰ Casper Sylvest, *British Liberal Internationalism 1880-1930: Making Progress?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

¹¹ Cornwall, "R.W. Seton-Watson and Nation-Building Clashes in Late Habsburg Space". See also Krishan Kumar, "Nationalism and the Historians," in *The Sage Handbook of Nations and Nationalism*, ed. Gerard Delanty and Krishan Kumar (London: Sage, 2006); John Breuilly, "Historians and the Nation," in *History and Historians in the 20th Century*, ed. Peter Burke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 55-87; C. King, "Nations and Nationalism in British Political Studies" in *The British Study of Politics in the Twentieth Century*, eds. B. Barry and A. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1999), 313-345; Dennis Deletant and Harry Hanak, eds. *Historians as Nation-Builders: Central and South-East Europe* (London: Macmillan, 1988).

essential compatibility of nationalism with internationalist and imperialist commitments.¹² Second, it shows how his solutions to the national questions in the Habsburg empire projected liberal values in the region, and, crucially, deflected concerns about imperial unity in Britain.¹³

The article has four parts. Following a short introduction, the first section outlines Seton-Watson's involvement with Habsburg politics and considers the interplay between his contemporary histories of the region and British debates on imperial unity in the 1900s. The second section turns to the long decade of regional and international conflict starting with the outbreak of the Balkan wars. It analyses the ideas underpinning his transformation from a defender of the Habsburg imperial state to an advocate for national self-determination in eastern Europe. The third part of the article retraces Seton-Watson's steps in the "successor states" of east-central Europe in the twenties, tracks the continuities and changes in his thinking on nationhood, democracy and empire, and Britain's role in the world. Finally, the fourth section analyses his turn to the writing of the diplomatic history of Britain in Europe as a reaction to the country's disengagement from European affairs, and argues that his celebrated

¹² David Long and Brian C. Schmidt, eds. *Imperialism and Internationalism in the Discipline of International Relations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006); Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (New York: Allen Lane, 2012), 13-116; Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*, (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo and José Pedro Monteiro eds. *Internationalism, Imperialism and the Formation of the Contemporary World: The Pasts in the Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Jessica Reinisch, "Agents of Internationalism", *Contemporary European History*, 25 (2016): 195-205.

¹³ See also Jeanne Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism: Empires without Imperialism: Anglo-American Decline and the Politics of Deflection*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future World Order 1860-1900*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

history of the “Eastern Question” epitomised a call for a new moralism to redress the crisis of liberalism in Britain and Europe.

2. Nationalism and Imperial Unity in Britain and Austria-Hungary

Robert W. Seton-Watson was born in London in 1879 and grew up in Scotland in an affluent and pious household. The Scottish contribution to the British imperial project shaped his family’s fortune: his father was a tea merchant in Calcutta and his mother’s family descended from officers in the East India Company. Seton-Watson’s Scottish heritage therefore became the foundation of a British imperial identity further cultivated in the elite schools of Winchester and Oxford.¹⁴ Frequent travels to the continent, especially in Germany, and linguistic competence in German, French and Italian constituted a second key feature of his upbringing and defined his transformation to one of Britain’s “cosmopolitan islanders”.¹⁵

In the dawn of the new century Seton-Watson’s thoughts were consumed by questions of imperial unity, and international order. His aspiration to produce original historical research connected with a political concern to cultivate a better understanding of contemporary Germany in British public discourse.¹⁶ Drawing from a broad palette of racialized debates on Anglo-Saxon unity in late Victorian and Edwardian political thought, Seton-Watson’s first

¹⁴ R.W. Seton-Watson, *Scotland Forever! And Other Poems* (Edinburgh: D. Douglas, 1898). See also Tom Devine, *Independence or Union? Scotland’s Past and Scotland’s Present* (London: Allen Lane, 2016), 99.

¹⁵ R.J. Evans, *Cosmopolitan Islanders*, 106, 125; R.W. Evans, “The Creighton Century”, 320-339; Hugh and Christopher Seton-Watson, *The Making of a New Europe*, 1-19.

¹⁶ Seton-Watson to Alfred Zimmern, 7 February 1935, Zimmern MS. Bodleian Library, Oxford [henceforth: Bodl.], 35/10; Fisher to Seton-Watson, 6 June 1901, Seton-Watson MS. SSEES, London, 10/07/03. Fisher to Seton-Watson, 6 June 1901, Seton-Watson MS. SSEES, London, 10/07/03.

articles in the press in the early 1900s defended Germany's right to imperial expansion.¹⁷ The co-operation between Germany, France and Britain was thought of as the harbinger of peace in the continent.

In the middle of the 1900s, a confluence of events across Britain, Russia, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman empire prompted by mounting nationalist tensions and demands for democratic representation gave rise to multivalent projects of imperial reform seeking to accommodate national and, in some cases, supranational movements within imperial structures.¹⁸ The articulation of nationalist demands within imperial state structures marked the

¹⁷ R.W. Seton-Watson, "The Relations of Great Britain and Germany," *The Spectator*, 27 May 1905; "A Necessary sequel to the 'Entente Cordiale'", *The Spectator*, 9 September 1905; "Anglo-German Relations," *The Spectator*, 30 December 1905. See also Pétér, "R.W. Seton-Watson's changing views," 653. See also Harry Hanak, "The Early Life of Scotus Viator," *The Contemporary Europe*, 200/1149 (1961), 539-42. See also Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, 254-272; "Beyond the Sovereign State: Isopolitan Citizenship, Race and Anglo-American Union," *Political Studies*, 62 (2014): 418-434; "Before the Democratic Peace: Racial utopianism, empire and the abolition of war," *European Journal of International Relations* 20, no.3 (2014): 647-670. On the state of German and British relations in Edwardian Britain see Stuart Wallace, *War and the Image of Germany: British Academics 1914-1918* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1988), 14; Paul Kennedy, *The Rise of Anglo-German Antagonism 1860-1914* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1980), 251-287; T.G.Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 309; See also Andreas Rose, *Between Empire and Continent: British Foreign Policy before the First World War* (London: Berghahn 2017); Jan Rüger, *Heligoland: Britain, Germany and the Struggle for the North Sea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

¹⁸ On east-central Europe see Balász Trencsényi, Macie Janowski, Mónika Baár, Maria Falina, and Michal Kopeček, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East and Central Europe. Volume I: Negotiating Modernity in the 'Long Nineteenth Century'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 512-544. On Britain see Andrea Bosco, *The Roundtable Movement and the Fall of the 'Second' British Empire 1909-1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishers, 2017); John Kendle, *Ireland and the Federal solution: The Debate over the United Kingdom*

evolution of his political and historical thought. The defining moment came after a research travel to Vienna to study the growth of Protestantism in Austria-Hungary in 1905, which exposed the aspiring young historian to the constitutional conflicts in both ends of the Dual Monarchy.¹⁹

Demands for universal suffrage, tensions between the Hungarian parliament and the Hapsburg Crown, and clashes between German, Czech and Italian students in Vienna on language questions raised doubts about the empire's stability.²⁰ Following the suggestion of the *Times* correspondent in Vienna, Wickham Steed, Seton-Watson travelled to Hungary to observe the electoral implementation of limited suffrage.²¹ The forced instruction of the Hungarian language deprived the country's Slavonic populations access to linguistic and other democratic rights.²² The Hungarian policies of assimilation existed in a condition of "contradictory

Constitution 1870 - 1920 (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989). See also Chris Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914* (London: Blackwell, 2014), 212-19.

¹⁹ "Racial Strifes in Austria-Hungary", *The Times*, October 3, 1905, 5.

²⁰ Seton-Watson to Fisher, November 18, 1905, Fisher Ms., Bodleian Library [thereafter: Bodl.], Oxford, 59/26; "The Suffrage movement in Austria-Hungary", *The Times*, November 7 1905, 5; *Review of Reviews*, November 1905, 490; Wickham Steed, "Austria- Hungary and Universal Suffrage", *The Times*, October 7, 1905, 5.

²¹ Steed to Seton-Watson, 4 May 1906, Seton-Watson MS. SSEES, London 17/26/6.

²² Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History*, 301-3. See also Dimitrie Drăghicescu, "The Future of the Peoples in Hungary," *The Contemporary Review* 87 (1905): 583-99, at 85.

simultaneity” with Austria’s more pluralist approach to the question of national and political representation.²³

The impact of nineteenth century Hungarian liberalism in Britain framed Seton-Watson’s first letters from Hungary.²⁴ Irish nationalists regarded the *Ausgleich* as a template for the reconfiguration of the relations between Ireland and the rest of Great Britain.²⁵ British liberals modelled the solution of the Irish Question upon Croatia’s autonomy within the structures of the Hungarian state.²⁶ It is therefore unsurprising that Seton-Watson employed the language of “Home Rule” to describe the constitutional crisis between the Hungarian parliament and the

²³ Gammerl, *Subjects, Citizens and Others*, 97.

²⁴On British/English Patriotism and Hungarian liberalism see Jonathan Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe:1830-1866* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 172-220; Robert W. Evans ed., *Great Britain and Central Europe 1867-1914* (Bratislava: Veda, 2002), 11-22; Gregory Clayes, “Mazzini, Kossuth, and British Radicalism, 1848-1854”, *Journal of British Studies*, 28/3 (1989): 225-261; H.S. Jones, “The Idea of the National in Victorian Political Thought”, *European Journal of Political Theory* 5/12 (2006), 12-21; Georgios Varouxakis, “ ‘Great’ versus ‘Small’ Nations: Size and National Greatness in Victorian Political Thought” in Duncan Bell, ed. *Victorian Visions of Global Order: Empire and International Relations in Nineteenth Century Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 135-159; Peter Mandler, “Race and Nation in mid-Victorian Thought, ” in Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore and Brian Young, eds. *History, Religion and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 224-245; Julia Stapleton, “Citizenship versus Patriotism in Twentieth Century England”, *The Historical Journal*, 48/1 (2005): 151-78, at 154.

²⁵ Arthur Griffith, *The Resurrection of Hungary: A Parallel for Ireland* (Dublin: Whelan, 1904); See also Eugenio F. Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism: 1876-1906* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 41.

²⁶ Julia Stapleton, “Political Thought and National Identity in Britain, 1850-1950” in Collini, Whatmore, and Young, eds. *History, Religion and Culture*, 245-69, at 253.

Habsburg Crown.²⁷ Crucially, the witnessing of restrictions in the freedoms of Slovaks, Romanians and Croats set him on a mission to preserve the regional ethnic heterogeneity in the Hungarian end of the Dual Monarchy, and protect the “*natural rights* of language and culture” of the regional ethnic groups within the framework of the imperial state.²⁸ “If the nineteenth century has been the century of the *great* nations”, he argued, “the twentieth will be the century of the small nations”.²⁹ But the “small nations” he sought to vindicate could only exist in great imperial states.

Writing under the *nom de plume* Scotus Viator, Seton-Watson became of Britain’s leading authorities on central Europe;³⁰ his public commentary for the liberal press in the golden age of Edwardian political liberalism gave him access to a network of British liberal and radical intellectuals and politicians with an interest in Balkan affairs and the Eastern Question.³¹ Moreover, his historical reconstructions of current events had a tangible regional impact as his

²⁷ Péter, “R.W.Seton-Watson’s Changing Views on the National Question of the Habsburg Monarchy and the European Balance of Power”, 644.

²⁸ Scotus Viator [R.W. Seton-Watson], “The Slovaks”, *The Spectator*, 2 November 1907 [my emphasis].

²⁹ R.W. Seton-Watson, “Preface” in D. Jurkovic, S. Hurban, M. Lichard and A. Kolisek, *Slovak Peasant Art and Melodies* (London: Constable, 1911), iv.

³⁰ Scotus Viator [R.W. Seton-Watson], *Racial Problems in Hungary* (London: Constable, 1906). See also F.R. Bridge, “British Foreign Office and National Questions in the Dual Monarchy 1900-1914” in R.W. Evans ed. *Britain and Central Europe*, 53-59.

³¹ J. St Loe Strachey to Seton-Watson, 3 May 1907 in Jan Rychlík, Thomas D. Marzik and Miroslav Bielik eds., *R.W. Seton-Watson and his relations with the Czechs and Slovaks* Vol., 118. See also Perkins, “The Congo of Europe: The Balkans and Empire in Early Twentieth Century British Political Culture”; Michail, *The British and the Balkans*; Diana Mishkova. *Beyond Balkanism. The Scholarly Politics of Region Making*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2018), Ch.1.

books were translated in German and French.³² Slovak, Romanian and Croat nationalists regarded him as a key ally;³³ Hungarian liberals saw him as a “personal enemy of the Hungarian state.”³⁴

Having convinced himself that he was “only almost too often digging in an almost virgin soil,”³⁵ Seton-Watson upheld the moral obligation to represent “young”, “non-historic” Slav nationalities in both meanings of the term: to echo their sufferings, and render aspects of their culture and life visible to a broader – western – audience through art exhibitions, intellectual

³² Scotus Viator, *Die Zukunft Österreich-Ungarns und die Haltung der Größmächte* (Franz Deuticke: Leipzig und Wien, 1908); *Politische Verfolgungen in Ungarn* (Wien und Leipzig: C.W. Stern, Verlag, 1908); *Britische Politik und Balkankrise* (Wien und Leipzig: C.W. Stern, Verlag, 1909), *Absolutismus in Kroatien* (Wien und Leipzig: C.W. Stern, Verlag, 1909).

³³ Ármin Vámbéry, “The Roumanians in Hungary,” *The Contemporary Review* 87 (1905): 661-65; Géza Jeszensky, “The correspondence of Oskár Jászi and R.W. Seton-Watson before World War I,” *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 26, 3/4 (1980): 437-454, at 443-44.

³⁴ Count A. Apponyi to T.C. Hope, 4 May 1908, Seton-Watson MS. SSEES, 17/10/5. See also Temperley to Seton-Watson, c.1908, Butterfield MS. Cambridge University Library (Henceforth: CUL), 311; Temperley to Seton-Watson, 25 April 1909, Butterfield MS, CUL, 311; Temperley to Seton-Watson, 18 October 1911, Butterfield MS. CUL, 311; Arhtur B. Yolland, “The Constitutional Struggle of the Magyars: An Answer to ‘Scotus Viator’ and Co,” (London: Polsue, 1905); Joseph Mailath, “A Vindication of Hungary: A reply to Scotus Viator and other writers”(London: Polsue, 1908; See also Peter Sherwood, “An Englishman’s Sixty Years in Hungary,” *Angol Filológiai Tanulmányok / Hungarian Studies in English* 11 (1977), 83-93; Hanak, *Great Britain and Austria-Hungary*, 161.

³⁵ R.W. Seton-Watson, *Europe in the Melting-Pot*.

exchanges,³⁶ and public displays.³⁷ In amplifying their struggles for democracy, collective rights and political representation, Seton-Watson “ventriloquized” the voices of his Slavonic interlocutors, most notably the Slovaks. As Larry Wolff has argued, the dynamics of his regional contacts manifested the fundamental incommensurability of western and eastern intellectual exchanges.³⁸

Seton-Watson’s orientalism is evident in his protracted quarrels with the Hungarian liberal elite. He repeatedly fended off the assertion that the policies of assimilation of the Hungarian state aimed at preserving state unity in manner similar to the preservation of the political unity the British state.³⁹ Despite arguments put forward by Hungarian nobles that the state of affairs in Ireland deprived British observers of the moral right to pontificate about the treatment of minorities in Hungary,⁴⁰ the cleavage between Britain and Hungary represented for Seton-Watson a binary between western inclusive political nationhood and eastern exclusive ethnological nationalism; between a land of feudal privilege (Hungary) and a tolerant multinational commonwealth (Britain). The Austrians, and Czechs, mirrored British values in

³⁶ Seton - Watson to Fedor Ruppeldt, 21 September 1911 in Jan Rychlík, et al, eds., *R.W. Seton-Watson and his relations with the Czechs and Slovaks Vol. I*, 176. See also W.T. Cairns to Seton-Watson, 18 September 1910, Seton-Watson MS. SSEES, 17/3/5; Seton-Watson MS. SSEES 1/1/5; Marzik, Thomas, “A splendid Scottish-Slovak friendship: R.W. Seton-Watson and Fedor Ruppeldt”, in Cornwall, Mark and Frame, Murray eds, *Scotland and the Slavs: Cultures in Contact* (Newtonville MA: Oriental Search Partners, 2001).

³⁷ Wolff, “The Western Representation of Eastern Europe,” 383.

³⁸ Ibid, 387-9.

³⁹ Emil Reich, “The Crisis in Hungary,” *The Contemporary Review* 87 (1905): 522-23 [my emphasis]. See also Count Albert Apponyi, “The Army Question in Austria and Hungary,” *The Monthly Review* 16 (1904): 1-33; Count M. Esterházy, “Hungary and Austria,” *The Spectator*, 13 July 1907; “The Case of the Slovaks”, *The Spectator*, 7 December 1907.

⁴⁰ Count M. Esterházy, “The Case of the Slovaks”, *The Spectator*, 7 December 1907,

that they shared a responsibility to check Hungarian oppression, protect the smaller underdeveloped nationalities and ethnic minorities and set their kin states, such as Serbia and Romania, in the orbit of a federated monarchy.⁴¹

Although locked in a different time-zone, central and eastern Europe could teach Britain and British patriotism a valuable lesson in cultural and political terms. The recovery of the region's primitive cultures and indigenous art was expected to instil a sense of rootedness to modern cosmopolitan life in Britain and western Europe. Slovak peasant folklore, for instance, presented "a wealth of ornament which must be seen to be fully realised by us dull Westerners who have rejected the national costumes of our ancestors".⁴² The "simple" motifs of Southern Slav art and sculpture expressed a "sense of nationality" imbued with religious values offering a counterpoint to the "degenerate" climate of European modernism.⁴³

On a more personal level, the national questions in the Hapsburg context allowed Seton-Watson to articulate his own nationalism. Two years into his studies on the national question in Austria-Hungary he confided that "I have discovered what I always suspected, that the reason why the cause of the non-Magyar (sic) nationalities appeals to me so strongly is that I am a nationalist myself!...a 'Home Ruler all round'".⁴⁴ The Hungarian policies of assimilation, he added, instructed Britain about how Ireland "should not be treated".⁴⁵

⁴¹ See Seton-Watson, *A History of the Roumanians*, 419 - 431.

⁴² R.W. Seton-Watson, "Exhibition of Slovak Art", 1911 in Jan Rychlík, et al, eds., *R.W. Seton-Watson and his relations with the Czechs and Slovaks* Vol. I, p.167 – 170, at 167.

⁴³ R.W. Seton Watson ed. *Exhibition of Serbo-Croatian Artists* (London: Grafton Gallery, 1917), 4, 7-9.

⁴⁴ Seton-Watson to Malcolm Seton-Watson c.1907, Seton-Watson MS. SSEES, 17/25/7.

⁴⁵ Seton-Watson to Malcolm Seton-Watson c.1907, Seton-Watson MS. SSEES, 17/25/7.

Seton-Watson's thought synthesized nineteenth-century British and continental debates on nationality.⁴⁶ Influenced by romanticism, he understood nationality in Herderian terms as defining an organic community of individuals bound together by linguistic and ethnologic features.⁴⁷ Echoing Lord Acton's formulations on nationalism in international politics, the Scot historian believed that the sizeable multinational imperial state offered the optimum vessel for the protection of national communities.⁴⁸

The Hapsburg national politics had more similarities with the state of affairs in Britain than Seton-Watson was willing to assert. The overstretch of British power and the rising demands for self-government in the dominions prompted imperial reformers to make references to a "crisis of political coherence".⁴⁹ Thinking in federal terms and the catchword "Home Rule All

⁴⁶ For an overview see Georgios Varouxakis, "'Patriotism', 'Cosmopolitanism' and 'Humanity' in Victorian Political Thought," *European Journal of Political Theory*, 5/1(2006): 100-118.

⁴⁷ See Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); I. Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Eric D. Weitz, "Self-Determination: how a German enlightenment idea became a slogan for national liberation and a human right," *American Historical Review* (April 2015), 462-96, at 479.

⁴⁸ Lord Acton, "Nationality", in John Neville Figgis and Reginald Vere Laurence eds., *The History of Freedom and Other Essays*, (London: Macmillan), 270-301; Timothy Lang, "Lord Acton and 'the Insanity of Nationality,'" *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 63/11 (2002): 129-149. See also Julia Stapleton, *Political Intellectuals and Public Identities in Britain since 1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 31; Georgios Varouxakis, 'Great' versus 'Small' Nations", 154; Sylvest, *British Liberal internationalism*, 174-94.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Jeanne Morefield, " 'An Education to Greece', the Round Table, Imperial Theory, and the Uses of History," *History of Political Thought* XXVIII, no.2 (Summer 2007): 328-361, at 330. See also Alfred Zimmern, "United Britain: A Study in XXth Century Imperialism" [1905], quoted in Andrea Bosco, *The Round Table Movement and the Fall of the "Second" British Empire 1909-1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2017), 214.

Round” had become a practically expedient way to untangle national and imperial questions in the British empire.⁵⁰ Similarly, the rising tide of democratic politics in fin de siècle Austria-Hungary had rendered the region a laboratory for federalist projects along socialist, conservative and liberal lines.⁵¹

Seton-Watson’s preferred solutions of the national question in the Habsburg state chimed with debates about imperial unity and federation in Britain. Having rejected radical federalist plans as incompatible with the principles of constitutional government,⁵² he endorsed the Austro-Marxist approach to national diversity, and more specifically Karl Renner’s measured account of national and cultural autonomy.⁵³ The Austrian statesman sought to resolve the question of national claims to statehood by proposing the recognition of national entities as

⁵⁰ Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future World Order, 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 93-8. See also J.E. Kendle, “The Round Table Movement and Home Rule All Round”, *The Historical Journal*, 21/2 (1968): 332-353; *The Round Table movement and Imperial Union* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975).

⁵¹ Trencsényi et al, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East and Central Europe I*, 308, 317; Holly Case, *The Age of Questions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 135-152.

⁵² See Aurel C. Popovici, *Die Vereinigten Staaten von Gross-Österreich* (Leipzig, 1906); Scotus Viator, *Racial Problems in Hungary*, 406-7.

⁵³ Scotus Viator, *Racial Problems in Hungary*, 406-8. See Karl Renner, “State and Nation,” in *National Cultural Autonomy and Its Contemporary Critics*, ed. Ephraim Nimni (London: Routledge, 2005), 13-42 and Scotus Viator [R.W. Seton-Watson], “Political Prospects in Austria and Hungary II”, *The Spectator*, June 8 1907; *The Making of a New Europe*, 39-40, 52; Harry Hanak, *Great Britain and Austria-Hungary During the First World War: A Study in the Formation of Public Opinion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 22.

“personal associations”; the attribution of legal personhood would render the national communities of the Dual Monarchy more visible in the empire’s legal system.⁵⁴

The appeal of Renner’s theory of personal autonomy to Scottish historian is explained by the fact that it connected with the question of church (dis)union that preoccupied much of Scotland’s public life in the turn of the century and underpinned the advent of English pluralism through Oxford’s intellectual milieu.⁵⁵ The emphasis on the “personal autonomy” and rights ascribed to collective entities had clear parallels with the organization of religious denominations and their place in the state as evidenced in the case of the Scottish Free church. Renner’s scheme, Seton-Watson argued, would “solve” the “national problem” in Austria-Hungary in a manner homologous to the settling of the church question in Scotland – by recognizing the nationalities, like the churches, as “corporate bodies in the State”.⁵⁶ The recognition of the legal personality of nations and churches alike would then facilitate national and religious unity and co-operation.⁵⁷

The eruption of the “South Slav Question” in the aftermath of the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908, and the return of the Irish Question in the frontline of British politics prompted Seton-Watson to delve further into the questions of imperial unity and reform.⁵⁸ The

⁵⁴ Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*, 294. See also Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems in Hungary*, 407-8; Seton-Watson, *A History of the Roumanians*, 426.

⁵⁵ Laicus Juvenis [R.W. Seton-Watson], “Presbyterian Reunion: A Pressing Need,” *The Scotchman*, 16 October 1905, 9. See also David Runciman, *Pluralism and the Personality of the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 89-150.

⁵⁶ Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems in Hungary*, 408.

⁵⁷ Laicus Juvenis [R.W. Seton-Watson], “Presbyterian Reunion: A Pressing Need”.

⁵⁸ R. W Seton-Watson, *The Southern Slav Question and the Habsburg Monarchy* (London: Constable, 1911), 345. On the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina see Robin Oakey *Taming Balkan Nationalism: The Habsburg*

status of Serb, Croat and Slovene populations in the Dual Monarchy, the state of the Italian-Habsburg relations and Austria's Balkan policy presented the biggest challenge to the unity of the empire and to the preservation of the regional balance of power.⁵⁹ Projects of South Slav unity had long stumbled upon rival visions about the primacy of the Serbs and the Serbian state or the Croat national culture within the framework of Austria-Hungary.⁶⁰

Seton-Watson's proposed solution to the South-Slav question sided with Croatian visions of a reformed "trialist" Habsburg imperial state - with a Yugoslav component - resting on the "absolute equality" of Serbs and Croats and their "essential unity as two inseparable elements in the life of a single nation".⁶¹ The creation of a South-Slav political nationhood accommodating separate Serb and Croat national and cultural identities would become the third pillar of a federally reformed imperial state. This would thwart the rising influence of the Serbian state; the weakening of the Habsburg state would mark "the triumph of Eastern over Western culture and would be a fatal blow to the progress and modern development throughout

'Civilizing Mission' in Bosnia, 1878-1914 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). On the Irish question see Eugenio Biagini, "The Third Home Rule Bill in British History" in Gabriel Doherty, ed. *The Home Rule Crisis 1912-1914* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2014), 412-442; G.K. Peatling, *British Opinion and Irish self-government 1865-1925* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2001), 53-91, 111-144.

⁵⁹ Serb, Croat and Slovene populations in the Dual Monarchy lived under at least four separate institutional frameworks. They enjoyed limited self-government in Croatia-Slavonia and a minority status in the Hungarian assimilationist state; they were subjects of semi-colonial occupation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and of economic exploitation in Dalmatia. Balász Trencsényi et al. *A History of Modern Political Thought in East and Central Europe I*, 532.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 286-88.

⁶¹ Seton-Watson, *The Southern Slav Question and the Habsburg Monarchy*, 341, 399. For more nuances, see Trencsényi et al. *A History of Modern Political Thought in East and Central Europe I*, 516-8, 533-55.

the Balkans”.⁶² Austria was “peculiarly fitted to manage Balkan peoples” and Austria’s Bosnian colonial experiment elicited references to the workings of the British colonial administration in Egypt.⁶³

The Serbo-Croat political unity envisaged was modelled upon the Anglo-Scot union within the framework of the United Kingdom. Serbs and Croats were seen as replicating an ideal model of Anglo-Scot political nationhood. The most pertinent parallel between the Habsburg and the British context was offered by the Irish Question. The South Slav Question and the Irish Question essentially challenged the unity of imperial states (Austria and the United Kingdom) and called for the invention of formulas to achieve self-government without severing the bonds of unity of the imperial states. Seton-Watson would therefore send his Croat contacts books about the Irish question, to the extent that one his Croat interlocutors mistook him for an “Irishman”.⁶⁴

The resurgence of the Home Rule debate divided liberal and imperialist opinion. The debate revolved around two main schemes, a “federal” and a “colonial” settlement prioritizing the creation of regional parliaments across the United Kingdom or the achievement of a dominion status. The supporters of the latter option made frequent allusions to the South African union, which was largely the brainchild of the segregationist federalist ideas of the *Round Table*

⁶² Seton-Watson, *The Southern Slav Question and the Habsburg Monarchy*, 337.

⁶³ Scotus Viator [R.W. Seton-Watson], “Austria-Hungary, Italy, and the West Balkans,” *The Contemporary Review*, 93 (1908): 344-348 at 347; Seton-Watson, *The Southern Slav Question*, 339.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Matković, “Ivo Pilar and Robert William Seton-Watson”, 23. Christopher Seton-Watson et al, eds., *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs*, 86.

group.⁶⁵ Those supporting more “federal” solutions cautioned against the impending break-up of the United Kingdom in the event Ireland achieved dominion status.⁶⁶

Although Seton-Watson did not write about Irish affairs, he became an advisor to a parliament committee collecting information on the Irish question from the point of view of “devolution”.⁶⁷ Comprised by liberals and liberal imperialists affiliated with the Round Table movement, the committee sought to resolve the impasse by supporting “self-government for Ireland consistent with the unity of the Empire.”⁶⁸ Seton-Watson found himself caught in the web of the conflicting and contradictory liberal-imperial positions on the Irish Question. Although committed in principle to self-government and federalism – “Home Rule All Round”, he feared that Irish Home Rule did not provide enough guarantees to Ulster protestants and endangered the political integrity of the United Kingdom.⁶⁹ The South-Slav question, on the other hand, appeared to be more straightforward.

In central and eastern Europe, the Scottish historian saw himself as a harbinger of political unity and regional co-operation. Writing from Dubrovnik in January 1912 on the occasion of

⁶⁵ Saul Dubow, “Colonial Nationalism, The Miller Kindergarten and the Rise of ‘South Africanism’, 1902-10,” *History Workshop Journal* 43 (1997): 53-86. See also Scotus Viator, *Britische Politik und Balkankrise* (C.W. Stern, Verlag: Wien und Leipzig, 1909); H.A.L. Fisher, *Political Unions: The Creighton Lecture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 1911, 7.

⁶⁶ Peatling, *British Opinion and Irish self-government*, 71 – 74, 128.

⁶⁷ Basil Williams, ed. *Home Rule Problems*, (London: King, 1911). See also S. Rosenbaum, ed. *Against Home Rule: The Case for the Union*, (London: Frederick Warne, 1912).

⁶⁸ Williams, ed., *Home Rule Problems*, 3. One of the group’s members, the historian and editor of the *Contemporary Review* George Peabody Gooch argued that “the real union between the two countries will only begin when it rests on the unforced consent of the weaker member, and when scope is found for the national self-consciousness beneath the tolerant sovereignty of the British Crown.” Ibid, 5.

⁶⁹ Hugh and Christopher Seton-Watson, *The Making of a New Europe*, 89-90.

a celebratory banquet in his honour by the local Croat authorities, Seton-Watson rejoiced that his presence brought the union of competing political factions, an event as remarkable as if “an Orange band in Belfast were to play Nationalist airs”.⁷⁰ A few years later, on the eve of the Great War, he wished Croatia had “one spark of the Ulster spirit” to resist the Serbian influence and that “Ulster had a little more of the “Kriecherei” so widespread in Croatia”.⁷¹

In a matter of a few years, from the middle of the 1900s until the outbreak of the Great War, Seton-Watson became one of the leading authorities on the national question in Eastern and Central Europe. His contemporary histories and public commentary were motivated by two main considerations: how to uphold the balance of power in Europe and redress the anti-German rhetoric and how to accommodate national self-government within imperial states. Democracy equalled the unhindered enjoyment of national rights and Britain was seen as offering a blueprint in the preservation of national and democratic rights. Keeping consciously at bay the Habsburg and the British context, his surveys of South Slav politics made manifest Britain’s exceptionalism. He therefore urged the Hungarian political elite to replace their assimilationist policies with a “British conception of citizenship which takes a delight in creating new nations and combining an endless diversity of race and type with the essential unity which encourages rather than hampers individuality”.⁷²

3. A New Europe in the making

The scope of Seton-Watson’s transnational networks set in motion plans for the inauguration of a periodical publication tentatively titled *The Interpreter*. Projected to circulate on

⁷⁰ Ibid, 88.

⁷¹ Ibid, 162.

⁷² Seton-Watson, *The Southern Slav Question*, 340.

November 1914, the journal aimed to celebrate the ethnic and national diversity across Europe, and “encourage national individuality, wherever found.”⁷³ Relying on regional collaborators the journal aspired to “break down the barrier of language” and provide access to an international – Anglophone – public sphere rendering continental “races” visible in “western eyes”.⁷⁴ Seton-Watson’s conception shared some similarities, albeit in a smaller scale, with the Round Table Journal and its organization pushing the cause for the federation of the empire. *The Interpreter* would also feature accounts on the Irish question intended to neutralise complaints from Seton-Watson’s “continental critics” of forgetting “the beam that is in mine own eye”; finally, the inclusion of articles on “the sympathetic and healthy side of the Jewish Question” was meant “to [be] at once fair play and good tactics”.⁷⁵

Seton-Watson’s hostility to assimilation may also offer an explanation for the employment of popular anti-Semitic stereotypes in his contemporary histories which has largely passed unnoticed. His attitude towards the Jewish question was determined by a fundamental inability to understand the viewpoint of the “assimilationist” Jews and explain their involvement in the policies of forcible assimilation in Hungary.⁷⁶ He therefore referred to the complicity of the “large landowners and the Jewish financiers, who between them control the Government and

⁷³ R.W. Seton-Watson Papers, SEESS, London, 2/1/1; R.W. Seton-Watson to May Seton-Watson, 1 June 1914, Jan Rychlík, et al, eds., *R.W. Seton-Watson and his relations with the Czechs and Slovaks Vol. I*, 188-89.

⁷⁴ R.W. Seton-Watson Papers, SEESS, London, 2/1/1.

⁷⁵ R.W. Seton-Watson Papers, SEESS, London, 2/1/1.

⁷⁶ See also “First Impressions of Transylvania”, 943-44.

the press in Hungary to-day”;⁷⁷ and registered his sympathy for Karl Lueger’s rhetoric with respect to the danger of “Hungary becoming a Zionist rather than a Magyar national state”.⁷⁸

The advent of the Great War cancelled Seton-Watson’s publishing plans and marked the end of a process of transformation of his international thought which began with the outbreak of the Balkan wars in 1912. The conflict in eastern Europe weakened the prospects of imperial reform in the Hapsburg empire. The Balkan wars polarised the community of the British liberal and radical experts on eastern Europe and marked the rise of Seton-Watson’s influence inside the British foreign policy apparatus.⁷⁹ Seton-Watson’s responded to the first Balkan war by endorsing the creation of federal groupings – “Zollvereins” – under the aegis of Romania; the country’s Saxon heritage explained his racial preference over Romania.⁸⁰ Moreover, the Romanian political elite at the time was regarded as more loyal to the Habsburg state.⁸¹ By the time of the second Balkan wars Seton-Watson’s regional alliances had been solidified: he sided with a Romanian and Serbian block against “a Balkan league dominated by Big Bulgaria on

⁷⁷ Scotus Viator [R.W. Seton-Watson], “Hungary and Reaction,” *The Spectator*, 20 July 1907. As Pieter Judson has argued, popular anti-Semitism in Hungary “served as a language for the unfranchised to mobilize locally against the power of the established national elite”. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*, 301.

⁷⁸ Seton-Watson. *The South-Slav Question*, 340.

⁷⁹ Seton-Watson’s commentary and linguistic dexterity rendered him a candidate for the Carnegie enquiry into the causes of the Balkan wars. See F.W. Hirst to R.W. Seton-Watson, 2 April 1913, Seton-Watson Papers, 17/10/1; Seton-Watson to J. Smolaka, 2 December 1913, Christopher Seton-Watson et al, eds., *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs*, 156.

⁸⁰ R.W.Seton-Watson, “Austria-Hungary as a Balkan Power,” *The Contemporary Review* 102 (December 1912): 801-806. See also R.W.Seton-Watson, “Hungary and the Southern Slavs,” *The Contemporary Review* 101 (July 1912), 830; *The Spectator* 12 July 1913.

⁸¹ Seton-Watson, *A History of the Roumanians*, 446-7.

Prussian models”.⁸² This was in striking contrast with the Bulgarophile and Albanophile writings of other intellectuals linked with the Balkan committee, such as Noel Buxton, Henry Brailsford, Henry Nevinston and Mary Edith Durham.⁸³ For instance, the conservative MP, and founder of the Anglo-Albanian society, Aubrey Herbert made no efforts to conceal his contempt for the “swine-breeding, queen-disembowelling Serbians”.⁸⁴

Serbia’s military success in the second Balkan War brought a drastic change in the tone of Seton-Watson’s Balkan commentary which had been wary of the prospects of Serbian expansionism against Austria-Hungary.⁸⁵ Serbia was now seen as undergoing a “revival of national feeling” assuming the role of a “Southern Slav Piedmont” for the South Slavs of the Hapsburg Monarchy.⁸⁶ Although the new language did not fundamentally challenge Seton-

⁸² R.W. Seton-Watson, “The Motives of Roumanian Policy”, *The Nation*, 15 July 1913. Hugh Seton-Watson and Cornelia Bodea eds., *Seton-Watson and the Romanians Vol II* (Bucharest: Editura Stiintifica si Enciclopedica, 1988), 679.

⁸³ Mary Edith Durham, “The Serb and the Albanian Frontiers,” *The Contemporary Review* 102 (1912): 801; Henry Brailsford, “The Autonomy of Albania,” *The Nation* 12, no.13 (1913); Noel Buxton, *With the Bulgarian Staff* (London: Smith, 1913), 156-7; Henry Nevinston, “The Causes of Victory and the Spoils,” *The Contemporary Review* 103 (1913): 10. See also Wolff, “The Western Representation of Eastern Europe,” 382.

⁸⁴ B. Destani and J. Tomes, eds. *Aubrey Herbert and the Making of Modern Albania* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 74.

⁸⁵ Seton-Watson, “Austria-Hungary as a Balkan Power,” 805. Christopher Seton-Watson et al, eds., *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs*, 120. In his earlier book on the South Slav question Seton-Watson argued that the political unity of Serbs and Croats outside the framework of the Habsburg state could only be attained “through universal war and a thorough revision of the map of Europe”. Seton-Watson, *The Southern Slav Question*, 338.

⁸⁶ R.W Seton-Watson, “New Phases of the Balkan Question,” *Contemporary Review* 104, (August 1913): 322-330 at 325-26, 328. See also See also Nicholas J. Miller, “R.W. Seton-Watson and Serbia during the Re-emergence of Yugoslavism, 1903-1914,” *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* XV, no. 1-2 (1988): 59-69,

Watson's fundamental aversion towards Serbia's political life, it denoted the country's renewed importance as a centre of gravity for the achievement of South Slav statehood.⁸⁷

The reference to Piedmont may have been influenced by the observations of Seton-Watson's travelling companion in the Balkans, the historian George Macaulay Trevelyan, whose scholarship shaped the legacy of the Italian Risorgimento in Edwardian Britain; Trevelyan waged a formidable campaign to change Serbia's public image in Britain playing up the qualities and tenaciousness of the "Servian [sic] peasant".⁸⁸ In Trevelyan, Seton-Watson found a useful ally in his efforts to accommodate the Balkan rivalry between Italy and Austria-Hungary.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to view Seton-Watson as a champion of a Greater Serbia. Prior to the July crisis he anticipated that the prospects Serbian expansionism would urge the leading statesmen in the Dual Monarchy to accelerate the process of the federal reform of the empire to avoid "abdicating in favour of the Serbian, Roumanian and Boulgarian (sic) national States".⁹⁰

at 62; Hanak, "The Early Life of Scotus Viator," 541. The idea that Serbia was the Piedmont of the Balkans – a place for national regeneration - had been introduced by W.T. Stead at the time of the Bulgarian agitation in the mid 1870s.

⁸⁷ Christopher Seton-Watson et al, eds., *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs*, 165; Hugh and Christopher Seton-Watson, *The Making of a New Europe*. 76.

⁸⁸ G.M. Trevelyan, "A Holiday among the Servians," *The Contemporary Review* 114 (August 1913): 153-164, at 158. See also James Perkins, "Peasants and Politics: Re-thinking the British Imaginative Geography of the Balkans at the Time of the First World War", *European History Quarterly*, 47, no.1 (2017), 55–77; Michail, *the British and the Balkans*.

⁸⁹ See also Breuilly, "Historians and the Nation", 58-61. David Cannadine, *G.M. Trevelyan: A Life in History* (London: Penguin, 1992), 64.

⁹⁰ R.W. Seton-Watson, *German, Slav and Magyar: A Study in the Origins of the Great War* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1916), 121. See also his German edition of the South-Slav Question in 1913.

The assassination of the Archduke in Sarajevo put an end to the prospects of imperial reform in Austria-Hungary. Seton-Watson lamented the moment that he “had touched the Southern Slav question.”⁹¹ The imminent Austrian response raised the question of Allied intervention. A sizeable group of liberals and radicals argued that Austria’s offensive in Serbia was within the purview of its imperial authority. In the words of the *Economist* editor F. W. Hirst: “our happiness, honour and future security depend upon a strict policy of non-intervention in the racial feuds and territorial ambitions of the Continent”.⁹² The crisis “pulled” Seton-Watson in “two directions”: neither an Austrian offensive on Serbia, nor the amputation of the Dual Monarchy were preferable options.⁹³ The preservation of regional order and peace therefore still rested on the co-operation between France, Britain and Germany, and the recognition of the latter’s colonial aspirations.⁹⁴ Even in the darkest hours of the Anglo-German rivalry, Seton-Watson would proclaim himself “too fond of Germany and things German” and advise his Slovak interlocutors that they had more to learn from Germany than from Britain.⁹⁵ However, although Germany was “not the danger to us that the man in the street imagine...her triumph over France and Russia would, it is fairly obvious, be the gravest possible menace”.⁹⁶

⁹¹ Christopher Seton-Watson et al, eds., *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs*, 106, 171-2.

⁹² Hirst to Seton-Watson 29 July 1914, SEW 17/10/1.

⁹³ Seton-Watson to Hirst in Christopher Seton-Watson et al, eds., *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs*, 178.

⁹⁴ Scotus Viator [R.W. Seton-Watson], “The Situation in the Near East”, *Spectator*, 9 November 1912 in R.W. Seton-Watson and the Romanians Vol.II,669-171 at 671.

⁹⁵ Seton - Watson to Fedor Ruppeldt, 21 September 1911 in Jan Rychlík, et al, eds., *R.W. Seton-Watson and his relations with the Czechs and Slovaks* Vol. I, 176.

⁹⁶ Seton-Watson to Hirst in Christopher Seton-Watson et al, eds., *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs*, 178.

The outbreak of the Great War threw everything in the “melting pot”.⁹⁷ Seton-Watson became involved in humanitarian campaigns, though the Serbian Relief Fund, and in various propaganda activities mediating between his central and eastern European interlocutors and Britain’s political class in an effort to rally support for the Entente in Serbia and Romania.⁹⁸ The war turned him, like many others of his generation, instantly against things German. Mainstream patriotism now rested on the distinction between British ideals of liberty and German militarism.⁹⁹ In this context, British imperialism manifested itself as anti-nationalist; the empire appeared as a liberal association of national units. The enemy of Britain, and of Europe, was “the nationalism of others”.¹⁰⁰ Having supplied the Round Table magazine with makeshift maps of central and eastern Europe, Seton-Watson contributed in one of the first

⁹⁷ R.W. Seton-Watson, *Europe in the Melting Pot* (London: Methuen, 1919).

⁹⁸ R.W. Seton-Watson, *Serbia Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: A School Address* (London: Kosovo Day Committee, 1916). See also Michail, *The British and the Balkans*, 86; Hugh and Christopher Seton-Watson, *Seton-Watson and the making of a new Europe*, p.175 R.W. Seton-Watson, “Memorandum: Conversation with Crown Prince Alexander”, 15 January 1915 in Christopher Seton-Watson et al, eds., *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs*, 192-5; R.W. Seton-Watson, “Speech at the Banquet Given in his honour in Bucharest”, 24 January 1915, Hugh Seton-Watson et al, eds, *Seton- Watson and the Romanians Vol.II*, 706; Ronald Burrows and R.W. Seton-Watson to members of Parliament, London 28 March 1916, in Christopher Seton-Watson et al, eds., *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs*, 262-4. See also N. Buxton to Seton-Watson, 3 March 1915, Seton-Watson MS. SSEES, 17/3/3.

⁹⁹ Wallace, *War and the Image of Germany*, 43-74.

¹⁰⁰ David Edgerton, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation* (London: Allen Lane, 2018), 30, 51

volumes making the patriotic case for the war undertaking the “hopeless” task to “explain the dual monarchy to a working-class public”.¹⁰¹

The times, Seton-Watson argued, required “a drastic solution of the Question of Nationalities”.¹⁰² Influenced by contacts with prominent Croatian Yugoslavists and émigrés, he therefore advised the Foreign Office that the “natural solution” of the South Slav question was a “federal union” between Croats, Serbs and Slovenes.¹⁰³ The prospects of South Slav union depended on the dissolution of the Dual Monarchy and the neutralisation of Italian claims to Dalmatia; Seton-Watson would therefore spend much of his energy together with Wickham Steed lobbying against the secret treaties with Italy and mediating between rival South Slav groups to bring about unity in a South Slav state conceived as a composite federal entity alongside a Czechoslovak and a greater Romanian state.¹⁰⁴

Long before the dismemberment of empires became a realistic policy option, Seton-Watson accommodated minority groups of émigrés and activists planning the independence of their states in some cases even against the aspirations of the majority of the local populace.¹⁰⁵ Thomas Masaryk became the symbol of the struggle for Austria-Hungary’s dismemberment

¹⁰¹ Seton-Watson to Zimmern, 15 September 1914, in Zimmern MS. Bodleian, Oxford, Box 14, Folder 74-5. R.W. Seton-Watson, Dover Wilson, Alfred E. Zimmern and Arthur Greenwood, *The War and Democracy* (London: Macmillan, 1914).

¹⁰² Seton-Watson to Stano, 22 October 1937, Seton-Watson MS. SEESS, London, 10/4/3.

¹⁰³ Christopher Seton-Watson et al, eds., *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs*, 145. Seton-Watson to Mabel Grujić, 15 March 1915, in Christopher Seton-Watson et al, eds., *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs*, 199-205.

¹⁰⁴ Seton-Watson to Herbert Fisher, 9 October 1916 in Christopher Seton-Watson et al, eds., *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs*, 280. See also Cornwall, *The Undermining of Austria-Hungary*, 173-220.

¹⁰⁵ Balázs Trencsényi, Michal Kopeček, Luka Lisjak Gabrijelčič, Maria Falina, Mónika Baár, and Maciej Janowski, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe: Volume II: Negotiating Modernity in the ‘Short Twentieth Century’ and Beyond, Part I: 1918-1968*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 10.

and Seton-Watson was pivotal in facilitating, and financing, his relocation in London as the inaugural professor of the School of Slavonic Studies.¹⁰⁶ The war had turned Masaryk from an advocate of regional autonomy and self-government for the crown lands of Bohemia, Silesia and Moravia, to an exponent of the empire's fragmentation.¹⁰⁷ Masaryk's international thought balanced between a Herderian view of the nation as an organic unit in human and international affairs and references to the liberal Czech tradition of central European federalism harkening back to Palacky.¹⁰⁸ His grand strategy rested on the establishment of independent small national states in east-central Europe forming a confederation of democratic units in the fault lines of east and west, between Germany and Russia.¹⁰⁹

Masaryk was influential in the inauguration of the *New Europe* weekly, which Seton-Watson edited and financed from 1916 until 1921. The weekly concurred with Masaryk's vision of international order and positioned itself in the middle ground of the political debate between

¹⁰⁶ Seton-Watson to T.G. Masaryk, 30 April 1915, in Jan Rychlík, et al, eds., *R.W. Seton-Watson and his relations with the Czechs and Slovaks Vol. I*, 222-235; Seton-Watson to Burrows, 15 March 1915; Burrows to Seton-Watson 18 March 1915; Seton-Watson to Burrows, 14 September 1915, Burrows MS. King's College, London, Box 86.

¹⁰⁷ R.W. Seton-Watson, *Masaryk in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943).

¹⁰⁸ Draga B. Shillinglaw, *The Lectures of Professor T.G. Masaryk at the University of Chicago: Summer 1902* (London: Associated University Press, 1978); *G.Masaryk's Kromeriz Lectures: Problem of a Small Nation*, ed. Stacey B. Day (Prague: Trigon, 2010); Roman Szporluk, *The Political Thought of Thomas G. Masaryk* (New York: Boulder, 1981). On Palacky see Monika Baár, *Historians and Nationalism: East-Central Europe in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp.298-9.

¹⁰⁹ T.G. Masaryk, *The Problem of Small Nations in the European Crisis* (London: The Council for the Study of International Relations, 1915); T.G. Masaryk, *The New Europe: A Slav Viewpoint* (Washington, 1918). See also Trencsényi et al, *A History of Political Thought in East-Central Europe I*, 624-7.

the “jingo” and the “pacifist”.¹¹⁰ It featured contributions from Seton-Watson’s continental contacts and younger experts affiliated with the British foreign policy apparatus monitoring the political events in east-central Europe and the near-middle east.¹¹¹ Its pro-Slav agenda was at odds with the official British policy on eastern Europe, which was driven by pragmatic and strategic considerations, and raised the criticism among senior British scholars.¹¹² As the war escalated the magazine opposed calls for a negotiated settlement and had a “curiously negative attitude” towards the League of Nations idea, in the words of a historian of the League of Nations movement.¹¹³ The magazine ventured to amalgamate with the Round Table movement, following the ascent of key members of the Round Table to the higher echelons of

¹¹⁰ Burrows to Wallas, 5 October 1917, Wallas MS. LSE 1/60.

¹¹¹ Erik Goldstein, “The Foreign Office and Political Intelligence 1918-1920,” *Review of International Studies* 14 (1988); Alan Sharp, “Some Relevant Historians - the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office, 1918-20,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 34, no. 3 (1988); Goldstein, *Winning the Peace: British Diplomatic Strategy, Peace Planning and the Paris Peace Conference, 1916-1920*, 39,41; Keith Hamilton, ‘The Pursuit of “Enlightened Patriotism”: The British Foreign Office and Historical Researches During the Great War and Its Aftermath,’ *Historical Research* LXI, no. 146 (1988).

¹¹² Calder, *Britain and The Making of a New Europe*. A.F. Pollard to Seton-Watson, Seton-Watson MS. SEESS 2/3/3; Similar concerns very voiced by W. Allison-Philips. Seton-Watson MS. SEESS 2/3/5.

¹¹³ H.N. Brailsford, “The Shaping of Mid-Europe” *The Contemporary Review* 106 (1916); H.N. Brailsford, “The New Spirit in Austria,” *The Contemporary Review* 11 (1917); Noel Buxton, “The Entente and the Allies of Germany,” *The Contemporary Review* 113 (1918). See also Henry R. Winkler, *The League of Nations Movement in Great Britain 1914-1919* (New Jersey: Scarecrow, 1952), 145. See also Peter J. Yearwood, *Guarantee of Peace: The League of Nations in British Policy 1914-1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Lloyd George's government.¹¹⁴ However, the question of the application of the principle of self-determination in central and eastern Europe eventually split the two groups.

In 1917 the demands for peace without annexations from Russian radicals and British pacifists proved in Seton-Watson's mind the need to re-state the British war aims "in a form which would bring out the underlying democratic principle....proclaiming our determination to secure to every nationality in Europe (whether as yet autonomous or not) the right to self-determination".¹¹⁵ In response to the socialist internationalism of the Bolsheviks, Seton-Watson evoked the "ideal of national Self-determination proclaimed long ago by the great Mazzini".¹¹⁶ The Wilsonian re-appropriation of Mazzini would turn central and eastern Europe into a space of composite and unitary states with internationally guaranteed boundaries and provisions for the linguistic freedoms of "racial minorities".¹¹⁷

The *New Europe* reached the apex of its influence at the time of the Peace Conference, famously making its way to Paris through the diplomatic sac of the British delegation. Its pages were populated by central and eastern European experts and national activists formulating ethnic claims to territory with reference to history, culture, geopolitics, anthropology and

¹¹⁴ Already from 1915 Masaryk communicated to Seton-Watson that the "Roundtable men should have a critical weekly;" Jan Rychlík, et al, eds., *R.W. Seton-Watson and his relations with the Czechs and Slovaks Vol. I*.

¹¹⁵ R.W. Seton-Watson to Intelligence Bureau, "A Special Memorandum on the Question of a Separate Peace with Austria", May 1917, in Christopher Seton-Watson et al, eds., *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs*, 292-4.

¹¹⁶ R.W. Seton-Watson, "preface", in Srgjan Tucic, *The Liberators: A Drama in three Acts*, trans. By Fannie S. Copeland, (Stratford-Upon-Avon: The Shakespeare Head Press, 1918), x.; R. W. Seton-Watson, "Lenin - his career and his methods," *The New Europe*, 6 December 1917, pp.266-8

¹¹⁷ R.W. Seton-Watson to Foreign Office, "Memorandum Respecting Austria-Hungary", 25 November 1918, Christopher Seton-Watson et al, eds., *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs*, 370-6 at 372. See Shannon Monaghan, *Protecting democracy from dissent. Population engineering in Western Europe 1918-1926* (London, Routledge, 2018).

ethnology. If the war had become the crucible of national questions, the *New Europe* was the vessel of thinking in terms of national questions. Seton-Watson also made his way to Paris in an unofficial capacity facilitating the representations of his regional political contacts and undertaking informal diplomatic duties in central Europe. He contributed to the transformation of Wilsonian self-determination into “national self-determination” and witnessed from first-hand the emergence of the “successor state” as an entity in international affairs.¹¹⁸

In the aftermath of the Peace Conference, *New Europe* ceased its publication. In the words of a diplomatic historian of the period, “much of its important work was accomplished, having helped to inform the peace-making process and the acceptance of a new eastern Europe.”¹¹⁹ But once the dust of propaganda settled, Seton-Watson’s tone was far from triumphant. Writing to Oscar Jaszi, his only remaining Hungarian interlocutor, he confided that “I do not pretend to be enamoured of the new situation and quite see many hardships and injustices have resulted from it. But I non the less believe that the necessary *foundations* are now laid, upon which it should be possible to carry out the necessary work of reconstruction”.¹²⁰

The coming of the Great war rendered Seton-Watson’s plans about the imperial reform of the Habsburg empire obsolete. The period marked his turn to one of Britain’s most vocal advocates of national self-determination in central and eastern Europe. Although the war further widened the cultural and political distance between Britain and eastern Europe, Britain was thought to bear the responsibility to guarantee the coming of the national state in the continent. However,

¹¹⁸ Leonard V. Smith, *Sovereignty at the Paris Peace Conference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 35.

¹¹⁹ Erik Goldstein, “The Round Table and the New Europe,” 346/1 (1998): 177-190.

¹²⁰ Seton-Watson to Jaszi [my emphasis]. See also Oscar Jaszi *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1929).

Seton-Watson was quick to realise that war had also failed to solve the national questions in the region; it had merely placed the aim of national emancipation on a better footing.¹²¹

4. Britain and the successor states in central and eastern Europe

On the 2nd of November 1922 Seton-Watson delivered his inaugural lecture as “Masaryk Professor of Central European History” at King’s College in London. The endowment of the professorship with funds from the Czechoslovak state marked the expansion of the School of Slavonic Studies.¹²² Speaking in the presence of Thomas Masaryk, Seton-Watson pleaded for the consolidation of the “experimental form” of “regional studies”.¹²³ The term denoted the combination of the historical, linguistic and economic study of a particular nation or region in Europe. Seton-Watson’s scheme aspired to be “international” and “cosmopolitan” in scope, fostering the “mutual interpretation between nation and nation”.¹²⁴ British scholars were best suited to undertake such a task; their objectivity derived from their detachment from the rival nationalities “which jostle each other throughout the wide area of Central Europe.”¹²⁵

As we have already seen, Seton-Watson’s regional activities were far from impartial; and in the decades that followed, the School’s activities supported and were depended financially on the Versailles’ victors. The school did not promote the study of Austria, Hungary and Bulgaria. When in 1923 the question of Hungarian linguistic instruction arose Seton-Watson

¹²¹ Case, *The Age of Questions*, 101.

¹²² Ian W. Roberts and Roger Bartlett, *History of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies 1915-2005* (London: School of Eastern European Studies, 2009), 15-7.

¹²³ R.W. Seton-Watson, “The Historian as a Political Force in Central Europe”, (London, 1922), 13.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 18. See also Evans, *Cosmopolitan Islanders*, 106.

looked for a candidate “entirely unconnected with politics” neither an émigré, nor anyone “obnoxious” to the Horthy regime “to avoid plunging the University into the middle of a political feud.”¹²⁶ The contemporary history that the Scottish historian promoted had a moral duty to defend the dissolution of Austria-Hungary against those who regarded the national fragmentation and economic ruin of central and eastern Europe as a symptom of “civilizational” decline.¹²⁷

In the early twenties British commentators with a distaste for racial equality argued that Europe had become “Balkanized” or “Africanized”; such were the epithets used to denote international disorder and national fragmentation.¹²⁸ Central Europe had been transformed, in Austin Harrison’s words, into “a victimized cordon of semi-starving, non-economic units all thirsting for more territory and more credit...quarrelling and blockading one another with tariff barriers, red tape and Balkanized policies of strangulation”.¹²⁹ Experts proposed plans for the reconstruction of the economies of the Danube region resting on federative schemes of regional organization with Vienna and Budapest seen as indispensable units.¹³⁰ In John Maynard

¹²⁶ R.W. Seton-Watson to Oscar Jaszi, 5 February 1923, Jaszi Papers, Columbia University Library, New York.

¹²⁷ H.N.Brailsford, *After the Peace* (London: Parsons, 1920), 60-2.

¹²⁸ Austin Harrison, “The Africanisation of Europe,” *The English Review* (April 1920): 542-48; Sisley Huddleston, “Balkanisation and Federation,” *The Contemporary Review* (July 1919), 542-48. See also Henry N. Brailsford, *Across the Blockade: A record of travels in enemy Europe* (London, 1919); Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, *The tragedy of Central Europe* (London, 1923).

¹²⁹ Harrison, “The Africanisation of Europe,” 367.

¹³⁰ William Goode, “Austria,” *Journal of the British Institute of International Affairs* 1, no. 2 (1922); Ellis J. Barker, “The Future of Austria,” *The Contemporary Review* (1922); Wiliam Goode, “The Rescue of Hungary”, *The Contemporary Review* (1924): 18-27. See also Miklos Lojko, *Meddling in Middle Europe: Britain and the “Lands Between” 1919-1925*, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006); Dragan Bakic, *Britain and Interwar Danubian Europe: Foreign Policy and Security Challenges, 1919 -1936* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

Keynes's words, the post-war settlement had created "innumerable new political frontiers...between jealous, greedy, immature and economically incomplete nationalist States."¹³¹

The counter-argument from the supporters of the new international order in eastern Europe rested on the assumption that economic internationalism was predicated on national self-determination. For instance, Alfred Zimmern regarded Keynes' ideas for a Free Trade Union in Central Europe as the revival of Friedrich Naumann's much derided *Mitteleuropa* project and he exclaimed, with a dose of irony, that "you cannot, as English liberals fondly imagine, have political nationalism without custom houses".¹³² In attacking those lamenting the fragmentation of Central Europe, Zimmern upheld a new vision of economic internationalism which could be at the same time protectionist and internationalist.¹³³ In a similar vein, Seton-Watson's riposte to those lamenting the "Balkanisation" of east-central Europe was to highlight the purported "abnormal" and "dynastic" bond of union amongst the different nationalities comprising Austria-Hungary.¹³⁴ In other words, the Scottish historian exclaimed, "if the League of Nations is the goal (and it must be the goal of all sensible students of foreign affairs) you must have your nations there, before you can form them into a League."¹³⁵ Seton-Watson's

¹³¹ John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (New York, 1920), 266.

¹³² Alfred Zimmern, *Europe in Convalescence* (London: Mills and Boon, 1922), 186.

¹³³ See also Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Consumption, Civil Society and Commerce in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 265.

¹³⁴ The assertion that the Dual Monarchy had become a prison house of nationalities had gained common currency amongst British liberals arguing that the war was fought for the liberation of the small nations of Europe. See Alfred Zimmern, *Nationality and Government* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1919), 17.

¹³⁵ R.W. Seton-Watson, *The Czechoslovak Republic* (Edinburgh, 1919), 2.

musings prove that liberal internationalism and protectionism could coexist, albeit not without tensions.

Having spent many years of his career wishing to “solve” national questions, in the twenties Seton-Watson would concede that the eastern European world was too diverse to be neatly parceled out in nation-states and the existence of ethnic minorities in the “wrong” side of borders was a matter of fact.¹³⁶ The frontiers of the new Europe, Seton-Watson argued, represented a compromise between competing historical, geographical, ethnographical and economic claims.¹³⁷ The “nationality question”, so hotly debated during the war, had now morphed into the “minority question”, denoting the existence of collective rights ascribed to national groups within states.¹³⁸ Having rejected “radical” solutions through population exchanges and forcible dislocations,¹³⁹ Seton-Watson failed to consider systematically the problem. His ruminations fluctuated between abstract appeals to “an enlightened and well-informed public opinion”, vague references to international oversight and a dogmatic rejection of calls to overhaul the minority protection regime in eastern Europe.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ See also Holy Case, *The Age of Questions* (Princeton, 2018).

¹³⁷ R.W. Seton-Watson, *The Successors of Austria-Hungary*, (London, 1921); R.W. Seton-Watson, *The Emancipation of South East Europe*, (London, 1923).

¹³⁸ For background see Carole Fink and Mazower.

¹³⁹ On this see See Mathew Frank, *Making Minorities History: Population transfer in Twentieth Century Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹⁴⁰ R.W. Seton-Watson, “The Question of Minorities”, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 14, No. 40 (Jul., 1935), pp. 68-80; C. A. Macartney, *National States and National Minorities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1934), 429-450.

The state-building process in eastern Europe rested on centralized state-policies.¹⁴¹ In Czechoslovakia, the challenges revolved around grievances about the political representation of the German and, to a lesser extent, the Hungarian minority, as well as what a historian of Czechoslovakia has called the “growing Slovak desire for autonomy and resentment over perceived Czech colonialism in the Slovak lands”.¹⁴² In Romania, the twenties witnessed fierce debates between the centralizing Bucharest establishment and the Transylvanian Romanian elite.¹⁴³ In the Yugoslav state, the political and constitutional divisions throughout the twenties were understood as a conflict between Serbian centralisation and Croat demands for regional autonomy and land reform.¹⁴⁴ The centralising and assimilationist policies in the new states prompted Seton-Watson to argue that policies of “denationalisation” were “in defiance of eugenic principles” and that “wholesale assimilation distorts the national character of...races.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Balázs Trencsényi, Michal Kopeček et al, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe: Volume II*, 31-33.

¹⁴² Andrea Orzoff, “Interwar Democracy and the League of Nations” in Nicholas Doumanis ed., *The Oxford Handbook of European History, 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 265. See also Andrea Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle: The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe 1914-48* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). For a more nuanced view see also Balázs Trencsényi, Michal Kopeček et al, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe: Volume II*, 33-36.

¹⁴³ Balázs Trencsényi, Michal Kopeček et al, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe: Volume II*, 37-41.

¹⁴⁴ Balázs Trencsényi, Michal Kopeček et al, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe: Volume II*, 12-14, 36-39; See also Dejan Djokic, *Elusive Compromise: A History of Interwar Yugoslavia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 20-21.

¹⁴⁵ Seton-Watson, *The New Slovakia*, 55-6.

The interwar settlement according to the Scottish historian exemplified a clash between the forces of an “old” and a “new” Europe revolving around the question of devolution and centralization which defined the degree of democracy and liberalism in the region. The political elites of the “old” Europe prevailed in Romania and Yugoslavia.¹⁴⁶ In 1924 a tour of Yugoslavia made him “more depressed than I ever was in the darkest days of the war... Turkey and Austria-Hungary were incapable of solving the South Slav question: The Serbs seem beat on proving themselves equally bankrupt”.¹⁴⁷ However, as in the eve of the Great War, Seton-Watson publicly defended Serbia and the South Slavs in the *Kriegsschuldfrage* debate and went as far as bullying some of his adversaries, namely, the pro-Albanian commentator Mary Edith Durham.¹⁴⁸

Seton-Watson’s hopes largely rested with Czechoslovakia and the ability of the Czech political elite to educate the other half of the state and promote the principles of national toleration and liberty in the wider region. The Czech political elite and consequently the Czechoslovak state, were viewed as transmitting liberal values in eastern Europe, following the lead of the British empire. His Slovak commentary reveals the extent of his imperial

¹⁴⁶ Seton-Watson, *A History of Roumanians From Roman Times to the Completion of Unity* (Cambridge, 1934), 549. Seton-Watson, *The New Slovakia*, 10, 32.

¹⁴⁷ Seton-Watson to Jaszi, 9 November 1929. Jaszi MS. Columbia University Library, New York. See also Seton-Watson, “Yugoslavia and Croatia”, 128-9.

¹⁴⁸ R.W. Seton-Watson, “The Serajevo Crime: Review”, *The Slavonic Review*, Vol. 4, No. 11 (Dec., 1925), pp. 513-520; R.W. Seton-Watson, *Sarajevo: A Study in the Origins of the Great War* (London: Hutchinson, 1926). Much of the widely discussed recent historical scholarship on the origins of Great War rehearsed the debate in the 1920s. See for instance, Isabel Hull, *A scrap of Paper: Breaking and Making international law during the Great War* (Cornel 2014) and Chris Clark, *The Sleepwalkers* (London, 2012).

paternalism.¹⁴⁹ Instead of undermining the Czechoslovak state, the Slovaks ought to “be thankful that fate has made them dependent upon a race so efficient, so well educated and well-disciplined...as the Czechs...”¹⁵⁰ Seton-Watson’s language of imperial duty was strikingly similar to the language justifying the mandates system. The Slovaks’ fate resembled the fate of the colonial subjects to be placed under protection and prepare them for the “gradual extension of self-government”.¹⁵¹ With regard to the Hungarian minority demands, Seton-Watson employed a language similar to the pre-war Hungarian defence of the assimilationist policies, arguing that the Czechoslovak state should allow for cultural liberties in so far as they did not undermine the unity of the state.¹⁵²

Faced with the irreconcilable tensions in post-war central and eastern Europe, Seton-Watson’s contemporary histories staged a battle between “old” and “new” political elites, centralized and de-centralized bureaucracies. His commentary featured less references and parallels with the confusing state of affairs in the British dominions. The eventual failure of the compromise, and devolution, in Ireland was ascribed to “causes inherent in the Irish pre-war situation and the relation between the two historic parties in Great Britain itself”.¹⁵³ Seton-Watson’s reading of the failings of liberal democratic structures in central and eastern Europe deflected an idealized view of Britain, and the British empire, as a tolerant multi-national

¹⁴⁹ R.W. Seton-Watson, *The New Slovakia* (Prague, 1924); R.W. Seton-Watson, ed. *Slovakia Then and Now: A Political Survey* (London, 1931). See also R.W. Seton-Watson to Ivo Lupic-Vukic, 8 February 1924, in Christopher Seton-Watson et al, eds., *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs* 116 [L.114].

¹⁵⁰ Seton-Watson, *The New Slovakia*, 8.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 128-9.

¹⁵² Seton-Watson, *The New Slovakia*, 58-60.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 115

commonwealth offering the blueprint for liberal international order.¹⁵⁴ British political life offered a model for the perfect balance between autonomy and centralization in the life of the modern national state in matters of education, justice, economy;¹⁵⁵ The new states in the continent, according to Seton-Watson ought to emulate the example of a “dual consciousness” of a “narrower Scottish nationality” and a “higher British citizenship enacting and transcending it”.¹⁵⁶

5. The Eastern Question historicized

From the mid 1920s central and eastern Europe ceased to be a priority for British foreign policy, Seton-Watson’s political influence gradually waned.¹⁵⁷ The economic depression affected him deeply at a personal level and the unravelling of the liberal international order in the early thirties found him in a state of pessimism, “waiting meanwhile for this or that thing which I care about to blow up!”.¹⁵⁸ He lamented the “disintegration” of public opinion and had started “writ[ing] off” his “friends in SE Europe”; for the times marked the “bankruptcy of democratic representation and liberal government”.¹⁵⁹ Alongside his contemporary histories of the successor states, he started working on a wide-scale reconstruction of the history of British foreign policy on the continent during the nineteenth century, from 1815 to 1880. The project

¹⁵⁴ For context see Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism*.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 122.

¹⁵⁶ Seton-Watson, *The New Slovakia*, 130.

¹⁵⁷ For background see Gabor Batonyi, *Britain and Central Europe, 1918-1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹⁵⁸ Seton-Watson to A. Zimmermann, 14 June 1932, Zimmermann MS. Bodleian, Oxford, Box 30, Folder 38.

¹⁵⁹ Seton-Watson to A. Zimmermann, 1 October 1932, Zimmermann MS. Bodleian, Oxford, Box 30, Folder 119.

culminated in two major diplomatic history surveys published in the thirties, in tandem with contemporary accounts of the rise of authoritarianism in the continent.¹⁶⁰

Seton-Watson's historical reconstructions, written in the vernacular of diplomatic history, ventured to stir the waning domestic interest in continental affairs and displayed a liberal nostalgia for a bygone age. Seton-Watson wished his writings to serve as a reminder that Britain had always been an integral part of the European system and its intervention in European affairs upheld the balance of power. He also upheld Britain's moral duty to intervene in European affairs and project British values: support good government when liberal institutions were in danger of tyrannical take-over.¹⁶¹ Seton-Watson's call for engagement in continental affairs did not amount to an abstract call for intervention; Britain's involvement depended on its ability to protect British interests and the status quo in the continent.¹⁶²

His diplomatic and political history of the Eastern Question, an outgrowth of his wider project, was emblematic of his thinking in the thirties.¹⁶³ The volume aspired to construct a polyphonic narrative of the rivalry between Disraeli and Gladstone by making use of the

¹⁶⁰ Robert W. Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question* (London: Macmillan, 1935); *Britain in Europe 1789-1914: A Survey in Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937); *Britain and the Dictators: A Survey of Post-War British Policy* (London, 1938); *Munich and the Dictators: A Sequel to "Britain and the Dictators"* (London: Methuen, 1939).

¹⁶¹ Seton-Watson, *Britain in Europe 1789-1914*, 649.

¹⁶² In the key question of the late thirties which mobilized radical opinion in England, he argued for non-intervention on the basis that the opposing factions in Spain represented two "equally and false" competing ideologies. On the other hand, in the Abyssinian question the answer is, yes, intervene by way of sanctioning Italy because it undermines the Geneva-based system and threatens British interests. His internationalism here differs from the rampant socialist internationalism which motivated people in Britain. Seton-Watson, *Britain and the Dictators*, 387.

¹⁶³ Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question*.

Gladstone papers, and secret documents at the behest of the Russian embassy which he had been able to copy before the Bolshevik takeover.¹⁶⁴ The manuscript was completed by 1933 and the book was published two years later in a series edited by Lewis Namier.¹⁶⁵ Its circulation coincided with the failings of the League of Nations and of the minority protection regime.

The book was the first attempt in Anglophone scholarship to recount the impact of the Eastern Question in British politics and set the cannon for future generations of diplomatic historians.¹⁶⁶ The study created and perpetuated the myth of the spontaneous moral indignation of the British public opinion in reaction to the news about the Turkish atrocities in the 1870s.¹⁶⁷ Scholars have since shown that aside from stirring humanitarian sentiment, the Bulgarian atrocities campaign was a calculated political venture to rouse liberal sentiment and pave the way for the return of the liberal party in power.¹⁶⁸

The narrative focused on the Great men of British politics. It glorified Gladstone's altruism and vilified Disraeli's "Turcophilia", pitting the noble Scott against the "Orientalized Jew". Having the emerging middle classes on his side, Gladstone personified an appeal to a higher Christian ideal dictating the attribution of self-government to small (Christian) nations in the European system.¹⁶⁹ His "would-be solution of the Eastern Question", Seton-Watson argued,

¹⁶⁴ Seton-Watson MS., SSEES, London, 19/1/1.

¹⁶⁵ Seton-Watson MS., SSEES, London, 19/1/1.

¹⁶⁶ Michelle Tusan, *Smyrna's Ashes: Humanitarianism, Genocide and the Birth of the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press: 2012), 16, 189-90. See also Harold Temperley, "The Bulgarian and other atrocities 1875-78, " *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 1931, 105-46.

¹⁶⁷ Rebecca Gill, *Calculating Compassion: Humanity and Relief in war, Britain 1870-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 80-1.

¹⁶⁸ Gill, *Calculating Compassion*, 89-123; Tusan, *Smyrna's Ashes*,

¹⁶⁹ Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question*, 506.

anticipated the Wilsonian internationalism of the League on Nations. Seton-Watson's glorification of Gladstone irked the series' editor, Lewis Namier. Namier noted that "you simply spoil a work of art by showing your dislikes and irritation...do try to keep down in the book the Celt in yourself and be for once, more of a Sassenach".¹⁷⁰ Namier acknowledged his own "strong animus against the great Mr. G." but noted that it was no stronger than Seton-Watson's bias "against Dizzy".¹⁷¹

The book was well received in the press. The veteran journalist Henry Nevinston applauded the recovering of the "pity and indignation" of the English people led by Gladstone and pondered over his own involvement in the Macedonian Question.¹⁷² However, some of the more expert reviewers raised doubts about Seton-Watson's political agenda. Harold Temperley argued that Seton-Watson showed "more sympathy with Gladstone's principle of foreign policy than it deserves from an objective standpoint".¹⁷³

The *Eastern Question* was essentially a lament for the waning spirit of liberal humanitarianism informing British foreign policy. The book allowed Seton-Watson to articulate his nostalgia about an imaginary and abstract Christian European ideal threatened by the rise of authoritarianism and totalitarianism in the continent. Britain still had a moral obligation to defend eastern Europe whilst acting to avoid another world conflagration. History became the main lens through which Seton-Watson filtrated the rise of totalitarianism in Europe.

¹⁷⁰ Namier to Seton-Watson, Seton-Watson MS., SSEES, London, 19/1/1.

¹⁷¹ Namier to Seton-Watson, Seton-Watson MS., SSEES, London, 19/1/1.

¹⁷² Henry Nevinston, "Mighty Opposites", *The London Mercury* 31/104-186 (1935), 592-3. See also R.C.K. Ensor's review at *The Spectator*, March 22, 1935 See also *The Times*, 7 March 1935; *The Observer*, 7 April 1935.

¹⁷³ Harold Temperley, "New Light on Russia's Policy in Regard to the Eastern Question (1876-8)", *Contemporary Review* (July 1935): 554-561, at 561.

Seton-Watson's contemporary histories on the rise of authoritarianism and totalitarianism in the continent focused on the figures of Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini. Much like the surveys on the "successor" states, the study of past and present politics recovered national psychologies embodied in the lives of Great Men.¹⁷⁴ The emphasis on psychology pleased Lewis Namier, who wittingly complained about the structure of Seton-Watson's *Britain and the Dictators* noting how "every chapter becomes a small self-governing state with minority rights for sometimes slightly extraneous subjects".¹⁷⁵ The Scottish historian noted the Russian "abnormality" and lack of a liberal tradition;¹⁷⁶ the "neurasthenia" of the Italian masses in the aftermath of the Great War; the "upset mental balance" of the "German nation" which had violently passed from "4 years of victory to utter downfall", giving rise to a "militant National Socialist psychology" based on racialism. This was partly due to the "the harsh unwisdom of the allies" – that was perhaps as far as he could go to criticise Versailles.¹⁷⁷

One of the biggest challenges posed by the rising tide of authoritarianism in the continent consisted of the prevalence of pagan and material values marking a retreat from the Christian principles which had defined Europe. This was in part due to Britain's failure to project its own Christian liberal values abroad. This mode of thinking was in line with a wider turn in the British political and international thought to Christianity.¹⁷⁸ Christian precepts were evoked to

¹⁷⁴ Seton-Watson, *Britain and the Dictators*.

¹⁷⁵ Namier to Seton-Watson. Seton-Watson Ms.

¹⁷⁶ Seton-Watson's reading of the political developments in Russia has many affinities with the pre-soviet pattern of discussion about Russian affairs in British liberal circles. Seton-Watson preferred Stalin's appeal to a nationalist Russian ideal with a constitutional veneer from the Bolshevik resolve to destroy the liberal bourgeois state.

¹⁷⁷ Seton-Watson, *Britain and the Dictators*, 39.

¹⁷⁸ Julia Stapleton, *Political Intellectuals and Public Identities*, 63-78.

redress the failings of liberalism, liberal internationalism, and defend the faltering liberal democratic world order.¹⁷⁹

Seton-Watson's recourse to the Eastern Question was essentially a call for the Christianisation of foreign policy and the reinvigoration of the spiritual core of liberalism. Faced with the rise of the German threat, Seton-Watson eschewed references to the League of Nations and collective security and once again picked up the language of great power politics. In a manner similar to his pre-WWI formulations he wrote favourably of the project of an Anglo-French *détente* with Germany by means of colonial appeasement and recognised Germany's legitimate economic interests in Mitteleuropa.¹⁸⁰ However, he objected to any alteration of the status quo in eastern Europe and became increasingly wary of the preservation of the unity of Czechoslovakia which by the mid-thirties had become an "island in the dictatorial sea".¹⁸¹ He directed his polemic against those "ill-informed" commentators, like C.A. Macartney, who "write and talk of Czechoslovakia as if she were the villain of the piece in minority questions".¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ A.D. Lindsay, *Christianity and Economics* (London: Macmillan, 1933); Lionel Curtis, *Civitas Dei: The Commonwealth of God* (London: Macmillan, 1938); T.S. Elliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society* (New York: Harcourt, 1939); Alfred Zimmern, *Spiritual Values and World Affairs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939).

¹⁸⁰ Seton-Watson, *Britain and the Dictators*, 410.

¹⁸¹ "Czechoslovakia To-day", *The Manchester Guardian* December 14, 1934, 7. See also R.W. Seton-Watson, "Background to the Czech Problem", *The Czechoslovak Broadsheets* (London: the Czechoslovak Association No 1, July 1938), 1.

¹⁸² R.W. Seton-Watson, "Background to the Czech Problem," *The Czechoslovak Broadsheets* (London: The Czechoslovak Association No.1, July 1938), 1; C.A. Macartney, *Hungary: A Short History* (London: Benn, 1934) C.A. Macartney, *Hungary and her Successors: The Treaty of Trianon and its Consequences 1919-1937* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1937). On Macartney see Milos Lojko, C. A. Macartney and Central Europe, *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 6:1, 37-57.

Seton-Watson's idiosyncratic support of the policy pursued by the British government landed him in a peculiar position in the debate on appeasement. He ventured to combine elements of the realist thinking in the contemporary political discourse with an abstract appeal to Christian morality.¹⁸³ Unwilling to acknowledge Germany's minority and territorial claims in eastern Europe, he attacked E.H. Carr's analysis on the basis that it rested on a materialist reading of power politics which led to nihilism. Seton-Watson's "moral realism", envisaged an international order firmly based on Christian values.¹⁸⁴ Seton-Watson's formulations in *Britain and the Dictators* confused the reviewer of the Observer who argued that "the work could not be justly called a contribution to European appeasement" and that the author's more accommodating attitude towards Russia undermined his moral message.¹⁸⁵ On the other hand, his old acquaintance from the First World War, the diplomat Harold Nicolson, applauded the balance between "idealism" and "realism".¹⁸⁶

The outbreak of the Munich crisis prompted Seton-Watson to publish a sequel to his *Britain and the Dictators* titled *Munich and the Dictators*. He conceded the failure of his erstwhile "reasoned defence" of the government's foreign policy. Munich had "falsified" his thesis. The government had betrayed "the cause of liberty and collective security in Europe."¹⁸⁷ "Treachery and Bullying" had brought down Czechoslovakia. Seton-Watson's prose became very personal; In the book the reader finds the author in the galleries of the Commons attending

¹⁸³ See Ian Hall, *British Intellectuals and World Politics*, 432-33

¹⁸⁴ On the debate on appeasement see David Long and Peter Wilson, eds., *Thinkers of the Twenty Years' Crisis: Inter-War Idealism Re-assessed*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

¹⁸⁵ *The Observer*, 1 February 1938.

¹⁸⁶ See also Derek Drinkwater, *Sir Harold Nicolson and International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 150.

¹⁸⁷ R.W. Seton-Watson, *Britain and the Dictators*, ix.

key speeches, living through moments of “shame” and “disillusionment at the miscarriage of the parliamentary system.”¹⁸⁸ The policy of appeasement, Seton-Watson noted, turned Chamberlain into Disraeli; His “peace with honour” evoked the Disraelian “peace in our time.”¹⁸⁹ The British stood idle and saved their skins by “carving up the living body of another nation, after having first undermined its powers of resistance and rendered its surrender to brute force and a tyranny of lies inevitable.”¹⁹⁰ Much as the Berlin conference, the Munich agreement would not create peace; it would perpetuate tyranny.¹⁹¹ Britain lacked political elites with the dexterity and moral calibre of Gladstone and Palmerston. However, even at the last hour, the option for colonial appeasement for Germany was still on the table.¹⁹² Seton-Watson continued to update the book and add new material until September 1939; the tone became sharper and although he welcomed the guarantee for Poland, it was in Czechoslovakia that his liberal internationalism left its final breath.

6. Conclusion

Faced with the outbreak of the second world war, the arc of Seton-Watson’s thinking turned backwards to the pre-WWI period and picked up the language of “international anarchy”. Despite the “evolution” of the small nations in the interwar period, the “defective frontiers” and the “excess of zeal on behalf of the victors” had contributed to the resurfacing of “European

¹⁸⁸ Seton-Watson, *Britain and the Dictators*, 99.

¹⁸⁹ Seton-Watson, *Disraeli Gladstone and the Eastern Question*, 526.

¹⁹⁰ Seton-Watson, *Munich and the Dictators*, 141.

¹⁹¹ Seton-Watson, *Munich and the Dictators*, 134- 146.

¹⁹² Seton-Watson, *Munich and the Dictators*, 168.

Anarchy”.¹⁹³ More than ever before, Seton-Watson added, the “survival of the British commonwealth” depended on the fate of small nations.¹⁹⁴ The maverick of the *New Europe* magazine therefore sought to revive the Great War momentum of his involvement with the national questions in the continent. However, his voice and regional contact became increasingly marginalized in the new British foreign policy apparatus. This did not stop him from attempting to revive the *New Europe* and once create a platform for the “small nations” of Europe within the framework of the Atlantic charter. For this reason, he appealed to the anti-fascist activist Sylvia Pankhurst who was at the time editing the *New Times and Ethiopian news*. The *New Europe* magazine old guard therefore proposed the inauguration of a new publication supporting “the trusteeship towards native races” and “the development of their natural resources in the interests of all”.¹⁹⁵ Pankhurst’s response indicated that the times were different:

...surely the people should have their proper designations: if they come from Africa they are Africans, as we are Europeans. Just as we are British, they are Ethiopians etc. Civilization is rapidly advancing among all these peoples, and old conceptions of their inferiority must be swept away...they have passed the stage in which they were isolated from European thought.¹⁹⁶

The article offered an appreciation of Seton-Watson’s international thought in a period extending over four decades, marking the rise and fall of his political influence and expertise on eastern Europe. The arc of Seton-Watson’s thought is a case study on the continuity and changes of British liberal internationalism in a period of imperial transformation, national agitation and international co-operation in Europe. Seton-Watson

¹⁹³ R.W. Seton-Watson, *The Problem of Small Nations and the European Anarchy* (Nottingham, 1939), 7. See also G.L. Dickinson, *The European Anarchy* (London: Unwin and Allen, 1916).

¹⁹⁴ R.W. Seton-Watson, *The Problem of Small Nations and the European Anarchy* (Nottingham, 1939).

¹⁹⁵ Seton-Watson to Pankhurst, *Seton-Watson Papers*.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

employed history to describe the political landscape of eastern Europe and by virtue of his politics, he found himself inscribed in the histories of the regions he studied.

For Seton-Watson, eastern Europe was trapped in different time-zones and could not live up to the more advanced state of affairs in Britain. In eastern Europe he projected a deflected and largely imaginary view of Britain, and the British empire, as an empire of toleration and a model for the international organisation of the world. The Irish Question, although the beam in the eye of the British, was thought of belonging to a different plane than similar questions in the continent. By contrast, the British commonwealth derived its force from the accommodation of Scottish sentiment and nationality.

Throughout his engagement with international politics Seton-Watson maintained a herderian enthusiasm for small nationalities existing within wider communities. This connected with his dismissive view of the Ottoman Empire and Hungary whom he thought of as a sinner country that ought to repent for oppressing alien populations. This inability to “forgive” the sinners was a blind spot in his liberal internationalism. In the thirties, the maintenance of the status quo in eastern Europe became an object of religious zeal. Living in a materialistic age his writings became a call for the return of spirituality in international affairs. Nothing exemplified this more than the Munich Crisis which plunged the Europe that Seton-Watson did so much to support in chaos and disorder. By then his thinking has come full circle. He seemed to be reliving the first world war; a man of the nineteenth century, living through an age he could not quite apprehend.