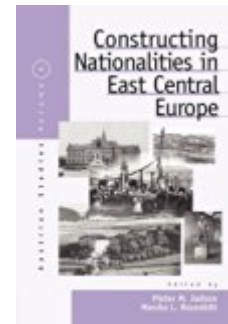


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The Dynamics of Nationalization

Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe is the sixth volume in the series Austrian and Habsburg Studies (formerly Austrian History, Culture, and Society), published under the aegis of the Center for Austrian Studies at the University of Minnesota. The volume is based on the symposium “Dilemmas of East Central Europe: Nationalism, Dictatorship, and the Search for Identity” held at Columbia University in 2000. The event was organized in honor of Istvan Deak, to whom the volume is dedicated.

Constructing Nationalities is one of those rare edited volumes that are more than the sum of their parts. The essays tell a coherent story from Joseph II’s absolutist monarchy to post-World War II Czechoslovakia. The broader context the essays outline is the history of state building and citizenship, and the interaction and conflict between the state and political as well as social groups (and among and within those groups). The essays probe the dynamics of the nationalization of differences, conflicts, politics, and state structures in the monarchy and its successor states. As Pieter M. Judson explains in the introduction, the authors attempt to answer the question, “How did nationalist discourses, tropes, identities, visions, come to occupy the available ideological space in the public sphere” (p. 4).

This important book reflects the coming of age of a new generation of historians and the consolidation of a new approach to the study of nations and nationalism in Habsburg history.[1] Due to compelling revisionist the-

ories of nationalism, the idea of the constructed, imagined, and invented character of nations became influential and—ultimately—commonplace in Habsburg history. As a result, historians have not only described the form (institutions) and content (ideology and iconography) of nationalism, but they also increasingly focus on the process of construction itself: the arduous ideological and practical work by nationalists, who try to turn an—often reluctant—population into a political and/or ethnic community.[2]

The title itself, which tellingly refers to nationalities as opposed to nations, is indicative of the conceptual thrust of the volume, which breaks with the practice of treating nations “as real entities and substantial collectivities.”[3] Judson’s excellent introduction enhances the conceptual coherence of the volume, and adds extra meaning to the individual essays. The contributors to the volume, states Judson, “write about nationalism without accepting the historical necessity either of nations or of the nation-state. Their essays recapture the contours of a nonnationalized world, as they examine why and how this world produced nationalist ideologies and movements” (p. 1).

The volume opens with Michael Silber’s essay on Jewish military service in the age of Joseph II. Silber convincingly demonstrates that Joseph II’s insistence that the Jews be obligated to serve in the army was prompted by the logic of citizenship with its rights and obligations and not utilitarian calculations, as most historians would

have it. This also means that the link between Jewish military service and Jewish integration predates the rise of nationalism. In fact, as Silber writes, “it was the discussions over Jewish military service and promotion to positions of authority over Christians that led to questions of citizenship and to notions of some sort of equality” (p. 26).

Robert Nemes continues the discussion of obligations, equality, and citizenship in his essay on the upsurge of public activity in Hungary in 1848-49. It focuses on the use of revolutionary symbols by ordinary men and women—among them many Jews. Nemes shows the rapid success and great popularity of national symbols, which, at the same time, were deeply influenced by transnational patterns. He explores the increasing use of symbolic criteria to distinguish friend from foe, which resulted in the boundaries of the national community becoming more distinct. Nemes persuasively argues that “many residents of Buda-Pest came to see themselves, at least for short periods, as part of a Hungarian national community. In this light, the 1848 revolutions are significant for contributing to the halting emergence of national political cultures in the second half of the nineteenth century” (p. 46).

Daniel A. McMillan and Claire E. Nolte also demonstrate that national movements followed transnational patterns. They continue the exploration of national political cultures and public activity through the discussion of the important role gymnastics clubs played in Germany and the Bohemian lands. McMillan argues that the 1848 revolution was a watershed event in the history of the German gymnastics movement. While in 1848 many activists praised gymnastics as a school of citizenship and many gymnastics clubs became political clubs, after the defeat of the revolution gymnasts seldom argued that exercise and club sociability produced active citizens. He demonstrates that the movement’s leaders turned to an increasingly biologized language in the 1860s. They started to talk about a widespread moral and physical decline, and offered gymnastics as a national cure. McMillan’s broader argument, however, that “the gymnasts’ shifting discourse concerning the meaning of exercise and its relationship to politics” both paved the way for the racial redefinition of the nation and contributed to German liberalism’s heavy emphasis on individual character (p. 56) remains speculative and unconvincing.

Nolte picks up where McMillan ends his story—in the 1870s. She argues that while the gymnastics club Sokol played a major role in the Czech national movement and

the Sokol idea was adopted by most Slavic national movements, the attempt to unite all the Slavic Sokols failed. The Federation of Slavic Sokols was founded in Bohemia in 1908, and—as the first concrete manifestation of Neo-Slavism—it met with great suspicion on the part of Habsburg officials. It was, however, not the Habsburg state, but the divisions within the Slavic world that undermined the idea of Slavic solidarity. Nolte shows that “The failure of the Federation of Slavic Sokols demonstrates some of the contradictions of Czech Slavism. Although the Pan-, Austro-, and Neo-Slav movements all originated in the Bohemian lands, their propagators often lacked an understanding of the true conditions of the Slavic world” (p. 135).

The three essays by Eagle Glassheim, Judson, and Cynthia Paces and Nancy M. Wingfield give further insight into the dynamics of nationalization at a time of growing political conflict in the Bohemian lands between 1880 and 1920. Glassheim explores how members of the Bohemian high nobility tried to save their status and wealth by adapting to a changing social and political context and eventually to nationalism, as “a combination of factors turned nation into the preeminent political loyalty it became by 1900” (p. 70). Glassheim shows that nobles developed their own versions of Czech and German national identities, which were moderated by a strong imperial loyalty. He demonstrates the adaptability and political and social influence of the Bohemian nobility, which “allows us insight into the place of nationalism in the clash and hybridization of the Old and New Regimes” (p. 82).

Judson explores the local workings of German nationalism in Bohemia through a vivid discussion of an annual passion play in a small Bohemian village, which was sponsored by the German League of the Bohemian Woods and became a tourist attraction in the 1890s. He describes how the league pursued a program of Germanization in a region that was increasingly seen as a language frontier, and where many people had very little sense of belonging to the Czech or German nation. The league furthered national tourism as a way of strengthening the Germanness of the region and its inhabitants. As Judson points out, there remained an ambivalence in the league’s literature regarding the difference between general and nationalist tourism. Judson concludes that the league failed to convince visitors that they had seen something particularly German, and the play strengthened the villagers’ local identity rather than their Germanness. “Rather, as elsewhere in southern Bohemia,” writes Judson, “villagers seem to have considered the

league to be something of a local welfare organization, its German nationalist identity secondary to its important economic self-help functions” (pp. 102-103). He argues that a nationalist identity became more compelling for the villagers only after 1918.

The essay by Paces and Wingfield on the relationship between religious symbolism and nationalism confirms that 1918 exacerbated the situation in the Bohemian lands. They explore the “statue war” between German and Czech nationalists, a culmination of the “era of monument fever” that started in the 1890s. They describe how Germans and Czechs tried to create national spaces and symbols, which “became representative of the contested geography of the Bohemian lands” (p. 115). The erection of Joseph II monuments by Germans and Jan Hus monuments by Czechs was a central element of this process. It was followed by popular attacks on and the violent destruction of statues of Joseph II and other monuments as symbols of Habsburg oppression after 1918, lasting well into the 1920s. Paces and Wingfield show that “Religious statues carried strong political messages, and statues of political heroes became sacred spaces to members of new minorities in Czechoslovakia” (p. 117).

The next three essays remind us that there also existed a supranational identity in the monarchy and the triumph of nationalism was not inevitable. In his discussion of the 1898 imperial jubilee, Daniel Unowsky convincingly argues that there were considerable efforts by the Habsburg court, the Austrian government, and the Joint Army to foment Habsburg patriotism. “Under Franz Joseph,” Unowsky writes, “Habsburg political ritual, imperial ceremony, and public celebrations promoted dynastic patriotism and, if with more limited success, fostered support and loyalty for the state he ruled” (p. 142). He argues that despite political conflicts and national rivalries these efforts did have popular resonance and millions of Habsburg subjects participated in imperial celebrations in the last decades of Joseph’s reign.

Alon Rachamimov explores the question of loyalty, patriotism, and nationalism through an intriguing set of sources collected and produced by Austro-Hungarian censors during World War I. His essay demonstrates the widespread support for the initial war effort and argues for the existence of significant imperial loyalties, which were weakened by the official fear and distrust of the Austro-Hungarian POWs. He explores how and why censors tagged opinions and forms of behavior as “patriotic,” “suspicious,” “disloyal,” and “unpatriotic.” He argues that the censorship “utilized a double standard re-

garding perceived ‘loyal’ nationalities and perceived ‘disaffected’ nationalities, and failed to recognize genuine support for the state that found expression in many of the letters” (p. 159).

Marsha L. Rozenblit discusses the opinions and behavior of one of the groups most affected by the war: the Jews. She argues that in the decades before World War I, Jews living in the Austrian half of the monarchy developed a tripartite identity. They had a fervent Austrian political identity, a proud Jewish ethnic identity, and a German, Polish, or Czech cultural identity. She asserts that “they espoused a vigorous Austrian patriotism and an Austrian identity, a framework that enabled them to avoid the pitfalls of ethnic nationalism” (p. 180). She demonstrates the assertion and ultimate crisis of this tripartite identity during the war, as well as the subsequent dilemmas the Jews faced in the emerging—often antisemitic—nationalizing states. The heuristic value of the tripartite model notwithstanding, Rozenblit tends to essentialize Jewish ethnicity and reify identity. Her treatment of “the Jews” as a self-aware homogeneous group simplifies the realities of Jewish history.

The next two essays by Paul Hanebrink and David Frey lead us to the nationalistic and antisemitic world of interwar Hungary, where Jews faced a “Christian” state that attempted to create an “authentic” national culture, reclaim its lost “national” territories, and prove to the nations of Europe its civilized and modern European character. In his excellent essay, Hanebrink explores the ideological content and inherently antisemitic nature of the idea of “Christian Hungary.” He also discusses the active role of the churches in the debates about the nation. He demonstrates the existence of differences among Hungarian nationalists concerning the meaning of “Christian” and the character of the nation. “As the radical right increasingly interpreted ‘Christian’ as a racial category in the late 1930s,” he writes, “religious and lay conservatives alike turned to [an] essentially Catholic understanding of Christian Europe” (p. 197).

Frey explores debates in the interwar Hungarian film industry concerning the creation of a national style. He demonstrates that even though there was a consensus concerning the need for a “Hungarian style,” there was less clarity about what it actually meant. He revealingly contrasts ideology and reality and shows that “[d]espite all of the calls for national films grounded in Hungarian uniqueness, both the largely Jewish filmmaking vanguard and the consumers of their products, Hungarian audiences, were slow to recognize their duties as patriots

and populists” (pp. 207-208). Frey shows that whereas the creation of a national style failed, the “Christianization” of the industry became a tragic reality through the purging of the Jews from the business after 1938. The only weakness of Frey’s otherwise excellent essay is that he writes as if he internalized the discourse of his sources and assumed the existence of a national character.

The next two essays discuss important aspects of Nazi ideology and politics. Even if the essays are relevant for the theme of constructing nationalities in east central Europe, the authors do not make a conscious attempt to frame their essays to fit more seamlessly into the volume. Patricia von Papen-Bodek argues for the significance of *Judenforschung* in the development, legitimization, and implementation of policies against Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe. She presents her preliminary findings concerning the Hungarian Institute for Research into the Jewish question, and enters into a polemic with German historians who downplay the role of the institute. She argues that “a case study of this Institute would reveal how ideology was translated into *Realpolitik* and how *Realpolitik* allowed an allegedly scholarly institution to legitimize the deportation of Hungarian Jews” (p. 235). Unfortunately, she overstates her case and the evidence she provides is scant and unconvincing. As she writes, the institute was founded in 1942 and worked covertly until mid-May in 1944, when it became a public institution, simultaneously with the first deportations. This fact weakens Papen-Bodek’s claim concerning the institute’s importance as a legitimizing force. The legitimization of the deportations was mainly prepared by interwar anti-semitic propaganda and politics, and the so-called Jewish laws after 1938. Papen-Bodek’s focus on the network of institutes for the study of the Jewish question in Nazi Europe should be integrated into the complexities of local contexts.

In his well-researched essay, Peter Black discusses the question of indigenous collaboration in the Government General through the case of the *Sonderdienst*, an auxiliary force deployed in Nazi-occupied Poland. The members of the *Sonderdienst* were supposed to be recruited from the “ethnic” and ideological “cream” of the German population in Poland. The activities of the *Sonderdienst* reveal the complicity of the civilian authorities in Nazi crimes, and “the link between ‘routine’ duties in Nazi-occupied Europe and the brutal persecution of groups targeted as enemies of the German Reich” (p. 244). Black also demonstrates the ideological dilemmas and practical difficulties Nazi authorities faced in their effort to “recapture” German blood. In 1942, for exam-

ple, 75 percent of the new *Sonderdienst* recruits did not speak German. Reich Germans considered the *Sonderdienst* men as less than fully German, but the practical needs of German occupation proved more important than the purity of German ancestry. As Black persuasively argues, “the *Sonderdienst* was to serve not only as a police executive, but as a political and cultural stepping stone to full acceptance into the German ‘racial community’” (p. 257).

The last essay by Benjamin Frommer explores the concept and politics of Czech national honor in the aftermath of the Nazi occupation. He discusses the conception and effects of the Small Decree, which was added to the Czech retribution system six months after the end of the war. Based on it nearly 180,000 persons were investigated for “‘offenses of national honor’” (p. 267). The Small Decree, writes Frommer, “played a critical role in the delineation of the hitherto-imaginary-boundary between the Czech and the German nations” (p. 267). He convincingly argues that in the midst of the expulsion of three million native Germans, the Small Decree represents a critical redefinition of a citizen’s basic obligations, which he now owed not to the state but primarily to the nation. With the help of intriguing individual cases, Frommer describes the role of the national honor tribunals in “defining, demarcating, and solidifying the boundaries of the Czech nation,” which represented an important element of postwar Czechoslovakia’s “ethnic unmixing” (p. 269). He also shows the reluctance of many people to accept the newly drawn national boundaries, and outlines the oppressive administrative efforts of the state to deter people from violating them. Frommer draws on Rogers Brubaker when he describes the period as the institutionalization of nationhood (p. 269).[4] Frommer’s essay is an appropriate, if not historically inevitable, ending to a volume that starts with the emergence of modern—but not necessarily national—citizenship.

Thanks to the conceptual shift represented by the essays in *Constructing Nationalities*, we know incomparably more about the details of the dynamics of the nationalization of public and private life in the monarchy and the successor states than ten years ago. However, with the increasing focus on local practices and activism on the ground, contingency, setbacks in nationalization, and popular indifference, new challenges have emerged. Curiously, we seem to be further from understanding why nationness happens so suddenly and powerfully in certain historical contexts, and why it has mostly proven to be so effective and pervasive. There has also been a con-

siderable fragmentation, whereby we have lost sight of the big picture of the monarchy as a whole. We need closer cooperation between historians working on nationalism in different parts of the monarchy, and larger scale systematic comparisons that bring together the host of new empirical and conceptual findings. *Constructing Nationalities* is definitely an important contribution towards that goal.

Notes

[1]. In fact, ten of the sixteen authors contributed essays that are based on recent dissertations, and ten essays offer a glimpse of important books published between 2001 and 2007. See Marsha L. Rozenblit, *Reconstructing a National Identity: The Jews of Habsburg Austria during World War I* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Claire E. Nolte, *The Sokol in the Czech Lands to 1914: Training for the Nation* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002); Alon Rachamimov, *POWs and the Great War: Captivity on the Eastern Front* (New York: Berg, 2002); Benjamin Frommer, *National Cleansing: Retribution against Nazi Collaborators in Postwar Czechoslovakia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Eagle Glassheim, *Noble Nationalists: The Transformation of the Bohemian Aristocracy* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2005); Robert Nemes, *The Once and Future of Budapest* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005); Daniel L. Unowsky, *The Pomp and Politics of Patriotism: Imperial Celebrations in Habsburg Austria, 1848-1916* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2005); Paul A. Hanebrink, *In Defense of Christian Hungary: Religion, Nationalism, and Antisemitism, 1890-1944* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006); Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists*

on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2006); and Nancy M. Wingfield, *Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands Became Czech* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

[2]. See Maria Bucur and Nancy M. Wingfield, eds., *Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2001); Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002); Nancy M. Wingfield, ed., *Creating the Other: Ethnic Conflict and Nationalism in Habsburg Central Europe* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2003); Patricia M. Dabrowski, *Commemorations and the Shaping of Modern Poland* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004); Keely Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village: The Genesis of Peasant National Identity in Austrian Poland, 1848-1914* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004); Gary Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861-1914*, 2d rev. ed. (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2006); Laurence Cole and Daniel L. Unowsky, eds., *The Limits of Loyalty: Imperial Symbolism, Popular Allegiances and State Patriotism in the Late Habsburg Monarchy* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007); and Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008, forthcoming).

[3]. Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationalism and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 14.

[4]. Ibid.

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