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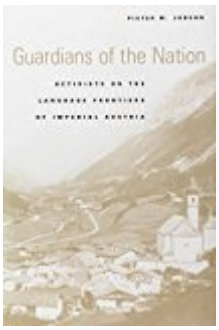

Pieter M. Judson. *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the language frontiers of imperial Austria.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006. 332 S. $49.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-02325-3.

Reviewed by John Deak

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At a 1966 conference at the University of Indiana on "The Nationality Problem in the Habsburg Monarchy in the Nineteenth Century," Istvan Deak commented on a panel entitled "The Dominant Nationalities as a Force of Integration and Disintegration." Deak famously began his commentary by calling the entire subject of the panel into question: "It is my contention that the subject of this debate is neither justified nor valid.... I would argue that there were no dominant nationalities in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. There were only dominant classes, estates, institutions, interest groups, and professions."[1] Deak's larger point was that nationality conflict operated not in a vacuum, but in a larger context of "class or group interests."

One reason why Deak's commentary, short though it was, has proven more memorable than the papers on which it was based, can be attributed to the impressive work of his former students.[2] In recent years, their work has been augmented theoretically by the UCLA sociologist Rogers Brubaker, who has cautioned students of nationalism not to accept nations as "real entities" but to see them as political creations. In this way of thinking, the "nation" becomes a "political and cultural form institutionalized within and among states."[3] The fact has been, however, that seeing nations as "contingencies" or "political fields" has translated with some difficulty into the field of Habsburg history. This is because histories that trace the development of nations as a process that runs parallel to modernization were dominant for so long.[4] Indeed, much of the history of the Habsburg Empire has been written from the standpoint of the successor states, which has privileged the birth, growth, and maturation of the Czech, Hungarian, Slovak, Romanian, Slovenian, Croatian, Polish, and yes, even Austrian, nations.

Pieter M. Judson's latest book, ***Guardians of the Nation***, presents not only a new study of nationalism, but also a new way of thinking about and writing the history of nationalization in Central Europe. Judson's object of research is the "language frontier." More specifically, he examines what he terms "nationalist activism on linguistic frontiers" where "Germans" were either defending their cultural or linguistic territory, or claim-

ing new territories for the German nation. The core of the book focuses on two of these frontiers: the Bohemian Woods in southern Bohemia, where Germans were supposedly holding back the Czechs; and southern Styria, where German speakers faced down their Slovene-speaking neighbors. The linguistically mixed areas of South Tyrol also come into play in the book, but are treated much less extensively.

A basic, but significant, assumption that underlies Judson's analysis is the rejection that a language frontier constituted a real place. Rather, Judson believes that such places were invented in the imagination of nationalist activists and were used to describe those areas where multiple languages were spoken by local inhabitants. The language frontier was essentially an idea that allowed nationalist activists to interpret rural linguistically mixed areas in a way that made complete sense to them. What did they find there that needed such an interpretation? It was national indifference. While nationalists saw and portrayed "the battle on the language frontier as an attempt to solidify the local hegemony of one nation in order to repel the potential advance of the other," they were confronted with a local population that "exhibited inexplicable behaviors, identifying themselves with neither nation or with both nations" (p. 2). Thus, the way in which language activists had to cope, to understand, and to transform their "Other" (that is, the nationally indifferent folk on the rural frontier) forms the focus of this study.

Judson carefully explores the interaction between nationalist activism on the rural language frontier and the nationally indifferent frontiersmen. For instance, he finds that "the slippery nature of the language frontier" confronted nationalists with cultural practices that called their "fundamental beliefs about nations into question" (p. 2). Some of these practices included blatant opportunism among villagers who declared their linguistic affiliation to be German in one census, only to declare Slovene or Czech in the next. For rural folk, choosing a side in the national either/or of the Habsburg Monarchy was not a moral or historical choice, so much as an economic or social one. They chose the side that offered them the most benefit: the best schools, best subsidies, and best business. In essence, the bilingual, nonnationalist rural communities presented nationalists with a paradigm that did not fit their idea that nations were easily defined by their "shared eternal and easily recognizable traits" (p. 2). Judson argues that the very existence of such indifference challenges the assumptions that historians of Central Europe have made when they write about the nationalization of the peoples in the Habsburg Monarchy and its successor states.

Nationalist activists explained the national indifference of rural communities as remnants of premodern cultural practices, or as Judson puts it, "rural ignorance, religious piety, and opportunism" (p. 2). As such, for nationalist activists, becoming national and making the conscious decision to join a nation was part of the modernization process. The problem is that historians of Central Europe have bought the activists' version of the story. Even if social scientists and historians have recognized that nations are constructions, they have not been able to find "a convincing way to relate nationalized outcomes to non-national origins" (p. 6). What makes this book such a valuable and engaging read is that, embedded in truly fascinating accounts of the confrontation between nationalist activism and everyday life in linguistically mixed areas, Judson questions both the traditional link between nationalization and modernity, as well as the way scholarship has presented the nationalization of Central Europe as an inevitable process. These larger arguments call into question both the reality of nations and the idea that everyone either "belonged" to a nation or would eventually belong to one.

The style of this book also carries these larger arguments to a great degree. Judson writes about

the language frontier in a way that treats such ideas as nations and national property as inventions. He always and invariably avoids references to "Czechs," "Slovenes," "Germans," or "Italians," and refuses to call multilingual towns or villages by a single name. Instead, Judson prefers longer and cumbersome formulations, such as "Czech speaker," or "German speaker," and place names that include both their German and Slavic or Italian equivalents. He does this to "challenge normative assumptions that presume that places and people have authentic national identities" (p. xiii). The larger point is that by labeling rural German speakers as "Germans" we make the assumption that they thought of themselves as such. These assumptions follow the worldview of the nationalist activists and not necessarily the reality of rural and small town life in the Habsburg Monarchy, where a villager might have identified much more with his profession, town, religion, or region rather than with the more abstract concept of a German nation.

Judson's choice of language passes over more convenient and commonly used terms for awkward structures that more accurately reflect the cultural mosaic of rural Central Europe. Such grammatical adventures pay off. On the one hand, his analysis of nationalist activism on the language frontier continually reinforces the necessity of formulations like "Bergreichenstein/Kasparske Hory was only half as large as Prachatitz/Prachatice" (p. 89). On the other hand, Judson's consistent use of such phrases throughout the book makes them gradually seem less exotic, less awkward, and even more familiar. In essence, Judson's specific choice for the consistent use of awkward phrases to describe language use--without denoting national identity--is a warranted effort to practice what he preaches. He pairs a new way of thinking about nationalism in Austria with a new way of writing about it.

Judson approaches his subject through a variety of sources, including local newspapers from Styria and the Bohemian Woods, national association newsletters, tour guides, and novels, as well as archival sources from regional archives and the General Administrative Archive in Vienna. But more than the breadth of the materials, it is the stories that Judson makes them tell and the explicit and clear way in which he uses these sources that underlie the value of this book.

Judson's story really begins with the First Austrian Census of 1880--a census that only took account of a person's "language of daily use" and therefore lacked categories for "nationality" (p. 27). The census provided the basis for nationalist activists to focus on language as the measure of whether their nation was winning converts or losing ground to the enemy. The census, then, sparked nationalist associations to descend on the language frontiers in order to nationalize their rural co-speakers or at least to keep the other side (whether it was Slovene, Italian, or Czech) from making further linguistic inroads into German territory.

The core of the book consists of five thematically organized chapters that cover different aspects of the confrontation between nationalist activists and the language frontier. In these chapters, Judson carefully approaches the variety of ways in which nationalist activists sought to intervene in rural linguistically mixed areas. In each case, Judson finds that rural folk were not a blank slate for nationalism--easily trained to think and act as members of a nation. Rather, the choice to see the world in nationalist terms or join the larger community of a nation was only ever a choice; and a choice that cannot be divorced from local matters or issues specific to an individual or family's situation (be it social or economic). In many cases, Judson finds that nationalist activists failed "to make national categories compelling to the people who were to represent them" (p. 255)--that is, their co-speakers on the language frontier.

Such a perspective takes us into rather new territory in the study of nationalization of Europe.

Judson has some company here in the recent and excellent study of the complex process of nationalization in the town of Budweis (Ceske Budejovice) by Jeremy King.[5] While King's book told the story of nationalization in the larger framework of local municipal politics, Judson's book is woven together by multiple tales involving school associations, tourism, farmers, and their encounters with nationalist activists from outside.

In chapter 2, Judson examines the important role of school associations in creating a frontline of nationalist activity in multilingual regions. The private German language schoolhouses that the German School Association built in frontier villages became physical embodiments of the nationalist cause. Schoolhouses, as both a shrine of and portal to a higher culture, were not only meant to educate children, but also to nationalize and invigorate the adult population. Such private funds brought a high quality of education to children on the rural frontier, but the roots of bilingualism in many areas persisted as well. In the end, these types of benefits of nationalist associations did not necessarily lead to committed nationalists.

Chapter 3 addresses the attempts of the urban-based nationalist activists to found associations in frontier areas. While the nationalists extolled the virtues of these "ur-Germans" on the rural frontier in their articles meant for urban consumption, they actually found themselves having to instill German cultural and civic virtues in the rural folk. Chapter 4 takes a penetrating look at the Sudmark, a German nationalist organization whose work focused on the southern language frontier. This organization began to actively colonize Slovene majority areas in southern Styria with German-speaking farmers. The organization bought up local farmland and sold it at reduced prices only to German speakers. Judson demonstrates that the Sudmark actually recruited Protestant farmers from the German Empire because they were less likely to mix with the Slovenes and thus could be counted on to maintain their German character through the generations.

Chapter 5 examines how tourism affected life and activism on the language frontier. Nationalist associations hoped that by sponsoring tourism in frontier regions they could bring economic prosperity to the frontier folk while making real the idea of a national frontier to peoples from homogeneously German regions. However, tourism could have other, unintended effects as well. Tourism brought these associations into direct contact with the a-national, or even antinational, policies of the central state and actually served to temper the nationalist rhetoric and plans of the association. Tourism required cooperation from the regional and central governments to build roads and rails lines, and to subsidize other infrastructure improvements. But state monies also meant that restaurant menus and road signs would have to be bilingual and that more aggressive forms of nationalism had to be toned down to offer tourists a feeling of safety. Judson calls into question the idea that modernization and nationalization always went hand in hand in Central Europe. Tourism, by bringing in the modernizing impulses of the Austrian state, could certainly displace the "nation" as the handmaiden to progress. Finally, chapter 6 addresses nationalist violence on the language frontier. Judson shows how any act of violence could be spun by the nationalist press to render them understandable with a nationalist paradigm. A particular episode in this chapter showcases the skill that Judson employs throughout the book of meticulously scrutinizing his sources and at the same time taking his readings beyond simply presenting what the sources state. An episode of violence in a town in the Bohemian Woods in 1908 involved German speakers, Czech speakers, and local gendarmes. Eventually, the army had to be called in to restore order. Judson retells the incident from the point of view of the German and Czech presses, both of which presented their sides as victims, as well as from

the perspective of the local district administrator (who downplayed the nationalist aspect of the incident). Judson's examination of the sources shows that each side had its own way of understanding the event and its own reasons for doing so. In the end, a completely accurate portrayal of what really happened in the small Bohemian town is impossible. But this is exactly Judson's point: the sources all tell different stories and emphasize different aspects of the violence, while each side could interpret these interactions on the language frontier in their own nationalist (or, on the part of Austria's officialdom, nonnationalist) way.

This book is filled with many such incidents that Judson recounts. In the end, though, Judson not only undermines the nationalist's idea of a language frontier but also calls into question the usefulness of the term "national indifference." This compelling book shows that, while Judson's rural villagers and peasants were not committed nationalists, these "frontier people" were also not truly "indifferent" to nationalist activists and the promises they offered; they often used them to their own benefit in what Judson refers to earlier as "nationally opportunistic behaviors" (p. 3). They did prove, however, to be resistant to nationalization and the efforts of nationalist activists to channel the way rural dwellers thought about the world into nationalist categories.

The resistance shown forms the moral backdrop of Judson's history of the language frontier at the turn of the century. One of Central Europe's tragedies was that this resistance eventually was smothered by the population practices--expulsions and transfers--undertaken during and after World War II, practices that were informed by a nationalized worldview which never came to understand or chose to oversimplify the logic of Central Europe's cultural mosaic.

Guardians of the Nation would make an excellent example in a graduate seminar of how to deftly use a variety of types of sources. Moreover, Judson's skepticism when dealing with his sources does not lead him down the road of postmodernist nihilism. Rather, he uses the slippery nature of his material to tell us much about the mindset of nationalist activists and their uncertainties and fears in trying to nationalize the nationally indifferent on the rural language frontier.

Ultimately, historiography will judge the importance of this book not by the many questions it answers, but the questions it raises anew. *Guardians of the Nation* offers new ways of thinking and writing about nationalism in Central Europe, and, by virtue of its example, calls historians to further reevaluate assumptions about the givenness of nationalization. As such, one can comfortably assume that this work will not provide the final word on the nationalization of Central Europe, but will be a much-appreciated model for many future studies to come.

Notes

[1]. The conference papers were subsequently published in the *Austrian History Yearbook*. For the full text of Deak's comments, see Istvan Deak, *Austrian History Yearbook* 3 (1967): part 1, 303-308, quotation on 303.

[2]. One can get a sense of much of the recent work by Deak's former students in a recent Festschrift for him. Pieter M. Judson and Marsha L. Rozenblit, eds., *Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe*, Austrian and Habsburg Studies, vol. 6 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005).

[3]. Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 13-22.

[4]. See the excellent essay by Jeremy King, "The Nationalization of East Central Europe: Ethnicism, Ethnicity, and Beyond," in *Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present*, ed. Maria Bucur and Nancy M. Wingfield (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2001), 112-152.

[5]. Jeremy King, ***Budweisers in Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948*** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). This book was the subject of a HABSBURG review. Claire Nolte, review of ***Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948***, by Jeremy King, HABSBURG@h-net.msu.edu (May 2004), http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=96461086838123.