Introduction: Austria-Hungary as *Ancien régime du jour*

Holly Case

In June 2007, the mayor of Kikinda in northeastern Serbia wanted to change the municipal coat of arms. The shield depicts a severed Turk's head impaled on a sabre held by an armored arm against a red background. It dates to the reign of Habsburg Empress Maria Theresa and was meant to honor the region's significance in battles against the Ottoman Empire. But in 2007, Mayor Branislav Blažić—a member of Serbia's ultra-nationalist Radical Party founded by the poet-paramilitary Vojislav Šešelj in 1991—said the coat of arms seemed "morbid" and that it had been unpleasant to hand out his business card during an official visit to Turkey.[1]

According to the last Habsburg-era census in 1910, the total population of Kikinda was 22% Hungarian, 22% German, and 53% Serbian.[2] Annexed to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later called the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) after the First World War, the city came under German occupation during WWII. Occupation forces arrived in mid-April 1941, and many of the local ethnic Germans—known as Banat Swabians—were given prominent positions in the civil and military administration. Within a few months a group of high-ranking officers arrived to inspect ethnic German military recruits. Observing the proceedings was the Volksgruppenführer Sepp Janko, who later reported feeling great shame for his fellow Banat Swabians when it turned out that "barely three, I repeat THREE people could answer questions like when the Germans settled here, where their ancestors were from, and who settled them here." One of the soldiers, when asked "who the Germans now needed to wage war against, answered 'against the Turks.' When told he was wrong, [he corrected himself]: 'against the Hungarians!'"[3] Nazi Germany was allied with Hungary at the time.

Janko then stressed the need for political and cultural propaganda to educate these men regarding who the Germans' real enemies were. But as much as the Nazi leadership sought to influence the locals' thinking, the Banat Swabians' own preconceptions exerted a reciprocal influence on the

1. "Blažić se stidi kikindskog grba," *Glas javnosti*, June 30, 2007 at http://arhiva.glas-javnosti.rs/arhiva/2007/06/30/srpski/V07062903.shtml (accessed July 31, 2019).

2. Ioan Munteanu, *Banatul Istoric: 1867-1918, aşezările, populaţia*, vol. 1 (Timişoara, 2006), 396, 403.

3. Akiko Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats, 1941–1944: Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien (Münster, 2003), 202–3. The inspection took place on October 24, 1941.*

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propaganda's content. The name of the new Seventh SS Division composed of ethnic Germans from Banat and nearby Croatia—both former Habsburg territories—was carefully chosen by its commander, Artur Phelps.[4] It was called the "Prinz Eugen," after Austrian general Prince Eugene of Savoy (1663–1736), who fought the Ottomans at Vienna, conquered Belgrade, and helped liberate Hungary from the Ottoman Empire. One of his most celebrated victories had been in 1697 at Zenta—not far from Kikinda. In choosing the name "Prinz Eugen" for the new SS division, its leaders "consciously linked [it to] the centuries-long tradition of the military frontier regiments; then as now the majority of the soldiers would originate from the peasantry prepared to defend its home soil [Heimatscholle]."[5]

The approximately 20,000 Banat Swabians who served in the Prinz Eugen received their training at a special base in Kikinda.[6] A speech drafted in June 1942 by a German officer celebrated the historic mission of the nascent SS division: "225 years ago in 1717, on this very day Prince Eugen defeated the Turks at Belgrade . . . thus was created the bulwark of the German Reich and the Banat SS is henceforth the legacy-fulfilling embodiment of the Prinz Eugen ideal."[7] The Prinz Eugen soon had a reputation for the brutality of its "home defense"—including mass killings of civilians and destruction of villages in reprisal for communist partisan resistance—in different parts of occupied Yugoslavia, but especially in Banat, Bosnia, and Montenegro.[8]

Kikinda was liberated by Soviet and partisan forces on October 6, 1944. Many ethnic Germans retreated with the German military. Of those who remained, most were later interned and expelled, and several thousand were killed or died in camps awaiting transfer to Germany. The current population of Kikinda is 67,000; on the 2002 Serbian census, just over 76% of the municipality's population declared themselves Serbs and 13% as Hungarians. In 2003, Kikinda was given the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Municipal Award for Tolerance. When Mayor Blažić sought to change the city's coat of arms in 2007, the proposal met with considerable resistance from the population and was roundly rejected.

The fate of Kikinda's coat of arms speaks to three matters raised in the contributions to this forum. The first is how post-Habsburg figures could see the possibility of shaping Habsburg remnants into something new. The Nazis wondered: how could the Habsburg remainder be forged into part of a new European and world order? It was a question others had also asked, including the Czech statesman Tomáš Masaryk and the League of Nations, as Ondřej

4. Phelps was a Transylvanian who had served in the Habsburg army, fought in Bosnia and Transylvania during WWI, served in the Romanian army, and later headed this Banat SS division. Thomas Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division 'Prinz Eugen': Die Banater Schwaben und die nationalsozialistischen Kriegsverbrechen* (Frankfurt, 2003), 189.

5. Ibid., 188.

6. Ibid., 214. The division consisted of 8.5% Reichsdeutsche and 91.5% Volksdeutsche, of whom the majority were from Banat and Serbia (53.6%). Ibid., 211.

7. Cited in Ibid., 221.

8. George H. Stein, *The Waffen SS: Hitler's Elite Guard At War, 1939–1945* (Ithaca, 1966), 274.

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Slačálek's and Natasha Wheatley's contributions show. The second is how Habsburg remnants managed to persist—in the form of Kikinda's awkward coat of arms, for example—in both form and content. And the third is how heavily the layers of irony weigh on these inventions and reinventions of the Habsburg past. Men who initially did not even know what or whom they were supposed to be fighting for or against became brutal killers, and were themselves later expelled and in many cases killed; the town they lived in—which became much more ethnically homogenous following a series of massacres, flights, and expulsions during and just after the Second World War—would be recognized for its tolerance, and a year later elect a mayor from the Serbian ultra-nationalist party who would try to do away with the municipality's skewered-Turk's-head coat of arms (in the words of one oponent of the mayor's proposal at the time, "If being morbid is a problem, why not begin by changing the coat of arms and symbols of [Blažić's] own party?")[9]

Studying the Habsburg legacy is like reading an eighth Nabokov novel—all the more engaging because one begins to understand the tricksy bits and the inside jokes, and all the more frustrating because one starts to wonder: Is that all there is? Little wonder that the novelist Robert Musil called the Dual Monarchy "that state since vanished that no one understood."[10] In the forum that follows, Natasha Wheatley and Ondřej Slačálek use fictional characters (Grace Bell and Jára da Cimrman, respectively) to introduce this common mystification. Miloš Vojinović uses a mountain metaphor to insist that there is, in spite of what Wheatley describes as the "fractal" appearance of the Habsburg Monarchy, an essence. "Can we simply claim that there were always many vantage points, and that from every single one of them Austria-Hungary and Yugoslavia appear different?" he asks. "I would say no. Even though a mountain looks different from various positions, every mountain has only one shape."

The criteria I employed when choosing contributors for this forum was threefold: younger scholars, individuals not trained exclusively in the US, and lively thinkers from whom I did not know precisely what to expect in terms of their approach to the Habsburg legacy. No sincere attempt was made at geographical, temporal, or disciplinary coverage, so this is a lopsided forum. The resulting contributions leave me disinclined to offer any apologies, however, as these young thinkers have covered areas and ideas relating to the Habsburg legacy that would not have formed criteria for consideration in years past, but are likely to do so in years to come, above all: internationalism, temporality, and historiographic silence.

During its existence, the Habsburg Monarchy was perpetually re-engineered, its external and internal borders in constant real and imaginary flux, its administrative groupings no less so, and its international position and status both hyped and underestimated. Yet these feats of transformative engineering—certainly not unique to the Habsburg Empire or later Dual Monarchy—have long been overshadowed by historiographical feats of *reverse*

9. "Blažić se stidi kikindskog grba," *Glas javnosti*.
10. Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities* (London, 2015), 28.

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engineering: What must Austria-Hungary have been to produce the legacy that it did?

All the contributors to this forum have both explored and troubled the ongoing practice of reverse engineering. In Wheatley's contribution, we are given a historiographical overview of recent scholarship on the Habsburg legacy, but with a valuable shift in emphasis: "Where most trace the implications of imperial collapse for the region's nationalization," she writes, "here I pursue instead its internationalization." Capital, crime, minorities, finance, hunger, and debt all overflowed post-Habsburg physical boundaries and, in the case of Wheatley's own work on the "Temporal Life of States," stretched across beginnings and endings in time, thinking "not only backwards from the present but also forward from 1848."

In his contribution, Slačálek traces the origin and trajectory of Czech nationalism, showing how it has long used the Habsburg experience as both a motivation and an excuse for the county's politics and trajectory, as both the reason why it is necessary to move on and the reason why moving on is impossible. This apparent impasse accounts for what Slačálek describes as a timeless infantilism in Czech reflections on the Habsburg legacy.

Vojinović's contribution analyzes the similarities—largely in terms of silences—that have defined the historiographies of the Habsburg Empire and Yugoslavia. Not only were the two states linked at the former's end and the latter's beginning, but both historiographies have come to be marked by troubled pluralities, omissions, and narratives of decline and fall.

Slačálek and Vojinović also explore some of the more cosmopolitan conceptions of national identity circulating among the empire's critics that were subsumed in nationalist politics, or tarred with the label of belligerent nationalism as a means of delegitimating them. Alternative versions of being "European" and "national" seem to hover in the wings of these two contributions. Another intriguing harmonic between Slačálek and Vojinović is a story of continuity, in the pattern of "de-Austrianization" that Slačálek notes was repeated across "de-Nazification" and "de-Stalinization" in Czechoslovakia, and in the peculiar tics of Habsburg historiography which Vojinović observes carried over into Yugoslav historiography.

All of the contributions have something to say about attempts to "overcome" the Habsburg state. As Wheatley's contribution shows, many were the postwar figures who fixated on doing so, either by integrating formerly Habsburg parts into a new whole, or reinventing or preserving the defunct state's presumed essence under a different cover. In fact, whereas the legacy to overcome during the nineteenth century was the absolutist *ancien régime* targeted by the French Revolution (as well as the Revolution itself), the all-important *ancien régime* of the twentieth century was arguably Austria-Hungary, given that many of the twentieth century's most influential forces—from Adolf Hitler to Theodor Herzl to Friedrich Hayek—were shadow-boxing with its legacy.

But what if the era of overcoming the Dual Monarchy has now yielded to another? If the twentieth century was about overcoming Austria-Hungary, might not the twenty-first be about overcoming the various defunct forms of state socialism (Soviet, Maoist, Yugoslav . . .), characterized by the broad

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taboo against "ideologies" and "utopias" that has shaped the reinvention of the Right and informed the search for a new footing on the Left? Notably all three contributions show how the Habsburg legacy is bound up with the revolutions that accompanied the Dual Monarchy's demise, the emergence and spread of state socialism and large-scale institutionalized internationalism, and the various responses to these developments.

Finally, a closing reflection on tone. None of these pieces is primarily concerned with an assessment of the Habsburg Empire as "good" or "bad." For Wheatley, the focus is rather on conceiving of the Habsburg legacy as international (as opposed to national), and the relevance of time in addition to space. Slačálek's critique is levelled at Czech nationalism, with its recurring theme of Cimrman-esque infantility. For Vojinović, the problem is that both Habsburg and Yugoslav historiography in similar ways repeatedly failed, in the words of Fritz Stern, to "re-create likely hopes and apprehensions of the people at the time." All suggest there is more to be seen and more ways to parse the world to achieve a different vantage, and that even if the Dual Monarchy is no longer the *ancien régime du jour*, we are not finished with it.

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