

Wheatley, Natasha, (2023). *The Life and Death of States: Central Europe and the Transformation of Modern Sovereignty*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Governance, as a concept, involves many different philosophical threads that many scholars work to understand better. This understanding impacts the future development and administration of policies—providing the foundational scaffolding of a nation. Nations are essentially mirrors of society's wants and desires. Thus, Natasha Wheatley's new book, *The Life and Death of States: Central Europe and the Transformation of Modern Sovereignty* gives readers the opportunity to better understand the construction of states in the twentieth century: a pivotal time in European history.

Many European historians note that the nineteenth century was a particularly volatile time for Europe. Many also note the numerous social issues of the time that contributed to the volatility of the region ultimately leading to the outbreak of World War I. The academic literature also points to the political upheaval following World War I and its substantial contributions that gave way to World War II. More importantly, because of this political upheaval, numerous nation states emerged creating new government structures and new political alliances were forged. Wheatley's book, *The Life and Death of States: Central Europe and the Transformation of Modern Sovereignty* focuses on the life cycle of states, and the various concepts that go into a government's constitutional structure. Wheatley constructs the book particularly well focusing on only one area of Europe to carefully review and analyze its life cycle.

Utilizing the Habsburg Empire as a case study, Wheatley isolates this region looking to understand more about the various political dynamics of the time, the influence of modern political thought and the changes in governance. Wheatley eloquently writes, "Together, these three strands—the Empire's constitutional challenges, its international dissolution, and the

thinkers who grapple with both—reveal a hidden story about the relationship between sovereignty and time” (p. 5). Later, she states, “This book shows how order of thought evolved in dynamic tension with orders of rule, and why innovation and anachronism proved such intimate associates rather than each other’s opposites,” (p. 5).

Wheatley follows the construction of the European nation boundaries providing a fresh opportunity to understand the political dynamics of the time. She writes, “this book uses the remaking and interwar unmaking of the Habsburg Empire to track the emergence of a world of states along three central avenues. It begins in the aftermath of the European revolutions of 1848 as the Habsburg Empire was convulsed by decades of constitutional experimentation in the face of rising provincial demands for political rights.”

Wheatley’s book is a particularly important read for several different reasons. For one, the book contributes to the historical literature about twentieth century Europe, which provides a lot of insight into the various European political constructs in modern days. The book also provides insight into the influence of political thought on a government structure, which is particularly important to scholars of comparative government and public administration. Wheatley ties in important political and sociological theories of Weber and Jellinek offering further insight into the construction of new nation states within the boundaries of the Habsburg Empire.

The Life and Death of States: Central Europe and the Transformation of Modern Sovereignty is an important book for how it contributes to the greater political science literature. Wheatley notes that this book provides a new framework for thinking about the Habsburg Empire (p. 285). This book is an important read for students of international policy, comparative governance, national security studies, history, and political thought. Wheatley highlights the

importance of her book noting that these themes contribute to the overall structure of a government system. In essence, these themes contribute to the well-being of a nation. The book in particular highlights that the understanding of governmental structure and political thought impacts society in a rather eloquent way, further connecting generations of citizens together in one common thread of governance (p. 283). Therefore, understanding the mechanisms that give way to the life cycles of nation states is not only intriguing, but provides insight for future generations.

The Life and Death of States: Central Europe and the Transformation of Modern Sovereignty by Natasha Wheatley would be an excellent book for undergraduate and graduate history, political science, and political thought students and scholars interested in the intersections of political thought and comparative governance. It is simply a must read!

Allison G. S. Knox

Political Science Faculty - Marist College & Western Connecticut State University

Emergency Management Faculty - Eastern Kentucky University & American Military University

Intermittent Emergency Management Specialist - U.S. Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response