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Identity, Contingency, and Interaction: Historical Research and Social Science Analysis of Nation-State Proliferation

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Abstract

Scholars of nation-building and secession tend to prioritize elite or broader nationalist activism when explaining the proliferation of nation-states. Yet, recent historical research reveals a major finding: the influence of great powers tended to eclipse nationalist mobilization for new states in Latin America, the Balkans, Anatolia, and Central and Eastern Europe. Drawing on recent trends in historical research largely unknown in other fields, this article examines context, timing, and event sequencing to provide a new approach to multi-case research on nation-state proliferation. Major power recognition of new states in the Balkans also emerges as transformational for the post-World War I replacement of dynastic empires with nation-states in Europe. These findings suggest a shift of focus to the interplay of nationalist activism and great power policy for explaining the spread of nation-states.

Keywords: nation-state, secession, self-determination, great powers, national indifference

Mainstream thinking on nation-building continues to emphasize the spread of national identities to certain populations in the vicinity of state boundaries, or understood as the basis for an autonomous area or nation-state in the making. The rise of nationalist activism, nationalist movements, and any corresponding sub-state administrations, are then assumed to hold central importance in the emergence of new nation-states. Miroslav Hroch's (1985) three-stage model serves as a paradigmatic example of the *nationalism paradigm*—the prioritization of nationalist activism or mobilization for the emergence of new nation-states,¹ exemplifying what Rogers Brubaker has labeled a developmental approach presuming nationalism as the result of an inexorable process (Brubaker 1996, 19).² Several important recent studies on nation-state proliferation similarly prioritize nationalist activism or mobilization (Wimmer and Feinstein 2010; Wimmer 2013), including how substate administrations may facilitate nationalists' demands (Roeder 2007).

Yet a growing body of historical research challenges the nationalism paradigm for the spread of nation-states in Europe (Judson 2006, 2016; Zahra 2008; Brown 2013; Blumi 2013b; Hillis 2013; Anscombe 2014; Yosmaoğlu 2014; Hajdarpasic 2015).³ Historically minded social scientists' work similarly reflects this trend (Jenne and Bieber 2014; Malešević 2017). While Bridget Coggins's recent studies (2011, 2014) of secessionist movements draw much needed attention to external recognition of sovereignty, her work leaves unexplored a major insight illuminated by recent historical research: the influence of interaction between great powers and activists on the often non-linear route to state recognition, interplay that tends to show the predominant role of major powers. Like most North American international relations scholars, Coggins does not conceptualize group identity and associated discourse and action as contingent and situational—and thus open to influence by great power policy and other factors. Coggins's focus on major

powers' recognition preferences also misses the unintended consequences of great power foreign and domestic policy, how problem-framing among key policy makers may affect perceptions of self-interests underlying recognition preferences, or examine earlier waves of state proliferation (prior to 1931). These issues are similarly unaddressed in J. Samuel Barkin and Bruce Cronin's (1994) analysis of major powers' varied observance of the nation-state norm, and in Mikulas Fabry's (2010) broader survey of modern recognition practices.

Drawing from recent trends in historical research, this article aims to lay the foundation for the next era of multi-case research on nation-state proliferation. My analysis shows that great powers are vital for new state creation by focusing on context, timing, and event sequencing, and considers more cases than nuanced historical studies typically allow. This approach magnifies the questions historians and others have raised about the longstanding ethnocentric bias in mainstream accounts of nation-state proliferation, and urges social scientists to consider adopting a dynamic, comparative approach to multi-case studies of proliferation, with identity and associated action and discourse understood as largely situational. Andreas Wimmer and Coggins, among others, leave unconsidered the multiple ways that major powers may contribute to (un) successful secession through policies that may influence the demands and timing of nationalist mobilization.⁴ Nuances regarding the action retrospectively categorized as "nationalist" are also often overlooked.

My analysis shows that major powers were most influential for new state emergence: (a) when nationalist activism/organization was insufficiently powerful and when at least one major power favored a new state(s) (mainly in the Balkans cases), and (b) through unintentionally creating openings for successful secessionist action through tax increases, intervention, or other policies that weakened one or more great powers, including the unintended consequences of empires' own domestic policies (mainly for the American, Turkish, and Central and East European cases). Great power action and policy created openings for shifts in activism—whether from supporting autonomy to independence, the formation or relocation of provisional governments in exile, or other measures—at times of high potential effect. Wimmer's identification of power shifts in nationalists' favor owes much to the unintended effects of great power policy.

This article also shows how much the all-important post-World War I wave of nation-state proliferation owes to its Balkan predecessor. With the Greek case, recognition in the Balkans inaugurated self-determination as the basis of legitimate statehood, setting a precedent for new states *not* legitimated solely according to modern principles: *de facto* independence or *uti possidetis juris*. The subsequent 1878 Berlin Treaty was of tremendous significance, signaling a change of focus to the ethnonational identity of populations (Weitz 2008, 1320—though Weitz uses the 19th-century terms of "race" and "nation"). Fabry (2010) charts shifts in modern recognition practice; yet, his analysis leaves unconsidered how great powers often facilitated the *de facto* independence they eventually recognized.

Self-determination remains the most well-known concept to emerge from the post-World War I peace process (Weitz 2008, 1327). Pieter Judson instead claims key causal power to lie in "military force and not democracy, national or otherwise" for border determination (2016, 441). Local-level power holders—most often successor states' respective military units—were able to make the most compelling claim to territory given the Allies' limitations of the rights of defeated states to engage in further fighting, or to pursue outcomes that would strengthen them; though noting that the new states owed much to "the loyalties and locations of Habsburg troops on whose support they could call late in 1918" (Judson 2016, 441). My analysis shows the successor state forces tended to play a supporting role in new state recognition;⁵ they gained assistance in key cases from civilian and military representatives of major powers. Allied policy makers were inclined to support nationalists offering troops that could effectively serve their respective war aims, aiding decisions regarding which nationalist claims to prioritize. While Italy and Italian forces were particularly important for the Allied campaign, and Rome did not object to empires'

replacement with small states, Woodrow Wilson's support for an enlarged Yugoslavia left irredentist Italian aims in the near abroad a mixed success.

I begin with brief consideration of precedent cases and the primary impact of nationalist activism for the post-World War I wave of new states: the construction of mind maps linking territory and identity among key policy makers. Understanding the mind maps' emergence and how great power policy shaped an environment conducive to incipient nation-states comes from the subsequent overview of context, timing, and event sequencing surrounding recognition of the Balkans states and Turkey. The final major section challenges the predominance of nationalist activism for post-World War I nation-state creation in Central and Eastern Europe, while the conclusion discusses potential next steps for post-nationalism paradigm research. Although discussion of the next waves of new states is beyond the scope of this article, the late Anthony D. Smith efficiently sums up why the nationalism paradigm cannot explain the subsequent emergence of many states: "the central difficulty of 'nation-building' in much of Africa and Asia is the lack of any shared historical mythology and memory on which state elites can set about 'building' the nation" (Smith 1986, 258).

Precedent Cases and Emerging Mind Maps

The first significant period of nation-state creation occurred in northern and western Europe, followed by the United States, a period left largely unconsidered here given the very limited geographical reach of the nation-state form, and questions raised over the inevitability of the initial wave of state emergence (Spruyt 1994). For the US case, perhaps the greatest challenge to my argument about this early period, Julian Go shows just how much the British experience of empire influenced prerevolutionary American thinking on legitimate government, noting the Americans' reluctant turn toward rebellion "to try to enact the ideals already laid down for them by the very imperial masters they sought to cast off" (Go 2011, 52). Changes in British tax policy occurring after the Seven Years' War (1756–1763) disrupted the long-time cozy arrangement between British authorities and colonial settler elites, who previously showed little indication of revolt. While Britain had withdrawn most of the offending fines by 1776, the taxation issue facilitated the shift of power to radical elites in many colonies comfortable with the idea of secession (Judd 1996, 21–25).

The next major wave of nation-state emergence appeared in Latin America. Independence was again the central concept with ethno-demography still of marginal importance for the justification of statehood. The emergence of a vague sense of 'American-ness' arose only among white elites and owed mostly to systematic discrimination by the Spanish-born *peninsulares*, with the elites differing significantly from the majority and comprising a very small part of the populations of the incipient states. While recognition of the United States served as an important regional precedent, conditions vastly improved for successful secessionist activism *only* after two changes in great power policy: the 1808 Napoleonic conquest of Spain, and Britain's blockage of the sea lanes linking Spain with the American colonies. While most colonists initially remained loyal to Spain's Ferdinand VII, the monarch's harsh efforts to restore control were met with a series of bloody and brutal wars that ended in 1826. Most independence claims in the Spanish colonies came in or near this conflict period with Ecuador the first to make claims in 1809 (Fisch 2015, 73–74). The effort to define nations came only after recognition of new political boundaries (Centeno 2002, 24, 47–48, 171–172).⁶

The much closer proximity of the Balkans and Anatolia to the European powers, particularly Russia in its efforts to use Ottoman Christians for strategic objectives, meant that the concept of minorities, notions of their threatening character when associated with irredentist powers, and diversity policies like minority rights and population exchanges emerged here rather than in the Americas or Western Europe, including Germany and Italy.⁷ The context within which six new nation-states in the Balkans emerged from 1830–1913 was of outsized importance for the near universality of the nation-state principle in postwar Europe given (a) the normalization of territorialized ethnicity occurred here rather than in the Americas or Western Europe,⁸ and (b)

these decades served an unintended trial period for territorial autonomy and/or the nation-state to be foundational unit(s) of political order for Central and Eastern Europe after World War I.

A closer look at event sequencing reveals that nationalist activism's contribution to recognition of new states after World War I came mostly with the sketching of rough ontological maps linking territory and identity policy makers drew on to consider the region's future political development,⁹ to include territorial autonomy within empires. During the 1880s, nationalists focused increasingly on territory rather than only on people during a time when nationhood had not yet acquired legitimacy as a legal or social category;¹⁰ when the great powers peacefully divided Africa at the 1884–85 Berlin Conference; and after the inaugural use of ethno-demographic maps in the drawing of the borders of Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro in 1878. Nationalist activists' keen interest in ethno-demographic maps influenced the thinking of key policy makers inclined to define nationalists' conflicting territorial claims as the primary problem driving conflict, implying alignment of territory and identity as the solution—or to support particular nationalists' claims mainly for instrumental reasons.

Yet the mind maps did not guarantee the “Balkanization of the Danube regions,” the phrase used by Woodrow Wilson's advisor Colonel House (Seymour 1928, 336). Major powers supported large-scale border redrawing only late in World War I. The timing of the culminating mind map's operationalization came only when the Austro-Hungarian Empire's demise appeared immanent owing to military defeat, and for the Baltic states and Finland, when Russian state power weakened substantially. These events gave nationalists valuable openings for effective activism, leaving decisive secessionist-oriented local nationalist mobilization to *follow* rather than spur shifts in great power politics. Charles Maier observes accordingly that “historians have often viewed . . . Austria-Hungary as a doomed state, but it fought for four long years in World War I before finally fracturing. Its armed forces were rarely victorious unless acting together with the German military, but they functioned as a unit despite their recruits' linguistic diversity” (2012, 148).

Great Powers, Nationalist Activism, and Nation-States in the Balkans

Unrest in the Balkans brought demands for autonomy and self-determination initially among Serbs, Greeks, and then Romanians, with provincial disquiet often simply a response to Ottoman repression labeling protest as ‘rebellion’ (latter point made by Anscombe [2014, 76]). Like the First and Second Serbian Uprisings (1804–1813, 1815–1817) and other uprisings occurring around the same time, the disjointed array of conflicts later named the Greek war of independence (1821–1829) were periods of social turmoil in which nationalist ideology had, at best, only a marginal impact in the mobilization leading to conflict (Malešević 2013, 257, 260; Blumi 2013a, 2013b, 192–193, 208–209; Anscombe 2014, 66). Modern ideologies like nationalism, liberalism, and socialism had little more than a modicum of influence on popular action, if any, prior to the second half of the 19th century in the Balkans, with much of the population resisting nationalist appeals even into the 20th century (Malešević 2013, 269, 271; Blumi 2013a, 2013b).

To understand the how self-determination became a justification for statehood, I begin with a look at the precedent-setting case of Greek independence before considering the context, several trends in particular, out of which emerged five additional nation-states between 1878 and 1913. Greece's emergence in 1830 was “the first time that the powers clearly linked a specific population and sovereignty—that is, the Greek state considered as representative of the Greek people” (Weitz 2008, 1317). Greece would be established for the Greeks—though the 1830 London Protocol recognizing frontiers and political features affirmed the new state's multi-confessional and ethnically diverse character (latter point from Weitz 2008, 1317).

Yet even a cursory review of key events signals that Greece's independence depended on great power intervention. With Ottoman-Egyptian forces overwhelming the Greeks, Britain, France, and Russia sent their naval fleets to Navarino Bay on the Morea's west coast in 1827. An unplanned naval battle ensued in October that ended with the destruction of the Ottoman fleet

and the vast majority of its Egyptian counterpart. Mahmud II then faced another war with Russia, ending with Ottoman defeat in 1829, with Britain, France, and Austria resisting temptations to balance against Russia and widen the war (Mitzen [2013, 159] makes the latter point). Through the 1830 London Conference, the great powers effectively created Greece with a final settlement establishing a Greek Kingdom coming several months later but before negotiations over boundaries in July 1832 (Mitzen 2013, 172–173). Prospects for a Greek state improved as the revolt lost its inertia given frequent civil war, the absence of effective government, and all but certain defeat by Egyptian-Ottoman forces.

With Greece, the European powers also set another precedent important for aligning territory and identity: the internationally sanctioned removal of Muslim civilians to reduce chances of further massacre. French troops oversaw the move of about 2,500 Muslims transferred to Smyrna via French ships in November 1828, “inaugurating a state practice that would become as common as it was tragic throughout the nineteenth century” (Rodogno 2012, 86).

Yet the Greek case does not automatically explain great power recognition of Romania, Serbia and Montenegro in 1878—or the emergence of identity-based population removal as a major conflict resolution policy until well after World War II. Several trends illustrate a context in which emerged five additional Balkans nation-states and subsequent mind maps for wartime Central and Eastern Europe. First, “nationalist” activists presenting themselves as community leaders utilized the foreign discourse of ethnic and religious difference, with the accompanying benefits from outside powers, and sought to use this patronage in ways that gave credence to ideas of ethnic separation for stability and peace (Blumi 2013a, 27, 60; Hajdarasic 2015, 94–95). For the Balkans, local notables held political power and tend to be characterized as purveyors of nationalist activism of the 19th century (Jelavich 1983; 29, 58; Barkey 2008, 204),¹¹ even while many notables supported the Ottoman tax farming system and remained loyal to the sultan.¹² Though rumors of Russian, Serbian or Greek plans to divide up the Ottoman Balkan lands often catalyzed action, advocates of dividing up these territories were not widely supported but merely advancing ‘spin’ to influence external opinion, with actors challenging the regime often preferring more effort toward justice and equality for all residents of Ottoman lands rather than separation (Blumi 2013b, 532, 536, 538).¹³ Those labeled “nationalist activists” or “ethnic entrepreneurs” were not necessarily driven by genuinely nation-oriented concerns, but motivated by local grievances and/or changes in Ottoman policy.

Benjamin Fortna (2008) notes a related pattern within periods of crisis in the Balkans: Russian agents and arms encouraged rebelling local Slavs to reinterpret their grievances away from local issues of concern, such as tax collection, to either the symbols of the Ottoman regime or local Muslims if symbols were not present. Small-scale violence would then be transformed into something larger when troops and irregulars responded, and moving into a cycle of attack and violent response (Fortna 2008, 45). Wars with Russia in the final decades of the 18th century and early 19th century not only brought territorial loss to the Ottomans but opened space for more influential Balkan-based disquiet (Barkey 2008, 204).

The Russian campaign to exert influence in the Balkans forms part of the second trend: great powers’ interference in, and increasing influence over, the Ottoman Empire. European pressures also facilitated the spread of assumptions of Ottoman Christians as potential allies of foreign powers. Key were the capitulations: the legal, commercial and religious privileges sultans provided the Europeans, allowing foreign merchants and others to operate according to their own laws outside of any disputes arising with the Muslim population. Such privileges could then be used in making alliances and contributed to growing inequality between Ottoman Christians and Jews engaged in trade and the Muslim population that brought awareness of privileges for the non-Muslims (Barkey 2008, 98, 282–286). Over time, successive renewals of the contracts created the basis for an internationally recognized European protectorate for the Ottoman Christians as well as for the Ottoman Empire itself (Rodogno 2012, 20, 29), with the capitulations significantly reducing Ottoman economic sovereignty (Findley 2010, 51). By the time of post-World War I

negotiations at Lausanne over Turkey's borders, Turkish delegates at the conference saw violence linked with ethnonational identities as connected with Western powers' self-interested use of "extraterritorial privileges afforded by consular jurisdiction or exercising treaty-based rights of guardianship over Christian communities" (Özsu 2015, 73).

A third factor was major power recognition of autonomy or independence, and great power protectorates or supervision in the Balkans prior to recognition of new nation-states—recognition often linked with the concept of culture-based nations. With the 1867 Compromise (the *Ausgleich*), the Habsburgs recognized Hungarian autonomy and equality with the Austrian kingdom, an event showing the importance of Hungarian nationalist activism. Yet consideration of timing reveals the equally vital importance of the 1866 defeat of Austria weakening Vienna enough to create conditions amenable for the *Ausgleich*. Then came a unified Germany and Italy in 1871, the former from the Prussian conquest of several German states and parts of France and Denmark and the latter from the Piedmontese annexation of Italian states. A fourth factor linking territory and identity was major powers' inaugural use of ethno-demographic maps for boundary drawing in the 1870s in the Balkans, serving as a key precedent for boundary drawing after World War I.¹⁴

The great powers played a vital role in the power shift allowing the emergence of new nation-states through spurring Ottoman weakness and increasing perceptions of non-Muslims as potential threats. I now turn to timing and event sequencing that shows the decisive impact of great power intervention when nationalist activism or mobilization was insufficiently powerful to create new nation-states (for Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia) or activists' main demand was autonomy rather than independence (for Albania). Russia proved particularly eager to support nationalists to fortify its influence in the Balkans, with Macedonia lacking major power support despite peaceful intervention in the Ottoman Macedonian provinces in 1903–1908 following the uprisings of 1902–1903. Only for Romania could nationalist activism potentially eclipse great power action for independence—at least prior to World War I, less so for long-time autonomous Montenegro.

With the precedent-setting Greek case and subsequent humanitarian interventions in Ottoman Lebanon and Syria and Crete, European powers were aware that talk of possible humanitarian intervention could stimulate the imaginations and activities of nationalists. The Bulgarian case, in fact, followed similar lines as its Greek predecessor: violence categorized as an insurrection meets a vicious Ottoman counterattack that results in European attention and then intervention. Yet the 1876 Bulgarian uprising was miniscule. Fighting was limited to only three mountain towns, while Ottoman foreknowledge of revolutionary planning allowed preemptive removal of some insurgents, with the Principalities and then Wallachia serving as the center of Bulgarian revolutionary action (Jelavich 1983, 335, 345).¹⁵ Prospects for an independent Bulgaria vastly improved only following the 'Bulgarian horrors': Ottoman irregulars' massacre of thousands of Bulgarians in response to the spring uprising.¹⁶ Such circumstances created the context for Russia's proposed occupation of Bulgaria, while Britain considered an occupation of its own modeled after the French takeover of Syria occurring sixteen years earlier to block Russian aims (Bass 2008, 285, 289). After the Ottomans rejected the European great powers' suggested autonomy for Bulgaria and Bosnia, Russia commenced with the 1877–1878 Russo-Ottoman War, leading to Russia's imposition of the Treaty of San Stefano on a defeated Ottoman Empire (latter point made by Bass [2008, 303]). Then appeared an enlarged Bulgaria, albeit as a satellite state for Russia.

Russia initially promoted the idea to further Bulgarian nationalists' goals of creating a Greater Bulgaria, allowing in principle Slav hegemony in the Balkans that would put the area under Russia's sphere of influence (Wilkinson 1951, 63). Britain and Austria did not accept the new borders and threatened war, with Austria facing the increasing power of nationalist activists and Britain refusing to acknowledge the demands of Irish nationalists. Nor was Germany inspired by nationalism in the Balkans, though it appeared the only great power at the time to lack clear

interests in the outcome of the Balkans dispute, leaving the 1876 map of German geography professor Heinrich Kiepert to be preferred for its apparent objectivity (Wilkinson 1951, 68, 87).

Russia opted for partition into an autonomous northern province governed by a prince appointed by European powers and a southern province under Ottoman control and governed by an Ottoman-supporting Christian governor, the latter known as Eastern Rumelia. Great power intervention once again brought Ottoman rule to an end, this time in an incipient Bulgaria in the fateful year of 1878—making the famed 1876 April (really May) uprising of marginal significance to eventual Bulgarian independence. In 1885, the autonomous north annexed Eastern Rumelia before gaining recognition as a kingdom in 1908, when revolt and a subsequent coup within the Ottoman Empire by the Committee of Union and Progress (*Ittihad ve Terraki Cemiyeti*)—the Young Turks—would make resistance from the Porte to Bulgarian independence much less feasible. As for Greece, attention to context, timing, and event sequencing reveals that recognition of Bulgarian independence owes more to great power action than local nationalist activism.

Under intense pressure to aid the insurgents in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the principalities of Serbia and Montenegro took advantage of Ottoman weakness to wage independence campaigns against the empire occurring in 1876–1878 with success for Montenegro and failure for Serbia until Russian intervention brought an armistice (Jelavich 1983, 354). Attention to timing and event sequencing reveals that Serbian independence in 1878 too owes much to Ottoman weakness and great power intervention, understandable considering that Serb nationalism developed far more under Habsburg than Ottoman rule (latter point made by Pantelić [2016, 432]).

Recognition of Albania came in 1913 with European powers opting to deny Serbia access to the sea (Rodogno 2012, 184; Hiers and Wimmer 2013, 228), and after Albanian national activism became more visible in the mid-1870s (Zavalini 1994, 61–63)—with Albanians fighting between 1910 and 1912 for more autonomy within the Ottoman empire rather than independence (Hiers and Wimmer 2013, 226). Albania's independence was not a result of the Albanian 'national uprising' against Ottoman rule, but came at the end of the 1912–1913 Balkan Wars after the Albanians sought protection from their recent Ottoman adversaries against the attacks of the Balkan League.

The Balkan Wars proved deeply disconcerting to the Young Turks. While Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia all witnessed post-statehood irredentisms, great power action led to these states' emergence, thus enabling the respective Greek, Bulgarian, and Serbian irredentisms threatening the Ottoman Balkans and making non-Muslims appear as potential allies of foreign powers. Greek irredentism served as an immediate catalyst for Turkey's emergence. Greek forces served as British proxies in the 1919 invasion of western Anatolia, with the subsequent Greek defeat paving the way for great power recognition of a larger and more diverse Turkey. Defense of a Muslim empire rather than a Turkish nation-state motivated the liberation movement occurring from 1919 to 1923, largely a response to the Greek invasion, with the Young Turks opting to turn toward nationalism (Anscombe 2014, 184, 187).¹⁷ Atatürk's successful diplomatic and military campaign sufficed for the great powers to recognize the larger Turkish nation-state and did not depend on the removal of many Christians. Great power-induced incentives for the forging of ethnically homogeneous nation-states, contributing to the Committee of Union and Progress's fears of treason among the empire's non-Turkic population, largely explain the exceptional degree of ethno-demographic engineering surrounding Turkey's emergence.

The case of Turkey provides perhaps the most acute challenge to the nationalism paradigm, particularly to Wimmer's analysis explaining the Committee's decision to replace the goal of imperial restoration with the creation of a nation-state with reference to the proliferation of nation-states in the Balkans (Wimmer 2013, 99). While Hiers and Wimmer note general agreement that the great powers provided necessary support for those waging war successfully against the Ottomans (2013, 226), great power diplomacy and intervention in the Balkans

delivered an important lesson to the refugee-dominated leadership: an incipient Turkey would have little choice in adopting the European nation-state form in order to survive as a state in the international order, even if de facto statehood sufficed following Atatürk's military and diplomatic success. Featuring a disproportionate number of Balkan refugees, the leadership of the Committee of Union and Progress knew little about the social and cultural elements in Anatolia—thus more easily viewing the religious and ethnic identities there as holding the same potential for uprisings as in the European Balkans (Zürcher 2013, 665–666, 669, 674).¹⁸ Power shifts in the Balkans and then Turkey thus owed much to the (un)intended effects of great power policy.

Great Powers, Nationalist Activism, and Post-World War I Nation-State Proliferation

Mainstream thinking on nation-building during World War I continues to understand the activism and political aspirations of numerous ethnonational groups as the predominant source of the Habsburg Empire's collapse.¹⁹ While the great powers had diverse agendas, local and émigré nationalists provided opportunities to reach agreements serving the often shifting interests of activists and key policy makers. France was particularly keen to use local nationalisms to support containment of German power.

Yet a closer look at timing and event sequencing reveals that nationalist activism's primary contribution to the recognition of new states came with enhanced emphasis on territorialized ethnicity. Key policy makers were more likely to draw new boundaries with reference to ethno-demography for autonomous areas or new (client) states, though did not strictly follow the self-determination principle. The timing of the culminating mind map's operationalization came only when the Austro-Hungarian Empire's demise appeared immanent owing to military defeat, and for the Baltic states and Finland, when Russian state power weakened substantially. These events gave nationalists valuable openings for effective activism, leaving *local* secessionist nationalist mobilization to largely follow rather than spur shifts in great power politics. Key factors leading to new state recognition included (1) major powers' ideas and policies, including (a) self-determination, (b) British, American, and, especially, French interest in containing German power, and (c) the deeply unpopular internal policies of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires; (2) military control over territory; and (3) the previously discussed great power policy in the Balkans doing much to normalize territorialized ethnicity appearing in emergent mind maps.

With massive Allied armies in Europe, France was in a good position to influence territorial assignments with the peace conference commencing two months after the armistice came into effect on November 11, 1918, having considerable sway over Eastern Europe in both diplomatic and military terms as the Big Four deliberated (latter point by Baker 1922, 1:29). During the war's final weeks, the Allies aimed to free Serbia and mount a challenge to Austria-Hungary, among other goals, with Georges Clemenceau urging French military commander of the Allied Balkan forces General Louis Franchet-d'Espèrey to "carry the war to the very frontier of Austria and extend allied military and maritime actions toward Romania and southern Russia" (quoted in Dougherty 2008, 501).²⁰ These actions formed a part of the *cordon sanitaire*, France's postwar system of alliances surrounding a defeated Germany and providing protection from Russia and a Russo-German alliance (Tooze 2014, 280).²¹ Allied policy supported the territorial separation of Russia and Germany through the recognition of Poland and Czechoslovakia (Tooze 2014, 276). Poland was a major part of the *cordon sanitaire*. Wilson pledged support for recognition in January 1918, with French generals commanding the Polish Army and holding leadership positions in other Central and Eastern European forces (latter point from Baker 1922, 1:396).

Poland along with Romania served as the strategic gateway to much of Central and Eastern Europe. Sizeable amounts of Allied military, economic and financial aid accordingly went to the Poles and Romanians in their advances on Soviet Hungary and Soviet Russia (Mayer 1967, 10, 20, 295). While Poland's reemergence owed to higher status as a "historical nation" and the often

unharmonized efforts of nationalist activists, including Ignacy Paderewski, Roman Dmowski, and Józef Piłsudski, a brief look at timing and event sequencing shows that great power policy proved equally, if not more, decisive. In 1915 German and Austrian forces pushed the Russians out of Congress Poland, facilitating the November 1916 proclamation of a Polish Kingdom. The Western powers reversed their previous opposition to Polish independence by 1917–1918 due to the US entry into the war in April 1917, the first of two revolutions that diminished Russia's power, and a strong desire to embarrass Germany (Davies 1982, 387). These events precipitated the relocation of the Polish Provisional Government to Paris the following August, a shift from Dmowski's earlier support for autonomy within Russia and facilitated by Allied governments' interest in recognizing a client state (latter points made by Davies 1982, 381, 394). After both Russian revolutions, France became keen on "building up Poland as the eastern check on Germany" and forming an organized alliance of eastern European states (Watson 1974, 378). While the formidable Piłsudski later negotiated a German evacuation from the kingdom, the agreement came only at the war's end in November 1918, indicating the necessity of the Central Powers' weakening, if not defeat, for the evacuation, as well as the German Intelligence Service's timing of Piłsudski's release from prison to obstruct the Allies' aim to create a Polish client state (latter point made by Davies [1984, 114]).

Romania's advantages also reveal great power, particularly French, influence. The French were the first among the Allies to understand the Romanian army as a stabilization force for south-eastern Europe and a partner in the containment of Bolshevism (Torrey 2011, 334), with the Entente entering into an alliance with Bucharest in August 1916. Certain circles in the French ministries of War and Foreign Affairs encouraged the Romanians to move beyond the armistice line into Hungary, action leading to the creation of a neutral zone between the Hungarian and Romanian armies in areas featuring majority Hungarian ethno-demography (Baker 1922, 2:29–30).²² The Council of Ten approved the neutral zone during a period of Wilson's absence, the zone being part of General Marshal Ferdinand Foch's frontier stabilization plan that would involve Hungarian withdrawal (Steiner 2005, 93). Hungary had little choice but to cede a good deal of territory to Romania, Czechoslovakia, and the incipient Yugoslavia with the second armistice concluded between Hungary and French military commander of the Allied Balkan forces General Franchet-d'Espèrey (Judson 2016, 439), events creating favorable conditions for the March 21, 1919 Communist-led coup justified with promises of stronger military forces applied to Hungary's territorially hungry neighbors (Torrey 2011, 323). French encouragement of Romanian, Czech, and Serbian expansionism stemmed from prioritizing the German over the Bolshevik threat, another example of the instrumental approach major powers often took to local nationalisms.

The emergence of a Bolshevik regime in Budapest, in turn, further solidified Allied support for Romania and its territorial claims (Torrey 2011, 334). Torrey notes accordingly that "[t]he Allied Powers had long intended to use the Romanian army to disarm enemy troops and assist in the occupation of Hungary, a task for which their own forces were not sufficient. At the same time, however, they were reluctant to allow the Romanians to occupy all of the territory promised in the treaty of 1916, which they considered excessive" (Torrey 2011, 322). While Lloyd George and Wilson protested Romanian demands to honor the 1916 border demarcation line and refusal of troop withdrawal to areas behind the Tisza river—allowing Bucharest to claim territories clearly considered Hungarian, Clemenceau successfully intervened in support of Romania given future intentions of realizing French eastern policy (Steiner 2005, 94).

While nationalist visions of Greater Romania provided justification for the military-driven effort at territorial expansion, and a reason for joining the war in 1916, the secret treaty that Prime Minister Ion Brătianu signed with the Entente in August 1916 provided a clear vision for the realization of this goal through the promise of Transylvania, the Banat, Bukovina, and other territory, an agreement that later provided the Romanian side leverage at a crucial wartime moment and facilitated eventual acquisition of a large part of the area promised. Yet Brătianu's

agreement with the Entente signals that the Greater Romania concept, coupled with his supporting actions, could not by themselves have brought the Allies around to accepting Romanian territorial gains, particularly with Bucharest using the secret treaty as a bargaining chip; for example, in making the supply of Romanian forces for Allied operations in southern Russia contingent on honoring the 1916 territorial promises (Torrey 2011, 323).²³ Nor does the Greater Romania concept and associated forces explain why Romania reentered the war in 1918, when Romanian troops were geographically isolated. The decision might instead be explained as a result of the strong urging from French general Henri Berthelot, for it was a decision that considerably strengthened Bucharest's ability to claim territory promised in the secret wartime treaty (Torrey 2011, 333).

For Czechoslovakia, Tomáš Masaryk had clear influence on the thinking of major leaders and the formation of a Czech foreign legion serving as the linchpin for Allied recognition of Czechoslovakia, leading Wilson to eventually support the French lead in sanctioning the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire. Yet, a closer look at Masaryk's thinking reveals that he was, in fact, a consistent supporter of an enlarged Austria *before the war*, declaring in 1891, "We wish for a strong Austria because its strength is our strength" (Doubek 1999, 75 [quoted in translation in Brisku 2017, 634]). When reiterating support in 1909, Masaryk simultaneously noted the dangers of European and global economic and political integration for smaller nations, particularly by bureaucratization, centralization, and Germanization in the case of Austria-Hungary (Brisku 2017, 636). Masaryk's shift to support for independence owed mostly to great power policies' diminution of Czech freedom, primarily the sheer difficulty of domestic reform in the empire, and Austria-Hungary's subjugation to Germany (Brisku 2017, 647).

The Timing of Secessionist Nationalist Mobilization in the Habsburg Empire

France, Britain, and the United States agreed on the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the (re)creation of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and an incipient Yugoslavia in the summer of 1918—albeit reluctantly—with borders to be determined (Judson 2016, 430).²⁴ European intelligence signaled the potential for largescale uprisings of Poles, Czechs, and South Slavs associated with Yugoslavia by late August (Unterberger 2000, 283). Yet, decisive independence-oriented nationalist revolt and revolutionary activity broke out in the Habsburg Empire only in the final days of World War I, with the successful Allied assault on the German Army along the Western Front (Torrey 2011, 311).²⁵ These events followed Wilson's September statement that autonomy would no longer suffice for Austria-Hungary's subject nationalities (noted in Tillman 1961, 210), and his 3 September recognition of the Czechoslovak National Council as the *de facto* belligerent government. The timing strongly suggests that serious *local* efforts in support of independence did not come until the Austro-Hungarian government weakened significantly, since the wartime alliance with the more formidable German military helped bolster the Habsburg regime, and after France, Britain, and then the United States recognized an incipient Czechoslovakia (admittedly owing much to the Czech Legion's efforts in Siberia as well as Masaryk's influence on Wilson).

In contrast to the independence-minded émigré activists and the Czech Legion, long-time arguments for autonomy within the empire primed *local* nationalist activists for further demands for autonomy and less inclined to set independence as a primary objective. Even in winter 1918 *local* activists continued to push their respective agendas within the nominal framework of the empire (Judson 2016, 422, 431), with the general strike in mid-January focused largely on material conditions. While announcements of the formation of several national councils came in early October, the councils were to organize state units within a federation and to determine their respective relationships with both the central government and with one another (Judson 2016, 431–433). Émigré activism, on the other hand, persisted in its independence-orientation with the Czechoslovak National Council proclaiming itself the provisional government with Paris-based

headquarters on October 14, and finally then coincided with support of Prague-based Czech representatives. The main intent behind these moves toward independence was to quash Emperor Charles' proclamation of autonomy within a federal system (Unterberger 2000, 314–15), an announcement coming two days later on the formation of a federation limited to the empire's Austrian part featuring sub-states with boundaries determined by ethno-demographic settlement (Judson 2016, 432). Then came a October 19 statement from Wilson expressing support for national self-determination for Austria-Hungary's various peoples (Torrey 2011, 308). Wilson's indication that autonomy for the Czecho-Slovaks was no longer sufficient caused panic in Vienna's ministry of foreign affairs, with Germans, Ruthenians, Czechs, Poles, and "Yugoslavs" quickly organizing local parliaments, soon followed by similar action among the Romanian, Croatian, and Ukrainian nationalist activists (Unterberger 2000, 316–318).

The Czech National Committee took on governmental responsibilities only in late October, after Austria-Hungary's armistice request was mistakenly announced by a poster in central Prague as being an actual armistice, with much Czech nationalist symbolism appearing once the empire had accepted Wilsonian conditions regarding Slav nations' self-determination (Judson 2016, 433). The Central Powers' deteriorating military position served as an immediate catalyst for these events, with armistice requests coming from Germany and Austria-Hungary on October 6 and 7 respectively. Czech national activists then finally came together to block Emperor Charles' proclamation of autonomy within a federal system. Timing and event sequencing shows that Masaryk and émigré promotion of independence, while very important, depended on the great powers to deliver Czechoslovakia—particularly Austrian policy's role in shifting Masaryk from support for the empire to independence.

Judson also draws attention to the role of myth in widespread assumptions of nationalism's causal role in the Empire's demise:

[S]tories about mass Czech desertions or refusals to fight were in fact myths—often propagated by German nationalists or military leaders—to help the military to deflect attention from its utter incompetence especially in the first years of the war. . . . Many German nationalists blamed Czechs both for Austria-Hungary's military defeat and for the break-up of the empire. At the same time, Czech nationalists after the war played up the myths of their desertions and betrayals because such claims made it appear that they had worked to achieve an independent nation-state since the beginning of the war. Thus, Czech treason became a critical mythological component of the founding of their nation-state. (Judson 2016, 407)

Beyond the Balkan precedent, the final major factor facilitating the creation of new states concerns Austro-Hungarian internal policy that left the empire to fall short in providing for its people. During the war's first two years, citizens faced a punitive military dictatorship that chipped away at confidence in the ruling authorities (Judson 2016, 387). Survival continued to be an arduous task even after harsh military rule ended: "The empire's inability to feed and care for its citizens and its often harsh wartime treatment of them had exposed its abject failure to fulfill its side of the equation of sacrifice and reward. This failure in turn produced a general indifference to the fate of empire, which allowed regional nationalist authorities to take power from the imperial authorities at the end of October" (Judson 2016, 430).

The Timing of Finnish and Baltic Secessionist Nationalism

A closer look at the timing of Finnish and Baltic nationalists' moves toward independence shows the wartime collapse of the Russian and then the German empire created prime openings for nationalists to change their preferences from (calls for) autonomy to independence. Nationalist leaders took advantage of Russia's wartime exhaustion when the situation was nearly ideal: the Allies signaled willingness to assist in their respective independence campaigns at a time when

the Bolshevik regime would be too weak to reestablish previous levels of control (Mayer 1967, 287–288). In December 1917, a month after the Bolshevik takeover, Finland, along with the incipient Baltic states, proclaimed their independence from Russia; yet during the initial round of talks at Brest the Baltic states were under German military control (Tooze 2014, 124, 150).

German and Russian assistance set the stage for the remarkable territorial loss of the March 1918 Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. German (and Austrian) wartime strategy, particularly military dominance in the Baltics, would be essential for the Baltic states' birth, coupled with a Bolshevik strategic objectives and instrumentalism toward the principle of self-determination intended as a ticking time bomb to destroy multinational empires. Substantial emphasis on the principle of self-determination served as a key part of the context: the February Revolution advanced the principle for Russians, before “the rhetoric of self-determination dominated the [Brest-Litovsk] negotiations” (Sanborn 2014, 236–237). For Imperial Germany, an important means of breaking up the Russian Empire was to advocate for self-determination and to create a durable new order in Europe's eastern half (Tooze 2014, 113, 117, 139). The Baltics could thus declare independence under German military protection.

Ukraine would be a much greater prize—won by Germany after “the breakdown of legitimate authority in Petrograd that forced Kiev into a declaration first of national autonomy and then in December 1917 of outright independence” (Tooze 2014, 125). The Central Powers then invited Kiev to join the Brest talks, recognized the Ukraine delegation, and on February 10 announced the conclusion of a peace treaty with Ukraine (Tooze 2014, 125, 131–132). While prospects for an independent Ukraine appeared, the Entente did not seriously consider Ukrainian independence claims, leaving nationalist activists bereft of great power allies facing formidable Polish and then Russian challenges to an independent Ukraine (Snyder 2004, 138).

For Finland, recognition again owed much to great power action—mainly Russian domestic policy.²⁶ Finnish national identity developed following the Russian takeover of Sweden's province of Finland in 1809, then the singular semiautonomous part of the empire after its incorporation. The pro-Finnish reforms of Alexander II (r. 1855–1881) eroded the powers of the dominant Swedish-speaking upper and middle classes, allowing further development of Finnish identity and institutions. A separatist-oriented Finnish nationalist movement against the Russian Empire emerged only in the 1890s—in response to the Russification campaign of Nicholas II (r. 1894–1917). The outbreak of World War I brought increased Russification, Russian military occupation, and the eventual threat of famine, leaving the Finns to launch an unsuccessful bid for Swedish assistance to force the Russians out without becoming a German client state. While the first Russian Revolution brought the near complete collapse of Russian control over Finland, the eventual prevailing of the Bolsheviks in the October Revolution allowed Petrograd to recognize the independence declared by the Finnish parliament in December 1917, after the Finns' successful request for German assistance to gain Soviet recognition of Finland—a status that withstood civil war and the Kremlin's subsequent interest in reconquering the Baltics and likely Finland. Peace agreements with the USSR were reached in 1920, following *de facto* Allied recognition.

Conclusion

This article's focus on context, timing, and event sequencing builds on Coggins's important work by going beyond a strict focus on great powers' recognition preferences to consider the unintended consequences of major power domestic and foreign policy, problem-framing, and interaction with activists. The analysis also sheds additional light on the power shifts that Wimmer claims allowed nationalists to overthrow preexisting regimes. For the incipient United States, changes in British tax policy disrupted the long-time cozy arrangement between British authorities and colonial settler elites previously showing little indication of revolt. For Latin America, Ferdinand VII's harsh efforts to restore control proved particularly conducive to

successful secessionist activism given that most colonists initially remained loyal to the monarch. For the Balkans, the capitulations and repeated interventions contributed to the weakening of Ottoman power as well as perceptions of non-Muslim identities as potential irredentist threats, with self-determination of a people justifying statehood for the first time.

For the incipient states of Central and Eastern Europe, great power policy in the Balkans had changed the context by solidifying the link between territory and identity, contributing to the spread of mind maps among key policy makers, and increasing the likelihood that nationalist activists would pursue decisive secessionist action at times of its greatest possible effect. An absence of sustained major power support for new states for particular identities (Macedonians, Ukrainians, Kurds, Armenians, and most non-Polish identities in Austria-Hungary until mid-1918) tends to explain the potential nation-states that did not emerge. Great power policy often assisted in the development and spread of local nationalisms as well as responded to opportunities provided by them in conditions of empire weakness, leaving some nation-state projects to remain unrealized when lacking the support of at least one major power.

A key question for future multi-case research on nation-state proliferation is how great power policy may affect—and be affected by—divisions among nationalist activists, while acknowledging that activists may not always be categorized as “nationalist.” There remains the ongoing question of how, when, and why great power influence eclipsed domestic factors in fostering state creation or non-emergence, and why sometimes domestic forces played a greater role. Scholars may also further investigate shifts in major power identities and interests, thus providing a deeper understanding of recognition preferences, as well as links between the Balkans, post-World War I, and other waves of state recognition.

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Notes

- 1 *Nationalism* is defined here as ideas and discourse celebrating rule by co-nationals. Nationalism can be considered distinct from *nationalist activism* or *mobilization* referring to varying degrees of action intended to advance the nation.
- 2 I thank Matt Kocher for reference to the developmental approach noted in Lawrence 2013, 42–43.
- 3 For Africa, Asia, and Latin America, the work of José Carlos Chiaramonte, Frederick Cooper, Adria Lawrence, and Todd Shepard similarly challenges the nationalism paradigm.
- 4 Exceptional are the few references of Wesley Hiers and Andreas Wimmer to the significance of great power support for nationalists in the Ottoman Balkans as well as references to the importance of geopolitics (2013, 222, 226, 250).
- 5 Exceptional is the Serbian/Yugoslav case. A sizeable Yugoslavia owed much to the efforts of Serbian military forces and influential ethnographic geographer Jovan Cvijic serving as an official member of the Yugoslav delegation to the peace conference. Cvijic laid the basis of his claim for Yugoslavia as a unified country on the notion that Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro shared a south Slavic designation and classified Macedonia as Slavic.
- 6 Nor was the transfer of power based on nationalism for the British West Indies, with the exception of Jamaica (Coggins 2014, 65).
- 7 Keith Darden and Harris Mylonas (2015) make a similar point regarding external powers' intervention increasing the likelihood of linguistic homogeneity.
- 8 Territorialized ethnicity refers to widespread assumptions of organic links between territory and particular identities through reference to history, memory or ethno-demography.

- 9 I thank Matt Kocher for naming the concept of the ontological map implied in an earlier draft of this article. İpek Yosmaoğlu similarly references a “grid imposed on populations” in the 19th century Balkans (2014, 83).
- 10 The territorial focus then helped activists argue for administrative power in particular areas. I thank Pieter Judson for pointing this out, as well as the shift of focus in the 1880s.
- 11 Frederick Anscombe instead claims that many more notables were loyal to the sultan than openly disloyal—with nearly all provincial notables being loyal up until the 1830s (2014, 42, 54, 89). Karen Barkey discusses the process in which the Ottoman Empire transformed local elites into provincial Ottoman officials and then how this diverse group of provincial notables developed networks that would challenge the ruling order (2008, 87–98, 205).
- 12 See Barkey (2008), chapter 7.
- 13 Serb national activism was exceptional in the lesser significance of the notables.
- 14 See Yosmaoğlu (2014) for a lengthy discussion of ethno-demographic maps.
- 15 The Bulgarian uprising may also be linked with tax collection efforts during a global economic downturn (Maier 2012, 220).
- 16 Prior to the 1876 atrocities, the great powers had not considered autonomy for the Bulgarians in any international forums (Fabry 2010, 101).
- 17 Ronald Suny (2015) also demonstrates the underdevelopment of Turkish nationalism as well as general Armenian preferences for remaining within the empire prior to the Greek invasion. Hasan Ünal notes “a marked hostility and suspicion towards all the great powers and the strong resentment of their interference in Ottoman affairs” in Committee of Union and Progress publications beginning in 1902, and that the committee believed Britain and France to be supporting Bulgarian and Armenian revolutionaries (1996, 31).
- 18 Uğur Üngör also notes the disproportionate number of Balkan refugees within the Young Turk leadership (2011, 44–45).
- 19 Regarding the outbreak of World War I’s facilitating the emergence of openings for nationalist mobilization in Central and Eastern Europe, the post-1903 Austro-Hungarian and Serbian rivalry appears to have nationalist origins: military conspirators linked with the Crna Drucka (Black Hand) assassinated Serbia’s King Alexander and Queen Draga in 1903, ending Alexander’s alignment with the Habsburgs and forging closer ties to Russia. Yet, the coup was generally welcomed in Serbia due to Alexander’s well-known authoritarian leanings and broad unpopularity. Serbia’s shift toward Russia, and ensuing rivalry with Austria-Hungary, thus owed largely to the problems associated with Alexander’s rule rather than the nationalist activism bolstered by such rule.
- 20 Clemenceau’s goals were for Allied military action in southern Russia and Bolshevism’s ‘economic encirclement’ (Mayer 1967, 296).
- 21 During the war, some German strategists advanced the cause of creating new East European states oriented toward the sharing of economic and military power with larger states (Tooze, 2014, 114–115), thus making the French strategy very similar to the wartime German counterpart.
- 22 Romanian forces occupied the majority of the contested territories before the Paris conference—after rejoining the war and fighting on the side of the Allies in early November 1918 and assured of French support given the “eastern barrier” policy arrayed against the Soviets and Germany (Steiner 2005, 90). Glenn Torrey provides a nuanced account noting the importance of French influence (2011, 312, 317, 320–321).
- 23 The Entente also provided mentoring and a sizeable amount of military equipment in 1917 resulting in a much improved force, with the sacrifice of French forces on battlefields shared with Romanians conveying additional support from western allies (Torrey 2011, 332).
- 24 The Big Three turned toward the idea of dismantling Austria-Hungary in the spring of 1918 (Steiner 2005, 30, 82; Tooze 2014, 177).
- 25 Habsburg military power was decimated in June 1916 by the Russian Army in Galicia, only to be replaced by German forces. Yet, it was Romania’s August alliance with the Entente that

served a greater blow to the Central Powers (Tooze 2014, 46–47), and after the defeat of Habsburg forces, the empire was left to its own defenses with respect to Italy (Gumz 2009, 6).
 26 This paragraph draws overwhelmingly from C. Jay Smith (1958) and Anthony Upton (1980).

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