With the progress of the idea of nationalism as a historically specific product of the modern world, and not a general attribute of human societies or human nature, historians have begun to investigate the origins of nationalist ideas and behaviors. In many parts of Europe, the crucial nationalist concept of the nation-state proved to be relatively unproblematic. Nationalists were able to place their nation into the convenient state framework of a centralized monarchy, developing since the fourteenth or fifteenth century. Such a procedure worked well enough in France, England, Spain, Sweden or Denmark (although there were issues even in those countries, as Bretons, Welsh, Basques or Norwegians could testify) but was noticeably more difficult in central Europe, where the co-existence of the Holy Roman Empire with nascent centralized states and other, less tightly organized and smaller territories made for problems in identifying the appropriate state for the nation, and the appropriate nation for the state. Both of the quite different books under review here deal with the process of the emergence of nationalist ideas in central Europe and the development of the imagination of the nation and its state. The authors of the two works uncover a plethora of information about the process, but in the end the empirical details they provide seem more convincing than the theoretical apparatus used to investigate them and the intellectual frameworks used to explain them.
Two of the editors of *Patriotismus und Nationsbildung* are distinguished senior scholars who have devoted a substantial part of their careers to the historical investigation of nationalism. Miroslav Hroch is well known for his investigations of the development of national identity and nationalist politics among the smaller peoples particularly of eastern Europe. Otto Dann may be a somewhat less familiar figure, but he was one of the first historians in Germany to study the history of nationalism and has written extensively on the topic.[1] *Patriotismus und Nationsbildung* emerged from two colloquia held in 1995 and 1998, where German and eastern European historians met to discuss the development of nationalist ideas in the closing decades of the eighteenth century. Stemming from a project supported by the Volkswagen Stiftung, "Das alte Reich im europäischen Kontext," the point was to compare circumstances in the Holy Roman Empire and its periphery, precisely that zone of Europe in which centralized monarchies either did not exist or had to share legitimacy with other political units.

The work opens with a discussion in which the editors put forth two basic propositions concerning the nature of nascent nationalism and the forms of identity involved in nationalism. The essays in the volume consider the transition from eighteenth century *Patriotismus*, the idea, intent and organization for the purpose of disinterestedly promoting the welfare of a collective entity, to nineteenth-century nationalism. As the editors note, such *Patriotismus* could take a wide variety of collectives as its object, ranging from all of humanity, through a monarch’s realm, to a province, a Stand or an ethnic or linguistic group. Also considered are the ways in which these forms of attachment developed into identification with the nation. Unfortunately, the editors do not go on to discuss the individual essays of the volume in light of their basic propositions. One finds that the editors’ concepts work better in some essays than others, and also that the individual authors sometimes stray from the editors’ intent.

The essays dealing with Western Europe conform very nicely to the editors’ ideas. Holger Bönning’s essay on Switzerland, for instance, shows that members of the enlightened Helvetische Gesellschaft developed the patriotic idea of improving all the territories and inhabitants of the Swiss Confederation, moving beyond the boundaries of order or of the individual sovereign territories. Society members later played a major role in the revolutionary Helvetian Republic of the 1790s, a Switzerland one and indivisible, thus illustrating nicely the transition from patriotism to nationalism. That the famous conservative political theorist Johann Ludwig von Haller was also a member of the pre-revolutionary Helvetische Gesellschaft shows, however, that not everyone made this transition. Another version of this transition appears in Johannes Koll’s account of the Austrian Netherlands. There, patriotism was associated with the preservation of the province’s privileges and *ständisch* prerogatives against the centralizing and enlightened reform efforts of Joseph II. Koll traces, through the turbulent events of the years 1787-90, the beginning of the process by which this patriotic defense of provincial identity developed into Catholic-clerical and liberal versions of Belgian nationalism. In a similar way, Nicolaas C.F. van Sas’s discussion of the Netherlands shows the development of a Dutch nationalism out of the patriotic movements of the old regime Dutch Republic, outlining the transition from *ständisch* and local identities to a national one, and how over the years 1780-1815 the House of Orange went from being the patriots’ enemy to the embodiment of the nation.

On reading the essays concerning the territories of the Holy Roman Empire, one finds that a linear progression from patriotism to nationalism does not appear, or only does so in oddly twisted fashion. Anke Waldmann’s piece deals with *Reichspatriotismus*, or the loyalty to and desire to
improve the Holy Roman Empire. She focuses on a group of intellectuals, state officials and some lesser German monarchs inspired by Frederick the Great’s 1784 League of Princes, which was designed to protect the institutions of the empire from the plans of Joseph II. They hoped to use this interest in the empire as the basis for a reform program and focused on improving and expanding the powers of the imperial courts and creating a unified code of civil and criminal justice by gaining either the support of Frederick or, somewhat more oddly, Joseph, for their proposals. However, both monarchs saw their controversy over the shape of the empire merely as a pretext for their Great Power interests and the disappointed reformers found themselves appealing to an empire whose most powerful princes had given up on it as a serious institution. With the outbreak of the French Revolution and the war between revolutionary France and the empire, adherents of Reichspatriotismus had to conceal their reform plans out of fear of being branded foreign subversives. Some, such as Karl Theodor von Dalberg, ended up as Napoleonic collaborators. Connections with the nineteenth-century nationalist movement, in either its klein- or großdeutsch variants, are hard to trace.

Andreas Gestrich’s and Cornelia Kaiser’s essay on patriotism and nationalism in the imperial free city of Ulm traces the attitudes of the city’s inhabitants from the end of the old regime through the early nineteenth century. The officials of the kingdoms of Bavaria and later Württemberg, who served as Ulm’s initial and final rulers in the Napoleonic era, took pains to devise ceremonies and to build monuments in order to promote the loyalty of the inhabitants of Ulm to the “nations” of Bavaria and Württemberg. Such measures do not seem to have had their desired success, however, and the residents of Ulm, unhappy subjects of Württemberg’s monarch, became increasingly strong supporters of German nationalism. This essay is a useful corrective to Alon Confino’s well-known study of nationalism in Württemberg, in which German national identity appears problematic and constructed, but Württemberg identity as almost natural and unquestioned.[2] It also demonstrates that nationalism in central Europe could arise not only out of loyalty to a collective body, but also from the rejection of such a loyalty.

Alexander Reder’s essay, a summary of his book on patriotic, vaterländisch women’s associations in the years 1815-30, emphasizes the extraordinary extent of these groups (some six hundred of them operated across central Europe) and the wide variety of their gender-specific actions. They cared for wounded soldiers, supported war widows and orphans of the wars of liberation and cared for the sick. The author argues that in spite of the gendered limitations on their activity, such groups gave women an opportunity to participate in public life and can be understood as an initial step on the road to emancipation. This argument successfully challenges a position often advanced by feminists, that the modern concept of the nation involved an exclusion of women from public life. In terms of Hroch’s and Dann’s intellectual framework, it is interesting to note that the female version of nationalism, with its disinterested support of the public good, seems strongly similar to eighteenth-century ideas of patriotism, without having any specific eighteenth-century antecedents.

Perhaps the most interesting views of central Europe are the two essays on the Tyrol: Laurence Cole’s on the Andreas Hofer uprising and its antecedents and Reinhard Stauber’s on Italian-speaking intellectuals in the southern part of the province. Both essays argue that political movements of the revolutionary and Napoleonic era were a reaction against the centralizing and enlightened reforming efforts of Joseph II. Cole shows a reaffirmation of provincial and ständisch privileges coupled with a vigorous defense of baroque Catholic religious practices, which were understood as defense of the nature of the Holy Roman Empire against pernicious changes and...
carried over very smoothly into the empire's war against the godless French Revolution. The high clergy and the provincial estates defended themselves against the threat of Napoleon's army in 1796 by dedicating the entire province to the Sacred Heart, and the uprising against Franco-Bavarian rule of 1809 was dominated by similar themes. They were anti-French, anti-Enlightenment, anti-revolution and pro-“German,” but advocated a Germany of *ständisch* and provincial privileges, to be ruled by a Catholic emperor as a continuation of eighteenth-century patriotism rather than a movement toward nineteenth-century nationalism. By contrast, among Italian-speaking intellectuals in the southern part of the province, the response to Joseph's enlightened reforms was not to reject enlightened ideals, but instead to use them to emphasize the identification of inhabitants of the Trentino with the Italian nation. Linguistic differences (proto-nationalist forms of ethnicity?) played a role in these different responses, but they did not make up the whole story, since Stauber shows the very considerable presence of bilingualism in the South Tirol and the cooperation of German- and Italian-speaking intellectuals, while Cole finds evidence of Italian speakers joining in the 1809 uprising, with its clerical and particularist attitudes. Here, once again, the transition from patriotism to nationalism proves not to be simple, linear or inevitable.

If the essays on central Europe suggest problems with the editors' theoretical framework, those on eastern Europe wander off in altogether different directions. Editor Hroch argues that in ways similar to Stauber's discussion of south Tyrol, the development of Czech nationalism was a response to the growing uncertainty about the society of orders, which were unleashed by the reforms of Joseph II and by the era of the French Revolution. This assumption is certainly plausible, but the essay provides no empirical evidence for it. By contrast, Eduard Maur and Eva Kowalská argue for continuity in nationalist thought among Czechs and Slovaks from the early modern era, or even the middle ages, to the nineteenth century. Their argument is based on the common use of origin myths by a small group of historians and is not very convincing. Kowalská's discussion of Slovak origin myths, according to which the Slovaks of the early medieval greater Moravian Empire voluntarily invited the Magyars to share their country, is interesting because the myth's acceptance of a foreign incursion is so different from belligerent English rejections of the "Norman yoke" imposed on free Anglo-Saxons, or French revolutionary ideas about invading Franks oppressing native Gauls; the author does not, however, explore these comparisons.

Miloš Žezník's account of patriotism in Polish-ruled eighteenth-century West Prussia shows that the patriotism of the province's German- and Polish-speaking corporate elites involved a loyalty to the Polish Commonwealth and a fierce defense of their provincial privileges against centralizing or reforming initiatives coming from Warsaw. The failure of these initiatives led to the partitions of Poland, the annexation of West Prussia into the Prussian kingdom and the loss of all its provincial corporate privileges. Rather than nationalist ideas emerging in these circumstances, Žezník suggests that for a number of decades under Prussian rule there was an anomic lack of broader forms of political identity. Anna Skýbová asserts that the Catholic Church played an important role both in encouraging Czech patriotism and in the transition from patriotism to nationalism. This is a promising idea, albeit involving a factor in the development of nationalism, namely religious identity, which the editors do not consider. However, Skýbová's one example of the church's support of nationalism, in which Prague's archbishop Leopold Chlumanský lent documents and printed materials in possession of the archdiocesan archives to the Bohemian patriotic museum in 1827, cannot bear the argumentative weight she places on it.
The essays in *Patriotismus und Nationsbildung*, which focus intensely on the transition from the old regime to the new political and cultural order of the post-French Revolutionary world, show the complexities, gaps and unexpected progressions in the emergence of nations and nationalism. In contrast Caspar Hirschi, in his book covering the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries, is not afraid to assert an identity of nations and nationalism across a much longer span of time. His work, the published version of his Fribourg dissertation, is a direct challenge to the idea of the nation and of nationalism as a feature of the modern world. The mass of empirical evidence he compiles, though, and the elaborate theoretical arguments he puts forth generally do not appear to support his contentions very well.

Hirschi begins by asserting that the theory of nationalism as a phenomenon of the modern world is a product of a few English-language intellectuals (Eric Hobsbawn, Ernst Gellner and Benedict Anderson are the prime suspects), which was taken up in central Europe with some relief as a way of managing the feelings of unease that nationalism brings there. This discussion, which seems more than a bit unfair to central Europeans such as Miroslav Hroch, who was an important inspiration for Hobsbawm, and Otto Dann, does contain some interesting if not particularly original criticisms of the work of Gellner and Anderson. Hirschi also emphasizes, correctly, in my opinion, the considerable influence of the now largely forgotten Harvard historian Carlton Hayes in developing this whole line of thought.[3]

One main point in Hirschi’s critique is to assert that the early modern and even, to some extent, medieval worlds had the concept of a collective identity of a group of people united by features such as language and common descent who belonged to one political body, and therefore a conception of a nation and a nation-state, even if the they did not always use those specific expressions. He brushes aside the assertion that modern nationalism involves prioritizing such an identity above other sources of loyalty, such as region, *Stand*, confession or dynasty, by asserting that except perhaps in wartime, mixed identities and loyalties are the exception in the modern world rather than the rule. The phrase “Deutschland, Deutschland über alles” might give one pause here.

Having dissolved most distinctions between the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries, Hirschi then proceeds to offer his explanation of the distinctive features of nationalism. He argues that it involves a pluralistic concept of group identity, a world of different nations, as opposed to the binary oppositions in ancient Greece of Hellenes and barbarians or the Chinese idea of a Kingdom of Heaven and barbarians or medieval Christian and Islamic contrasts of believers and infidels. Hirschi then asserts that the group identity is, as his title states, a community of honor, and the different nations are engaged in a competition of honor. This state of affairs, he argues, emerged from the Renaissance humanist understanding of the medieval heritage of the Roman Empire. Such a competition between nations has been underway ever since. Sometimes it is ruled and regulated by transnational institutions, as in the earlier period of the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire; in more recent years it has been regulated by the U.N., the WTO, or even FIFA; and in the intervening period without any such institutions it has been prone to taking more violent and extreme forms.

The empirical material in the book involves a "discourse analysis" of the concept of the nation. Beginning with the late medieval world, Hirschi discusses at some length the ways that the Italian Renaissance altered concepts of the nation. He argues that the Renaissance humanist revival of classical Latin culture was central to the development of nationalist ideas, not so much in Italy, where Italian authors took up again the ancient contrast between a civilized group, in their case,
the Italians, heirs to the Roman Empire, and external barbarians. According to Hirschi, it was the German humanists who employed this classical revival to create the notion of a German nation, a community of descent, language and especially honor, existing from the days of the ancient Germanic tribes down to the present, distinguishing the Germans from other, especially French or Italian, national groupings. He quotes a wide range of humanist authors, but his prime examples typically come from the writings of the Bavarian Johannes Aventinus.

Hirschi sees these nationalist ideas reaching their highpoint in the early sixteenth century, peaking in the election of Charles V as Holy Roman Emperor in 1519, with Karl's protagonists identifying a Spanish prince as a true German, against the "foreign" French and English monarchs who sought the imperial title. The Reformation then quickly brought this nationalist era to an end. Martin Luther appears in Hirschi's work as a man concerned primarily with sin and salvation who saw the Germans as a community of gluttons and drunkards, not as the more familiar pioneer of German nationalism. Indeed, Hirschi must admit that the entire humanist image of German nationalism seems to vanish in the sixteenth century, and by the middle of the century Germany's Protestant princes were trying to get the King of France elected emperor, which does not prevent him from asserting that nineteenth- and twentieth-century German nationalism is the successor to the northern Renaissance, in other words, an intellectual tradition running not from Luther to Hitler but from Johannes Aventinus to Hitler.

In spite of the author's extensive surveys of humanist writings, which are at times over-extensive and not always entirely relevant to his account, his assertions of continuity in nationalism between the fifteenth and the twentieth centuries is very problematic. Four major problems emerge for his argument. One is the nature of the late medieval and early modern nation. Although Hirschi condemns Otto Dann's idea of an early-modern Adelsnation, many humanist mentions of the German nation invariably seem to refer to the nobility. Evidence for the wider influence of these concepts of the nation, outside the ranks of humanist intellectuals and the nobility is lacking, except for somewhat unreliable, as the author himself admits, reports of the English ambassador on the imperial election of 1519, which asserted that the inhabitants of the city of Mainz were hostile to foreigners.

Another problem is making the link between the late medieval and early modern sources Hirschi cites and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In a discussion of the fifteenth century "revolutionary of the Upper Rhine" (probably best known to English-speaking readers from Norman Cohn's The Pursuit of the Millenium (1957), Hirschi asserts that this individual's belief that the Germans were God's Chosen People and that Adam and Eve spoke German served as the origins of Fichte's notion of the Germans as an Ur-volk. He fails to explain how an unpublished fifteenth-century manuscript exerted its influence on an author writing over three hundred years later. The book is simply replete with such assertions of intellectual influence based on some sort of intellectual similarity that is at times quite far-fetched.

The Upper Rhine revolutionary brings up the third and perhaps greatest problem with Hirschi's work: its conceptual underpinnings. The contention that nationalism involves a pluralist understanding of group identities as opposed to a binary one is undermined by the Upper Rhine revolutionary's assertion that the Germans were God's Chosen People, since it posits a distinctly binary contrast between those chosen by God and those not. In a more secular vein, nationalist ideas have often involved a binary opposition between a nation with distinct historical tasks and a special destiny and the rest of humanity. German nation-
alism certainly fits this description, as do French and American nationalism and Mazzini’s ideas about the role of the Italian nation.

There are also conceptual problems about the central role of Renaissance humanism in the evolution of nationalism. Hirschi notes that Renaissance humanists are not to be confused with, for instance, Albert Schweitzer; their humanism was about the revival of classical cultural forms, not about being nice to people. However, he also asserts that the humanist prioritization of oratory was at the origins of the modern practice of articulating nationalism in rhetorical form. Here, he seems to fall into precisely the problem he warns against: the Renaissance revival of Cicero’s Latin rhetoric is rather distant from the rabble-rousing of an Adolf Hitler, Jean-Marie Le Pen, Jörg Haider (or Rush Limbaugh, for that matter). Hirschi’s idea of the nation as a community of honor shows this problem as well. Honor was certainly a central concept of the society of orders and used at some length by Renaissance humanists, but it is less clear that it fits the modern world or that national communities are communities of honor. One need only think of Montesquieu’s celebrated observation that honor was the basic principle of monarchical forms of government, but virtue was the principle of a republic.

In sum, Hirschi’s efforts to make the late medieval and early modern world similar to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries seem quite unconvincing. One might expect this problem in view of the differences between the historically much closer eighteenth century and the post-1800 world drawn by the authors in Hroch’s and Dann’s volume. What does emerge from reading both these books is a renewed sense of the many unresolved questions about the origins and nature of modern nationalism, in general, and also of the unusual complexity and contested nature of the emergence of nationalism in central Europe, in particular.

Notes


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